

## French Language as a Tool for Improving the Quality of Education in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*A Language as a medium for quality education is the most important attribute of learning. The French language is certainly one of the communication tools used for quality education. The paper therefore, reviews the concepts of quality education in a bid to propagating French language. It also shows the importance of French as a vehicle for improving quality of education in Nigeria. Recommendations were also given in order to improve the standard of French language through quality education this country.*

*Keywords: Education, Quality, Language, French, Communication, Nigeria.*

### Background to the Study

Much has been said about French language, its status and importance in Nigeria. The French language has played some important roles in the development of Nigeria, socially, politically, economically and technologically. With regards to its position as an international language it has very important transformation roles. It has move from its ugly state of neglect and decay, which paved ways for Nigeria to see beyond their nose, how profitable and meaningful this language is as regard its importance to livelihood. This is to say that it has moved from non-recognition to recognition, from a mere foreign language to a second official language in Nigeria, from being an elective course to being compulsory course at both primary and junior secondary school levels as stated in the national policy on education (2004). Thus, this language, when viewed from different perspectives, is no longer a mere academic subject, but also an important discipline/area of study and means of providing or creating job opportunities for many Nigerians. It is one of the reasons that French is being taught at all levels of education system of the

country; primary and secondary schools, colleges of education, polytechnics and universities. The objective of this study was to examine the use of French language for improving the quality of education in Nigeria, an English speaking country. In so doing, we shall try to;

- i. Define education, quality education, language and communication as concepts.
- ii. The importance of French language as; Communication tools for national, political, economical, social and cultural gains. A language for effective quality education and interpersonal communication.

### Education

Education can be defined as "the total process by which knowledge, ideas, facts, skills, attitudes and societal values are acquired or learned and developed". Education remains the most essential and potent instrument for individual and national development. Without education, it is impossible to achieve any meaningful development. This assertion is confirmed by the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) which described education as "an instrument per excellence for effecting national development". It states further that education foster the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake and for the general development of the society.

### Quality of Education

The oxford advanced learners' dictionary, defined quality as "the standard of something when it is compared to other things like it". While the New International Webster Dictionary of English language defines quality as "a distinguishing element or characteristic degree of excellence; relative goodness or high quality of something" from the two definition above therefore, quality means a high standard of something. While quality Education means a high standard and excellent education. This therefore, implied relevant and functional education that is capable of making an individual and society better. The NPE (2004) stresses the need for a functional education that would reduce illiteracy and improved the standard; enhance parents and family status and the society at large.

### French Language Education

According to Awobuluyi (1996), Amah (2009), and Odewumi (2009) that language Education can be stressed as the education in language(s). It is the type of education which lays more emphasis on the study of language(s), be it national or foreign language. Language education is aimed at not only enhancing interpersonal communication and general communication; it is, for the purpose of training and producing professionally qualified and competent manpower in language. French language education is therefore, targeted at training and producing qualified and competent manpower in the language, needed in the industry, administration various institutions, local and foreign industries, companies, banking, markets etc. The other purpose of the French language education in Nigeria is for the training and production of Nigerians that are fluent in the language on order to enhance international relation and diplomacy, to foster regional and international peace, unity and progress.

The French language education does not only mean training in grammar or in the four language skills (that is speaking, listening, reading and writing) only, but it also involves exposing learners to France and francophone African Literature Cultures and civilization. The Nigerian cultures and civilization are also taught in French.

Thus, learners are exposed to, and made to be aware of their own immediate environment and that of others. Thus, the skills, attitudes, values as well as the knowledge acquired help in the development and survival of the individual (learners) and the society at large. These are in consonance with the Nigeria's education aims and objectives as contained in the National Policy on Education (2004). The objectives among others include;

- i. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.
- ii. For the survival of the individual and the Nigeria society.
- iii. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around.
- iv. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competent both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

#### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of teaching and learning of the French language at the secondary level is, therefore, to facilitate interaction with our neighboring French speaking countries like, Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Benin.

The National Policy on Education however, the precise 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 years, learner should be able to:

- i. Understand French expressions necessary for seeking and obtaining answers to his/her immediate personal problems and or satisfying his or her needs such as, attracting people attention, asking for information etc.
- ii. Understand verbal narration of stories and event within their range of experiences that have already taken place.
- iii. To understand simple verbal introductions of events, plans and projects yet to take place.
- iv. To use intelligently and appropriately, oral expressions and structures that are related to the situation in (i-iii) above.
- v. To read correctly and with understanding of oral and written French appropriately to the situation outlined in (i-iii) above.
- vi. To be good in conventional letter writing, French language activities in the situation outlined in (i-iii) above.

However, the general objectives of teaching French language at the senior secondary school level as stated in the 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 communication method.
- ii. To widen the scope of the learners' knowledge about the French and French speaking countries.
- iii. To assist the teacher in his or her presentation of the subject in the simplest possible manner, in order to sustain the interest of the learners.
- iv. To encourage the innovation capacity of the teacher who should be able to improve on materials in order to enhance effective delivery.
- v. To help text book developers to produce teaching materials that will adequately reflect the communicative methods in modern language learning.

### Language

The term language, like most technical term, evokes different connotation depending on the context in which it is used. Relevant to linguistics is Robinson's view of language as a "formalized system of communication, especially one that uses sound or written symbols which the majority of a particular community will readily understand" (Robinson, 2003). This definition evokes at least three characteristics of language;

- i. That it is a system of communication used only by human beings (species- specific to man).
- ii. That language is formalized (properly which helps identify one language from others).
- iii. That language exists in a community.

