

ENHANCING NATIONAL SECURITY IN 21ST CENTURY IN NIGERIA THROUGH EFFECTIVE FRENCH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Language is no doubt, an essential ingredient in nationhood and education is recognized as a life-wire of every nation which involves training and instruction specifically from childhood to adulthood. One should note that any nation short of adequate education suffers much negativities ranging from insecurity, poor diplomatic relations, dwindling economy, among others. It is said that if you are not informed you are deformed. For any nation to move forward is highly dependent on language policies. Communication is very important in human existence and this communication can only be passed through a language which is the medium of communication. Owing to the fact that Nigeria is surrounded by French-speaking countries and French being an international language, the second most frequently spoken language globally is a pointer to valuing French in Nigeria. Today French is widely used for government, economics and diplomacy hence, speaking and understanding only English language in Nigeria is no longer adequate in addressing the communication problem of Nigerians in a world that has virtually turned into a global village. Inadequate communication in French language puts Nigerians in fear of insecurity before their foreign counterparts. On this note then, there is every need for the National Policy on Education to be reviewed to make the teaching and learning of French language in Nigerian schools compulsory at all levels of her educational system. When a good number of Nigerian citizens are able to speak and understand French language there will be no more communication barrier and insecurity will not be there any longer. The paper therefore examines how French language education for all Nigerians can enhance national security in the 21st century. Suggestions are made for effective French education in Nigeria followed by conclusion.

Keywords: National Security, 21st Century, French and French Language Education

Introduction

Language is seen as the core of the communication process around which human activities rotate. Through languages public relations are achieved nationally and internationally. Knowledge is imported via language and as such it fosters unity among nations. This is because thoughts language people's ideas, though and needs are formulated hence interact/communicate effectively socially, politically, academically, economically and otherwise.

It is of no news again that Nigeria is bordered by francophone countries making it a necessity to tackle French with all seriousness. In 1963 French was officially introduced into Nigeria school system but its unfortunate that since then the impact has not been felt much in Nigerian society. The Nigerian foreign language policy has not made any serious effort to move French language education forward. Between 1980 and the mid 90s there was a high disinterest in French language which was relegated to the minimal among non-vocational subjects in the 1981 National Policy on Education.

In view of the geographical location of Nigeria General Sani Abacha, in his administration adopted French language in 1996 as the second official language of the nation. This then made Federal Republic of Nigeria FRN, (2004) to specify that French language should become a compulsory subject from primary to junior secondary levels of the Nigeria education system.

It should be noted that if any language is to become an efficient tool of learning at higher levels of education, there is every necessity to start using such language at an early state. This is because a child certainly learns faster and effectively than an adult. Whatever a child learns at a tender age is hardly forgotten. It eternally sticks to the Childs memory more than that which is learnt at older age. That which a child learns at that early stage of his/her life will help him/her to do better in that particular aspect of knowledge he/she earlier acquired as he/she keeps growing older. This implies that early childhood education yields better results in all ramifications. It shall therefore be encouraged mostly when it comes to the learning of foreign languages (French). In this case French language is listed among the non vocational elective subjects for senior secondary schools across the nation. This has to some extent contributed to the insecurity Nigerian citizens suffer out there in the hands of their foreign counterparts because of that communication gap. That is why this paper has decided to look into how French language education for all can help in establishing national security such as military security and boarder security in Nigeria in the 21st century.

Method:

It is pertinent to know that this work cannot be done in thin air hence, consultations will be made to textbooks, journals, conference papers, workshop materials and others. These materials and other relevant research materials related to the work at hand will be reviewed, all for the realization of this paper.

The concept and value of National Security

National security can be seen as a protective measure over a man, nation, society, place or thing. *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* see it as the defence of a country talking of different areas of security such as; airport security where security checks are carried out at the airports, tight security where many police officers are used, the security forces/services which involves police men, army officers, etc, a high/maximum security prison for dangerous criminals and others. This is to say that National Security can be seen as a protection where there are activities involved in protecting a country, building or person against attack, danger, etc.

National security is the security and defence of a sovereign state including its' citizens, economy and institutions which is regarded as a duty of government. Originally, National Security was conceived as 'protection against military attack' but now widely understood to include non military dimensions such as security from terrorism, minimisation of crime, economic security, energy security, environmental security, food security and cyber security.

On the other hand one can say that National Security is the ability of a country's government to protect its citizens, economy, and other institutions. Beyond the obvious protection against military attacks, National Security in the 21st century includes several non-military missions. Just as earlier mentioned National Security today covers some non-military levels of National Security such as political security and other ones mentioned above.

To ensure National Security, governments rely on tactics, including political, economic, and military power, along with diplomacy.

