

The Roles of French and Other Foreign Languages in 21st Century in Business Administration: a Case of Mubi Town

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A b s t r a c t

This paper examines the roles of French and other foreign languages in business administration investigate managerial perspectives and study the problems of foreign languages usage in communication to discover modes of developing employee's foreign language ability and to investigate the students' opinions concerning the roles of foreign languages in business administration in Mubi town. Face-to-face interviews were employed. The results show that foreign languages play some important roles, more especially in import and export business. In the managers' point of view, foreign languages are very important to their businesses, especially for communication with customers, other companies and suppliers. The problems in some companies might happen because of differences between customers. The problems also come from both senders and receivers who lack knowledge of foreign languages. The informants stated that organizations should invite professional trainers to help improve foreign language skills in vocabulary and conversation in particular.

Keywords:

Business
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Managerial
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Language
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Background of the Study

Language is an essential tool that we use to communicate with other people in our day to day activities and working lives (Adejimola, 2008). It consists of words and meanings that are put together into discrete units to form what we call (sentences) (Van Berkum, 2008). Sentences joined together become information that can be used to exchange ideas with other people (Lieberman, 2008).

The roles foreign languages play is also important in business administration. In business administration, foreign language plays several roles, such as a role in internal and external communication, a role in having a chance to get a good job, and a role as a means to understand other cultures. Good communication in foreign language becomes so vital in today's world (Cole, 1988) owing to the impact of globalization. For global competitors, the most very important factor is the ability to communicate on a wider range, quicker and clearer basis and ability in communication is focused on foreign languages which are widely used (Walters, 1990).

The important roles foreign languages play in business administration is for communication with customers, competitors, employers, employees and colleagues (GO, 2009). Indeed, communication starts early in life as we can see the fact that the baby needs is communicated by a simple cry. As children grow older, the communication process becomes more complex (Stewart, 1985). Communication is very important in the business field in terms of sending messages to receivers or speaking clearly to listeners. Foreign language ability also plays very important role in business administration in helping to increase the opportunities for understanding and in learning other people cultures (Griva, 2009).

The roles of foreign language will be beneficial because it assists understanding of conversations, communications and negotiations between practitioners and foreign customers. Practitioners can run businesses more smoothly with the use of foreign languages and their foreign customers will feel more comfortable. In business administration, not only are speaking and listening skills are important but also other skills including reading, writing and negotiating. Language is, seemingly, omnipresent and successful communicators that apply principles of human behaviour (Stewart, 1973). Any foreign language can be used in business depending on customers and the nature of the business and market involved. Understanding the type of language required and the degree to which understanding of it is required is an important managerial skill. Language creates customers' satisfaction which will lead to competitiveness. Competitiveness cannot happen without ability to handle well with customers. Also, foreign language plays a role in assisting customers who face problems in communication (Cotton, 2007), especially in terms of communication with multi-national companies.

Language and Culture

Language and culture cannot be separated and are in fact part of each other (Jenkins, 2000). Culture has a component that consists of words. Attempting to communicate meaning through the transmission of a message to someone from a different cultural background runs into the danger that cultural differences will lead to misunderstanding (Robock, 1989). Understanding language and using it perfectly requires understanding its cultural

component too. To clarify, some words with the same meaning can be used in different situations or some words can be very rude in some other languages. One example of this is the word “pumpkin” in English, which is “fuktong” in Thai, which clearly can cause some offence. Culture involves learning and sharing forms of behaviour, norms, values and material objects (Stoyko, 2009). It also encompasses what people create to express values, attitudes and norms. Communication systems such as language and nonverbal communication are products of culture. Cultural misunderstandings in business activities can be destructive to an organization. Mistakes can be unconscious as well as unintentional (Varner, 2005).

Furthermore, foreign languages play an important role in having more chance to get a good job. Many businesses are looking for people who are fluent in other languages. Foreign language skill provides a competitive edge in career choices in the contemporary job market (Ebling, 2005). Many companies want their new employees to possess foreign language skills and need people with high levels of proficiency. For existing employees, some companies will provide foreign language courses to sharpen their language skills so employees can use them more effectively. Moreover, foreign language plays a role as a means to understand other cultures, while understanding cultures of customers is beneficial in running businesses. The world opens widely to meet people from different cultures and understanding the customer's culture helps organizations manage conflicts arising from cultural barriers or differences (Schaub, 1992).