Furthermore, (Ro; 1981) concludes that "language interacts with every other aspect of human life in the society, and it can be understood only if it is considered in relation to society".

To Simpson (1994) who sees language as "human behaviour on a particular occasion, all system of writing and speaking, and a particular type of speaking or writing felt to be typical of, or appropriate to a given situation, as in the expression of language for advertisement".

Robinson, M. (2003), opened that a language is so vital to human life that there is hardly any situation where it is not involved. Languages are used to communicate and also to achieve the essence of livelihood. It is a vital cultural component, which cannot be separated formal learning process, national development and nation building stability.

### Communication

In its most general sense, is considered to be a chain of event in which the important link is a message. The process also involves the production, transmission and reception of message. In its broadest human sense, communication can be seen as a source and extension imagination in forms that can be learned and shared. It is the production, perception and comprehension of messages that bear man's notion of what is significant, what is right, and also what is related to something else. The hand, brain, eye, and mouth, are the chief organs of communication.

## The Importance of French Language

Nigeria is a country occupying an area of 923678km square, situated on the golf of guinea sharing boundaries with Niger in the North, in the East by Chad and Cameroun, while in the west by Benin. Therefore, it is the duty of Nigerians to learn French language because it is the official language of its neighboring countries mentioned above. This paper therefore, classified the importance of French into two categories as follows:

### French as a Communication Tool for Quality Education

French and English are the only foreign language that can be useful through out the world; French as foreign a language is the second most frequently taught and spoken language in the world after English. The international organization of francophone has 52 members' states and government, of which 33 countries have French as an official language. French is the only language (Other than English) spoken in five continents of the world. These two international language are therefore, considered as world language.

When deciding on a foreign language for work or school, French is the language that will give you the most choices, in your studies or career. French along with English is the official working language of the following international agencies:

UNESCO

The United Nations (UN)

Organization for Economic cooperation and Development (OECD)

The 31 member council of Europe

The International Olympic Committee

The European Union

The International Labor Bureau

The International Red Cross (RC)

The Universal Postal Union

Union of International Association (UIA)

### French Language and Quality Education for Effective Inter-Personal Communication

It should be necessary for every Nigerian to try to learn French in order to speak write and read it, especially, "women". Generally speaking woman are considered to be good in learning language, because they force to be reckoned with for French language to be qualitative and properly propagated, the Nigerian woman is in the better position to do so. Proverbs that say "when you educate a man, you educate a nation" support their view. Therefore, communication start with a mother to her child from the first day on earth, and as he grows up and reaches the age of speech, he tends to master the language being spoken to him frequently. Since there is a very intimate relationship exist between a mother and child, she can influence her child either positively or negatively most especially, in communication. Teaching of French language should not, therefore, be limited to teaching and learning in schools alone but it should start right from the home. A child starts learning how to talk right from the home before going to school. A mother that speaks French eventually teaches her children to speak it right from the home. For

example, if a mother has two or more children, by the time they are able to communicate in French it could amount to educating so many Nigerian citizens.

Moreover, in an inter personal communication, there must be an exchange of ideas and this must be done orally or in writing. Therefore, for effective communication, a common language has to be efficient in order to facilitate understanding. Nigeria is a large country and has quite a number of business men and women who travel a lot to french speaking countries in Africa to buy and sell goods. For effective and quality communication, French language is vital for them. Without their knowledge of French language, they must hire someone to interpret all transactions between them and their partners in business.

Furthermore, some intellectuals travel outside Nigeria to attend conferences and in most of such conferences, French is being spoken and some articles are written in French. A Nigeria who speaks French would be able to watch French programs, on television, listen to radio and read newspapers written in French effectively. Nigerian journalists who speak both English and French are highly respected in their communities. Some jobs and professions demand s a bilingual person. For example, those that work at the customs, airport, immigrations, ambassadors, and a lot of others need French language for effective and efficient communication. In international hotels and standard restaurants, it is also certain that one should have knowledge of French language.

In the light of the above, the teaching and learning of French language has become compulsory in primary and secondary schools in some states in Nigeria. For instance, Kaduna state, where the former governor Ahmed Makarfi has made teaching of French compulsory in all post primary schools in the state. (Leadership, 2006). Similarly, the governor of Akwa Ibon State has adequately provided for the study of French as a second language in his state. This was achieved by the establishment of the French language resource center in Uyo. Through the center, about 100 French teachers in the state participated in a workshop for 100 days tagged “Operation speaks French in 16 weeks”. C'est-à-dire “Operation parler français dans seize semaines” Nigerian Tribune, (2006).

### Conclusion

The reason for leaning a language, for a country and for an individual could differ significantly. The government's reason could be political while for an individual it may be because he or she wants to be able to operate within the system. It could be for a job or career in the diplomatic service or for self- esteem, that is, to a special group of elites who speak French or simply for the love of learning. An attempt was made in this presentation to define education, quality of education, language and communication as concepts and roles which French language could play were also been highlighted.

This paper could save as an eye opener to those who are ignorant about the importance of French to this country. Since it is the second important language of the internet after English, all efforts should be made to learn how to speak French. This is because it is the

language of tomorrow. *“esseyez d'apprendre le fran?ais aujourd'hui pour être joyeux demains (endeavour to learn french today to be happy tomorrow).*

#### Recommendations

The following recommendations are therefore made as one of the ways forward for improving the quality of education in the country. French language should be given more priority attention in the three tiers of education in fulfillment of the current national policy on education. French language should be made compulsory in all primary, secondary school and high institutions in Nigeria. More French teachers should be trained and employed with high remunerations and incentives. The federal government of Nigeria should give scholarship to those who intend to study French at the tertiary institution.

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