Concepts of 21st century and its education

The 21st century can be defined as the current century in the Anno Domini on Common Era, in accordance with the Gregorian calendar (Wikipedia). It began on 21st January 2001, and will end on 31st December, 2100. It is the first century of the 3rd millennium.

What is the 21st century education all about?

21st century education focuses on preparing students with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world, emphasizing critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and creativity, rather than just rote learning/memorisation. It also incorporates technology and global awareness into curriculum, fostering adaptability and lifelong learning.

Key features of 21st century education

1. Focus on skills, not just knowledge: 21st century education recognises that while knowledge is important, the ability to apply that knowledge,

analyse information, and solve problems is crucial for success.

2. Development of 4“C”, These 4“C” are known as: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity which are seen as fundamental skills for the 21st century. Students need these specific skills to fully participate in today’s global community. Students need these skills to be able to share their thoughts, questions, ideas and solutions.
3. Technology integration: Technology is not just a tool but an integral part of the learning process, helping students access information, communicate effectively, and create innovative solutions
4. Global Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity: Students are encouraged to understand different cultures and perspectives, recognizing the inter connectedness of the world and the importance of global citizenship.
5. Personalized learning: Recognizing that each student learns differently, personalized learning aims to tailor instructions to individual needs, strengths, and interests.
6. Real world application: Connecting classroom learning to real-world situation and practical scenarios helps students see the relevance of what they are learning and develop a deeper understanding.
7. Emphasis on problem-solving and innovation: 21st-century education encourages students to identify problems, develop solutions and be very creative in thinking to address challenges in their communities and beyond.
8. Lifelong learning: students are encouraged to develop the habits and skills of a lifelong learner, fostering a love of learning and the ability to adapt to continuous change.

Concepts of French and language education

The French language is an Indo-European language from the Romance family of languages. It is the official language of France along with a number of other nations, primarily on the African continent. French is a language often used in business, including foreign relations. It is one of the languages used in the UN General Assembly and it is the official language of the international Olympic Committee. It is also the fourth most-used language on the internet. Some of its words and phrases have even worked their way into other languages.

French language, as a matter of fact, is a language developed from ‘Vulgar Latin’ (i.e, the Latin spoken by average people as opposed to the Latin used in official capacities). It is one of the ‘langue d’oil’, a series of dialects that spans that length of modern France and a bit beyond its borders.

French is the official language in numerous countries, such as Cameroun, Côte d’Ivoire, Chad, Nigar, Mali, Bukinafasu, Togo, Begium, Canada, Francis, etc many of them in Africa with all these enumerated above concerning French language, there is every need for it to be taken seriously in Nigeria. This

will go a long way in helping Nigeria to tackle most of her national problems caused by language barrier.

As human relations and interactions continue to expand between persons, communities, people and nations so does the need to learn another language other than theirs’ (Oguegbune-Okwuenu, Akan, and Jang; 2010). This is so because language education is a process by which an individual is trained in a language, way of inculcating the four language skills in an individual to provide for the acquisition of language skills in order for the individual in question to be functional member of his or her society. The four skills expected to be acquired by a language learner in language education are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Language education is a process and practice of teaching a second or foreign language. It is primarily a branch of applied linguistics, but can be an interdisciplinary field. (Wikipedia).

The aim of language education is to acquire knowledge, skills and abilities to an existential competence.

In a simple term, language education can be explained as the teaching and learning of any language, language is of paramount importance since it is a process by which a child develops the communicative attitude which is of positive value to his or her society. In this case therefore, one can say that language education is the formal acquisition of communicative skills by an individual.

Concepts of French language education

To discuss about this, focus should be on the historical overview of French Language Education in Nigeria.

An attempt on the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria is dated as far back as 19th century. In 1878, the Wesley High School already included in its curriculum the teaching and learning of German and French languages respectively. But unfortunately, French language education was not officially introduced into the secondary school curriculum in Nigeria until 1956. Thus, King’s College, Lagos and government College, Ibadan need to be mentioned in this regard for pioneering the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in this country. At tertiary level, the situation was not much different. The teaching and learning of French language at the University level for instance, was necessitated as those few lucky Nigerians who were products of the schools mentioned above were in quest for their university education consequently, as from 1960, shortly after the independence, some of the so-called first generation universities such as university of Ibadan, University of Nigeria Nsukka, University of Lagos and University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria took up the challenge of teaching and learning of French language with expatriate lecturers like Henri G.J. Evans, Wilfred, Feuser, Brann C.M.B etc.