The objectives of this paper are to examine the roles of French and other foreign languages in 21st century in business administration, to investigate managerial perspectives concerning the roles of foreign language, to study the problems of foreign language usage in communication with customers, to discover modes of developing employees' foreign language ability, and to investigate the co-operative education students' opinion concerning the roles of foreign languages in business administration in Mubi town.

With these objectives in mind, the paper is structured in four sections. In the first section, the importance of French language in 21st century, in the second section, a review of literature serves as a reference for analysis of the results. In the third section, the setting of the research and methodology employed are described. In the fourth section, there is a presentation of the research findings obtained and the data analyzed in order to answer the research questions. Finally, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made that will assist in facilitating a business in 21st century that encourages economic and business development of a country.

Methodology

The objectives of this study were to examine the roles of French and other foreign languages in business administration, to investigate managerial perspectives concerning the roles of foreign language, to study the problems of foreign language usage in communication with customers and to discover modes of developing employees' foreign language ability in business administration in Mubi town.

This study was based on face-to-face interviews with a convenience sample of 30 managers. The managers were from different companies and departments and represented all types of business form. There were 2 tour company managers, 10 hotel managers, 4 import and export company managers, 3 rice store managers, 3 transportations managers and 3 bicycle company managers. They were selected on a random basis within Mubi metropolitan area. There were additional interviews conducted with 5 co-operative education students. The aims were to examine the roles of French and other foreign languages in business, to investigate the managerial perspectives concerning the roles of foreign language, to study the problems of foreign language usage in communication with customers, to discover modes of developing employees' foreign language ability and to investigate co-operative education students' opinions concerning the roles of French and other foreign languages in business administration.

A set of the interview guidelines in English was created as a research instrument by the researcher. The interview guidelines consisted of two main parts. The first part was designed to obtain the interviewee's personal information (e.g. gender, educational background, years of working experience, type of business, etc.). And the second part consisted of questions related to the objectives of the study as identified above. After designing the set of interview guidelines, they were given to experts in designing such guidelines for their consideration. The aim was to determine whether wordings, questions and question order issues contained in the guidelines were clear to the interviewees and, as a result, some minor adjustments were made.

Interviews were arranged beforehand Formal letters requesting an interview were also prepared on request basis. Interview guidelines were sent to managers in advance by e-mail and so that respondents had time to prepare answers.

Interviews were conducted in company offices when the researcher went to observe the co-operative education students. Sometimes interviews were conducted in offices, coffee shops, restaurants, hotels and elsewhere. The interviewing time lasted approximately 3-5 minutes. Thirty cooperative education students were interviewed after they had experienced four weeks of business administration studies. There are limitations to this study. First, the respondents in the sample were from diverse businesses and, second, the time was quite limited. In the future, more specific business or industry sectors should be selected and more time should be considered.

This paper presents only some of the findings, which are those concentrating on roles of foreign languages in business administration, managerial perspectives concerning the foreign language, the problems of foreign languages usage in communication with customers, modes of developing employees' foreign language ability and the co-operative education students' opinion concerning the roles of foreign languages in business administration in Mubi town.

Research Findings

The research findings are divided into five sections:

- (i) The roles of French and other foreign languages in business administration,
- (ii) Managerial perspectives concerning the roles of French and other foreign languages,
- (iii) The problems of French and other foreign languages usage in communication with customers,
- (iv) Modes of developing employees' foreign language ability
- (v) The cooperative education students' opinions concerning the roles of foreign language business administration in Mubi.

The Importance of French and other Foreign Languages

The importance of French and other foreign languages cannot be measured, as a result of this, the **late General Sani Abacha** in 1996 declared the new status of French as the nation's second official language. Therefore for Nigerians to interact effectively in their business with francophone countries locally and internationally, they should not only be able to speak the language fluently but also be able to attend international seminars and conferences that concern business without much problem. Thus, Nigerian language policy should make provisions for the following areas of communication: Internal communication, international scientific or technical communication. French is one of the international Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics; it is most widely used in commerce, scientific and technological research, administration, education, literature etc. With the knowledge of French, Nigerians and Francophone countries will be able to work together in areas of commerce, science and technology.

The need for French and other foreign languages in 21st century in business administration in Nigeria cannot be over illustrated. Nigeria's geographical, economic, and diplomatic as well as her educational and research needs make it imperative for her to give adequate attention and to the learners of French and other foreign languages. French is an important language needed by the professionals and much needed by the 21st century business administration. It is prominently known that right from the onset, we cannot underrate the role of French and other foreign languages in Nigeria because the country, Nigeria, is geographically surrounded by francophone countries, such as Republic of Benin, Republic of Niger, Chad, and Cameroun respectively.