It should be noted that the first set of Nigerian French graduates were products of these famous universities. And many of them, after graduation, joined the noble teaching profession thereby reducing the penury of French teachers in

the system at that time. It is glad to stress that in Nigeria today, some of these indigenous fore-runners and seasoned scholars of French language education in Nigeria are professors of French in their respective universities, either at home or abroad. Among them are professors Abiola Irele, Victor O. Aire, Tunde Ajiboye, Kester O. Echenim, Adebola A. Kukoyi, Raymond O. Elaho, John E. Elerius, Unionmwan Edebiri, Paul E. Modum, Pai Obanya, Olusola Oke, Emmanuel C. Nwezeh etc. Similarly, some colleges of Education known as Advanced Teachers' college in the country then also joined in the crusades for French language education in Nigeria. Among these old colleges are Adeyemi College of Education Ondo, Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, as well as University of Lagos College of Education. In the early 60s, there were already French graduates from these colleges of education.

One notable feature about French as a foreign language in Nigeria from inception to date is its popularity as a subject as well as the extent of glory and recognition it does accord any school offering it. For quite some decades, inspite of much efforts put by various experts in the field to make it work French language education is still a mirage in Nigeria in the sense that it is still being faced with some challenges which will be discussed later in this paper.

Importance of/Need for French Language Education in Nigeria

There is every need to take French Language Education seriously in Nigeria considering her position as giant of Africa. Geographically, Nigeria in the African continent is surrounded by French-speaking countries hence, there is every reason for her citizens to have knowledge of French.

The security and economic vitality of Nigeria as a nation in the present complex global era, depend on her citizens' knowledge of foreign languages and international affairs. Besides, Nigeria belongs to regional, sub-regional and international organizations with her francophone counterparts where French language serves as one of the major languages of deliberation. According to Akan, Oguegbuna-Okweuenu and Jang (2009), it is said to observe that during such fora, while francophone's conduct deliberations in English right here in Nigeria, their Nigerian counterparts always have to fall back to interpreters and translators who often times, only paraphrase and omit important details. This kind of position is capable of incapacitating Nigeria and setting her backward in several respects, considering her cultural, economic and military positions, especially in this era of consolidation and conflict resolution globally.

Foreign language can be seen as that which prepares youths for industrialization and trade. Possessing an extra linguistic competence provides the opportunity of contrasting one's own language with that of others in order to appreciate the unique identity and power of one's language.

Effective communication in foreign language such as French in both writing and speaking will create much avenue for

mutual understanding among the people of different nationalities. By so doing respect and tolerance for other peoples' culture and civilization is highly promoted. Effective communication in foreign language such as French puts one on the advantage and opportunity of securing fortunes like jobs, business and the likes.

According to the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004:10) Federal Republic of Nigeria:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expected that every child be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba. For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French (p. 10).

Having seen the importance of French language in Nigeria, one does not need to be told that every Nigerian should be given the opportunity to learn French. This will help in breaking every communication barrier or prejudice, and prepare Nigerians to live and interact harmoniously with their French-speaking neighbours thereby fitting in the business of the global village in this 21st century. Activities in global village include commerce, religion, education, politics, etc. This will equally make Nigerians feel more secured in the hands of their foreign counterparts.

Talking of the need for French language in Nigeria, it is to be noted that Nigeria is a member of so many international organizations such as United Nation (UN), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), World Health Organization (WHO), etc. French is the official language of 29 countries and working language of all these aforementioned organizations, including UNESCO and European Union. The reason being that these organizations comprise of francophone and Anglophone countries and French is one of the languages they use in running their affairs and Nigeria often sends delegates to conferences and seminars organized by these bodies. For these delegates to flow effectively in their deliberations and equally enjoy security in the hands of their foreign counterparts they need to have a fair knowledge of French

French in Nigeria Peace and Security Programme

Nigeria has been a key player in many peace keeping missions as regards chaos in the West African sub-region and Africa at large, like Liberian Civil War, Sudan/South Sudan crisis, the rebellion in Mali, etc and this led to the establishment of ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) which is a brain child of Nigeria. Nigeria has been sponsoring this outfit through funding and other logistic supports. Many lives of military personnel were lost in ECOMOG activities due to language barrier. They were unable to understand and speak the language of the community where they were sent to defend. So because of this communication gaps so many

Nigerian military personnel fell prey in the hands of their foreign counterparts because of their inability to understand and speak French. On the contrary, if military and paramilitary personnel deployed to French –speaking countries understand and speak French it will be of great advantage to them which will help many of them escape death traps.

Regarding International and Internal security there is a body formed in the police force known as INTERPOL, meaning International Police. Nigeria is a member of pearaph here of INTERPOL. It is for international police co-operation. This body deals with the police force within African continent and beyond. Iwunze, as cited in Umeche (2005) states that, Interpol has its international headquarters in Lyon, France. The organization today has 178 member nations, including 48 African nations. Nigeria became a member of Interpol in 1960 at the 29th general assembly session held in Washington DC. USA.

Obviously, one should expect conferences and workshops, in French or English since the headquarters is in France. Definitely communication barrier will set in if it happens that French dominates, thereby making Nigerians feel cheated and insecure and, when this happens, suspicion, distrust and antagonism are in-evitable.