The benefits of language include the whole system of human communication with the aim of achieving total understanding. It is the mean component of cultural identity and the most prominent factor in bringing out a distinction from one culture to another. For instance, Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa in Nigeria which share different linguistic identity, background, culture and social life within one defined nation can still express their own different languages with full audacity. The roles of language include a substantial amount of people's historical experience, their thought patterns, and their world view. Language's roles are said to be related to the embodiment of culture leading to the depth of a person's reflection—beyond the practical necessities of life to such aspects of searching for knowledge, education and collaboration among multi-ethnic societies, in such a way, it revealed how language continues to operate signs and elaborate functions in almost all phases of Nigeria's life. Particularly unique position where it ranges in its usefulness in the Nigerian experience

in the domains of politics, education, legal matters, mass media, art and leisure, all of which are typically carried out through the medium of languages, most particularly the foreign languages such as French, Arabic, German, Spanish and Chinese. Language is seen as an instrument that brings about wholesome exchange of ideas to be able to affect comprehension. According to Ajiboye (1999) French could be regarded as one of the most important foreign languages used by most countries. Most of these countries need to interact to form unified bodies for economic, political and technological advancement. In spite of the place French is yet to be given its expected recognition in the country. It is quite obvious that the language is now popular in the country since its inception right from 16th century; the relevance of French language in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. Therefore, the role of French and other foreign languages in developing 21st century business administration cannot be measured. Some of the inevitable roles being performed by the foreign languages are discussed below.

Literature Review

What is Business?

According to Walter, (2004) “business” means the activities of buying and selling of goods or services, the work that we do to earn money, or an organization that sells goods or services. Business involves advantages, profits, and money. Friedman (1994) defined “business” as the commercial enterprise, profession, or trade operated for the purpose of earning a profit by providing a product or service. Businesses are created by entrepreneurs who put money at risk to promote a particular venture for the purpose of a profit. They vary in size from one-person selling to an international corporation having billion of dollars in assets and thousands of employees. Thill (2001), stated that, there are a wide range of career areas that exist in business settings such as, business management, finance, human resources, marketing, sales, public relations, and industries. Business is important; because it involves economies it can earn revenue from both inside and outside of the country. Business can also build good relationships across borders. To succeed in running a business, organizations must share information with people both inside and outside the organization. The reason is that, the aim of business is to communicate with others to sell products or to provide services, and to communicate inside the organization to have a good cooperation among the commander and workers (Mendonca, 2003).

Three types of Principal forms in Business Organization

Sole Proprietorship, Partnership and Corporation:

Sole Proprietorship

Is the oldest, most common, and is the simplest form of business organization. It is a business entity owned and managed by one person. It can be organized very informally which is not subject to much federal or state regulation, and is relatively simple to manage and control (Mauro, 2008). The sole proprietorship has only one business owner, and is a good business organization for individual who wants to start a small business, and it is beneficial to the country's economy. If a country's economic structure is large enough, the country's economy is hard to collapse, once there is economic crisis.

The Partnership

It is a type of business entity in which partners share with each other the profits or losses of the business undertaking in which all has invested. Thus, partnership is a state of being a partner for sharing the rewards if the business is successful, search information and discuss. Whenever there are problems, a partner can try to help solve them.

The Corporation type of Business Ownership Model

Here, the ownership is divided into shares and management distributes net profits in the form of dividends to shareholders. So a corporation is a separate legal entity. The corporation comes into legal existence when its founders comply with their state's incorporation process (Iwai, 2001). Most definitions of business type concentrate on the activities involved in earning money such as selling of products and services. For the purposes of this study, business involves all types of business forms previously specified.

Demand for Foreign Language Competency in Business Administration

There is a demand for foreign language competencies in business administration (Ali, 2009). The demand of foreign language in business administration is for communication. In sharing information among employees, employers and customers, foreign language plays important role both inside and outside the company. Foreign language usage inside the company is a form of internal communication that employees need to interact between themselves and with co-workers, and employers. It is important to use the correct grammar, syntax and spelling in order to promote understanding and to maintain the image of the organization. Foreign language usage also helps to build good relationships that promote working processes through encouraging cooperation from employees in every section of the company. Most successful business communication comes from listening and talking (Theobald, 2006). Foreign language usage outside the company is a form of external communication, for example, when the sales manager deals with the salespeople. They use foreign language as a means of communication for products or services of the organization, to provide information and to persuade customers to purchase products or services. Foreign language usage with customers must be clear enough for them to understand and it should also be positive and friendly so that customers feel positive about using the products or services. For customers, it is very important for them to know and to understand all the details and conditions of products and services so as to make better decisions (Grosse, 2004). Foreign language is also important in terms and terminology; most especially in writing of labels, instruction for usage of product and the translation of terms used for foreign costumers.