Problems of Effective French Language Education in Nigeria

There are so many problems facing French language Education of which, all cannot be mentioned here now. Out of the whole lot of them the following can be mentioned in this work:

1. **Funding:** French, as the 2nd official language in Nigeria is characterized by numerous setbacks which militate against its proper implementation. Among all these setbacks inadequate funding has been the major problem in achieving the objectives of French language education in Nigeria. In schools where French is taught, their libraries/language laboratories are poorly equipped, poorly managed above all there are no basic audio-visual materials. Even some of the institutions that have this equipment the said equipment are neither put to use appropriately nor function well due to one reason or the other. Language immersion/Acculturation program is frustrated by some school managements making the study of this language to suffer attrition. People are by this discouraged to read French.
2. **Poor Power Supply:** It happens that even in some schools where some of these materials like French films are available there will be no light to watch them and even when there is light it will be unstable. This now prevents students from watching the French films and listening to French programs on the radio whereas these programs are meant to develop learners' spoken and written aspect of the language.
3. **Language Policy Priorities:**
 - a. **Dominance of English:** English status as the official language and the focus on it in the curriculum has no doubt overshadowed the importance of French thereby

leading to a lack of emphasis on the language in question in schools.

- b. **Inadequate Curriculum:** French language curriculum may not have aligned with the needs of the learners or the demands of the job market leading to a disconnect between what is taught and what is needed in real-world contexts. Moreso, in some cases, textbooks and course materials used in teaching students do not correspond to the sociolinguistic background and the necessities of the students hence, this affects their competency in communicating very well in French even after spending five or more years in school Imoh (2006).
4. **Lack of Qualified Teachers:** There is lack or shortage of proficient and trained teachers in French who are competent and effective in language methodologies hence affecting French language productivity and competence. Many of these who have been saddled with the responsibility of teaching the language are either untrained or ill-experienced with little or no knowledge of language pedagogy (Obiekezie & Timothy, 2011). Only few may have NCE, B.A.Ed. qualifications, even at that, not all of them are sound in the language.
5. **Motivation:** There is no motivation on the job training, on the part of the students most of them lack motivation for reason being that they don't see the value of practical application of the language in their daily lives or career paths.

SUGGESTIONS

French language has been officially adopted in Nigeria as her second official language and has been approved to be taught in her schools. Moreso, Nigeria being surrounded by French-speaking countries is already enough to make her citizens know that proficiency in French offers one access to a comfortable sojourn in France and other French-speaking nations. To make this dream a reality the following suggestions are made;

1. The policy of French language education in Nigeria should be reviewed by the government to make French language core-subject at all levels of nursery, primary and secondary schools, in order to sustain and perfect its learning.
2. The use of French should be introduced as GST case in all Nigerian institutions of higher learning.
3. French should be taught as a double major program in colleges of education to give room for proper training of French language teachers
4. Studying French and other disciplines like science and technology, international relations, etc should be encouraged in the universities as it is in other parts of the world.
5. More French language centres both public and private should be established across the nation to cater for the language need of those who are no longer in school.
6. Government should embark on rigorous training and retraining of French language teachers. French language teachers should be sent to France from time to time so as to be well equipped in the art of teaching. They should also be encouraged to update their language skills through e-learning.
7. Government should collaborate with cooperate organizations and French embassy in Nigeria and provide ICT facilities for French language teaching and learning ICT literacy should be a must for every French language teacher. French language teachers should adapt online motivational prompts using power-point to stimulate students' interest in the language.
8. Motivation and adequate remuneration should be offered to French language learners so as to prevent them from choosing careers other than teaching after graduation from schools. If all these can be put in place the most needed manpower for French language education in Nigeria can be retained thereby enhancing security.
9. Guidance counsellors should be encouraged to educate students on employment prospects in French foreign services as well as in educational institutions both at home and abroad.

CONCLUSION

One can see that security can be fully enhanced through French language education if every Nigerian is given the opportunity to learn French, besides, the importance of French language education cannot be over emphasized.

Achieving French language education for all in Nigeria will not only facilitate communication between Nigerian and her francophone neighbours, it will also enhance cultural transmission and peaceful coexistence between them. It will be a powerful tool in the hands of Nigerians which will enable them participate in international politics and trade in this era of globalization.

Young Nigerian graduates will be opportune to live and work in any part of the world thereby reducing unemployment rate in the country. There are so many advantages in making Nigerians literate in French. There is no doubt that if French is properly placed as a second official language in Nigeria and is put at disposal of every citizen. Nigeria's external market will grow significantly and more foreign investors, will be encouraged to come to Nigeria with new technologies. At this point therefore, there will be no more entertainment of fear of insecurity for both parties there will be smooth business transactions and interactions between Nigerians and their foreign counterparts.

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