Roles of French and other Foreign languages in Business Administration

Nowadays, many businesses have expanded worldwide and many investors invest in other countries. Therefore, foreign language is necessary (Cook, 2007). Foreign language plays a significant role in communicating and also opens up different and better opportunities (Odlin, 2007). Therefore the success of business administration will depend on the quality of information about its customers, its competitors and the market in general.

Roles of French as Foreign language in Internal Communication

People who work in an organization need to talk to each other to make others know what they want or what they need. They sometimes want to share their thoughts and to listen to others

foreign language can be a means to help them understand each other. If nobody communicates within an organization, there are likely to be problems. Lack of communication will cause working process problems. Communication can be a way to build a good relationship between employees inside an organization. In fact, the roles of language in internal communication and external communication will support each other. If the internal communication works well, the external communication can work effectively too (Grunig 1992). Internal communication involves all forms of communication that exists within an organization. Communication may be oral, written, face-to-face, virtual or in groups. Internal communication helps to establish formal roles and responsibilities for employees and lead to the success of an organization.

Roles of French as Foreign Language in External Communication

The roles of language in external communication will involve speaking face-to-face with the customers (Samova 2004). It can also be a written message like some quotes from an important or even legendary person or a billboard advertisement. From these messages, customers develop an understanding about the company (Stewart, 2005). These shows how important are language roles in external communication that can gain profits for organizations. An organization will get more customers from the messages and actions that express what the organization truly is. It reveals many things to customers and the wider community. Just as internal communication carries information up, down, and across the organization, external communication carries it into and out of the organization (Thill, 2005).

French and other Foreign Languages Roles and Customer Satisfaction

The roles of language in business administration and customer satisfaction are both related in business. Customer satisfaction depends on what and how the customers gain from the organization after an interaction. Both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication are important in this regard. Communication skills will be used as a first step to reach customers and make them satisfied with the organization's offerings. The more those customers are satisfied, the more the organization gains advantages. Foreign language plays an important role in making customers feel comfortable about buying products or services (Runnakit, 2007). The company needs to use positive and friendly language to show understanding and care for their customers. Listening to customers carefully to know what they need or want from the organization is very important, because it makes the company staff knows how to make them satisfy. Consequently, the company can offer them some form of promotion and for products that are directly related to their needs.

Moreover, the company will need to show the same level of care and attention in looking after their customers as well as the first time the company staff meet the customers. This is called after-sales service which should impress customers and will build loyalty to the organization in their minds. For example, mobile phone call centres answer any questions from customers and so need to use a form of speaking that includes consciousness, completeness, effectiveness and positivity to help customers understand the answers and to feel good and satisfied with the service received.

French and other Foreign Languages in Business Administration

From the interviews, it became apparent that foreign languages are significant in business administration. The kinds of businesses in which foreign languages play significant roles in particular are in import and export companies concerning agricultural products such as rice, sugar, tropical-fruits, crops, handicrafts, herbicides and local-products.

In addition, Nigeria needs to import a large number of products which cannot be produced efficiently in the domestic economy. It is currently unable to produce some kinds of products which may need special inputs, such as high-technology parts for computers, medical equipment, cosmetics and chemicals. As Nigeria is not able to produce some of these products on its own, it is necessary for Nigeria to communicate with foreign suppliers to obtain them and of course communication is very important. Effective communications are very significant for sending messages to customers and intermediaries and also, foreign languages are important in making a first-impression with tourists.

Managerial Perspectives Concerning the Roles of Foreign Language

Foreign language skill from the managers' point of view is very significant to their business administration, especially for communication with customers, other companies, suppliers and other stakeholders. Informants stated that communication gave the opportunity to expand their businesses from the national level to the international level, which offers further success.

All the informants that the researchers interviewed have Mubi people as a part of their major customers and many of the materials that are needed in their business are ordered from foreign countries. They import handsets from China, rice from Thailand for example etc. Knowledge of foreign languages is a must in this case and they have to communicate at least in English to negotiate or to make a contract to get needed materials for their business processes.

The Problems of French and other Foreign Languages Usage in Communication with the Customers

The researcher found that some problems occurred because of differences between customers. Not all foreign customers can communicate in a foreign language, whether or not it is English. Many could speak only their own language, whether it is French or Arabic. They could not speak English very well and sent in orders in bad English in terms of grammar and spelling mistakes. This situation often occurred for cattle markets and other businesses in the market. The issue for the company was to guess the meaning from the context from incorrect sentences and to use clear and easy English that those customers might be able to understand. This opens the possibility of errors in the communication channel that come from senders and receiver who do not understand each other. In such a case, the problem concerns the need for the partners to adapt themselves to understand and respond to the order correctly, as well as other forms of interaction.

The problems came from both senders and receivers who lacked knowledge of the foreign languages. In this situation, it was indicated that senders might lack knowledge in English and so they used it anyhow. In some cases, the receivers did not know any French or Arabic and so they did not know how to respond to the customers, or were not sure they understood the

message in English, because of their lack of knowledge. In this situation, the informants pointed out that they could not blame their customers' language skills because it is not their responsibility to speak a foreign language well.

Modes of Developing Employees' foreign language Ability in Business Administration in Nigeria

Similar findings involved the mode of developing employees' foreign language ability or skills training for company staff. The informants realized that English is not only important but is necessary for administering business. They also stated that organizations should invite professional trainers to help improve English skills in vocabulary and conversation. Writing skill for employees is also important, so that employees can complete written tasks such as letters, receipts, memos, reports and so forth. They will know whether details are correct or not. The respondent also emphasized that the organization should strongly consider providing support for language skill development.

In terms of communication, foreign language is very important for business administration, so communicators should not make too many mistakes, since these can cause problems and delay business. This example urges managers as respondents to know that communication should be effective from both senders and receivers. The managers who are the leaders of the group need to have a responsibility to use language properly to communicate effectively. It is their duty to speak concisely, clearly and completely to their staff or customers. If managers do not assign work clearly, the staff might misunderstand the message which might then cause some conflicts between the managers, the staff and the customers. In brief, communication at work should involve as few mistakes as possible.

Co-operative Education Students' Opinion Concerning the Roles of French as Foreign language in Business Administration

Interviews with co-operative education students emphasized the importance of foreign languages because of the number of foreign customers. Informants observed that they must be able to communicate using foreign languages when required. In terms of communication, foreign languages were used to communicate with customers when the informants were on duty all the time. Fluency in foreign languages made for satisfied customers. To co-operative education students, foreign languages were also used for internal communication. It occurred when they cooperated with foreign administrators, managers, employers and other foreign employees.

Conclusion

This research is concerned with the roles of French and other foreign languages in business administration based on managerial perspectives and the views of co-operative education students. This study shows how foreign language skills are important in business administration.

As expected, the answers from different managers in different business sectors to the question about the importance of foreign language were similar. They all said that foreign language was very important to everyone in communicating with others and to working out various issues.

Foreign language is important in contacting other countries and foreign customers. The importance of foreign language in business administration depends on the field of business and the nature of the stakeholder it is wished to contact. If the company has been running a tourism business, then it needs to use English very fluently, while for a cattle market company involved with foreign sellers, foreign languages certainly play an important role. Having foreign language skills is important for the cattle business and some goods in the market store business, so that they can serve their foreign customers comfortably. The administrators or managers need to speak foreign languages in addition to English, such as French and Arabic well. This will help create a good impression in customers because they would be reassured that the company they have chosen to use can understand them well. Having foreign language skills is good because it will assist administrators or managers and co-operative education students to reduce problems in communication at work by speaking, listening, and writing effectively. It would be better to know how to communicate with other foreign customers in languages other than English, such as French and Arabic. Customers expect the marketers to do business with or whose services they will use to be able to understand their language. Those customers will appreciate the language use and will not feel like they are strangers but close to their business partners as people on whom they can rely.

Recommendation

The researcher recommended that businesspeople should study French and other foreign languages if they want to be successful in the business field. Businesspeople should pay more attention to languages for better business administration. The best approach is to identify those countries with which the business is involved and prioritise the relevant language skills. Negotiation becomes easier if the relationship is good and cultural differences are minimised through communication. Foreign language skill helps business flow more efficiently. It may also help the company to expand within the country and internationally.

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