

---

## REVIEW PAPER

### FRENCH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN NIGERIA: AN ISSUE OF CONCERN

Enakome Praise Ovekaemo and Ganagana D. Peter (Snr)  
Directorate of General Studies, Delta State Polytechnic, Ozoro.

---

#### ABSTRACT

The aim of language teaching is for students to acquire comprehensive abilities in a foreign language (including listening, speaking, reading and writing) and even a comprehensive understanding. Language Teaching has been greatly considered in Nigeria as the basic tool for development. The reason is that language teaching is seen as a great investment to produce quality of human resources needed for productivity and development. But unfortunately language teaching in Nigeria is bisected with myriads of problems. There exists a lot of setback in the teaching of French language ranging from lack of material, teachers, fund, etc. This paper attempts to discuss the concept of language teaching in Nigeria thereby highlighting the challenges facing the teaching of French language. This paper also suggests possible solutions toward improving the present state of French language teaching in Nigeria.

**KEYWORDS:** Language Teaching, foreign language, language experts.

Received for Publication: 23/06/15                      Accepted for Publication:  
22/09/15

Corresponding Author: [pedogalinguist@gmail.com](mailto:pedogalinguist@gmail.com)

---

#### INTRODUCTION

Education is all about knowledge and skills acquisition. Thus, to successfully confront the challenges of development; Language Education must be heavily invested into. Odiya and Omofonmwan (2007) defined education as “the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives, that is to say, it is a process of disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both.” Going by the definition of education, language education is thus the process by which a child develops the communicative attitude which is of positive value to his society. In other words, language education is the formal acquisition or learning of communicative skills.

In the Nigeria Policy on Education (2004), the place of language education is not neglected. The policy states thus: "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 expedient that every child be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigeria to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and Junior Secondary Schools but Non-vocational elective at the Senior Secondary School". 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). Since Nigeria is surrounded by French speaking countries, the importance of the language in Nigeria for social, political, economics and international relations cannot be overemphasized.

The main purpose of this review paper is to highlight the challenges facing the teaching of French language in Nigeria. The study also discusses the concept of language teaching in Nigeria and suggests possible solutions toward improving the present state of French language teaching in Nigeria.

### **Nigeria's Language Policy**

French is the only language regularly used with English as a working language by international organisations and during conferences within the West African sub-region (Simpson, 1980-4).

Recognising the dire need to facilitate communication with its francophone neighbours, Nigeria's former military Head of State, General Sanni Abacha, in 1996, declared that French should become a second official language in Nigeria. As a result, changes were effected in the country's National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1997.

The policy included the study of the French language in the primary and secondary school curricula, as a compulsory subject. Section 1 sub-section 10 (b) of the *National Policy on Education* states as follows:

For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in Junior Secondary Schools (*National Policy on Education*, 2004:10).

However, political instability and government's seeming lack of interest has been a principal impediment on the implementation of the language policy in Nigeria. This only goes to confirm the statement that previously agreed policies are often abandoned or neglected by new regimes, thus truncating proper implementation (Adegbija, 2004).

### **French Language as a Second Language**

Undoubtedly, Nigeria has more than 450 languages, thus making her the most multi lingual country in Africa (Adegbija, 2004). The Federal Government recognized only three (3) major languages in Nigeria: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. This is stated in the 1999 constitution. These three languages may be used in conjunction with the English language. Following the colonization of Nigeria by the British in 1852, the English language was subsequently made the first official language of the country. However, with the fall of the Roman Empire and the consequent decline of the prestige of Latin in Europe and, in particular, since the second World War, French has replaced Latin as a foreign language in the British educational curriculum (Ajiboye, 2004). In view of this, French, which was then seen as the language of culture and enlightenment, was introduced into the curriculum of the overseas protectorates which included Nigeria and Ghana.

Suffice it to say that, French has been present in Africa for at least three centuries since the French presence in Senegal in the 19th Century. It was later that other countries, that are not Francophone, embraced it such as Nigeria (1965), Ghana (1975) Sierra Leone, among others. This means that the urge to learn and study French in Nigerian schools started in the early sixties before it was adopted as the second official language of the country. It could be said that the need to facilitate communication and promote fruitful contacts among Nigerians and the outside world brought the urgent need for English speaking West Africans to learn French.

It is important to reiterate here that Nigerians' independence from Britain in 1960 further enhanced the drive for inter elite political, economic and social cooperation, exchanges and communication among French and English speaking countries. Kamal (2002) maintained that it is a historical fact that French as a language has existed in those countries that are now known as francophone. In fact out of 51 member states and government of the international organization of francophone, 28 countries have French as an official language (Shryock, 1997 - 2008). It could be said that the French language of today is an outcome of colonial evolution. French speaking countries in Africa are the following: Algeria, Burundi, Chad, Congo, Republic of the Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Morocco, Rwanda, Togo, Tunisia, Senegal, Niger, Mali, Gabon, Cote d' Voire, Comoros, Cameroon, Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Guinea, Mauritius, Reunt and Seychelles while in Europe French speaking countries includes France, Monaco, Belgium, Switzerland, Italian and Luxembourg. In American and the Caribbean, they included Canada (Quebec), French Guinea, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Haiti, Northern New England (especially the state of Vermont), Louisiana and so on (Shryock, 1997 -2008& Sonuga, 1995).

### **Challenges Facing the Teaching of French Language**

The policies in Nigeria theoretically provides for multiple language learning, not only because of the multilingual status of the country but also due to her geographical location in the African continent. Therefore, it is not a surprise to find in the National Policy on Education terms such as: (i) Mother Tongue (MT), (ii) Nigerian languages (NL) (other than

the mother tongue): Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, (iii) Official Languages (OL): English and French, (FL); Arabic, German, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish. These languages are theoretically open to Nigeria students for learning except the foreign languages which are considered optional. But recent research revealed in practical term that the Nigerian student has not been able to offer all these languages at school most especially French language which is now considered the country's second official language.

According to Awobuluyi (1991), Nigeria has over four hundred distinct indigenous languages and each of the languages by definition of mother tongue and by theory qualifies to be taught in pre-primary school, primary school and junior secondary schools. Imoh (2006) strongly stated that, some of the factors working against French language teaching in Nigeria include inadequacy of materials, the unsatisfactory acquisition of basic language skills by students, and the incompetence of language teachers in Nigeria, especially in Nsukka education zone.

It should be state that some language experts in Nigeria have outlined some factors that hinder language teaching. In this study, effort was made to identify the major obstacles bedeviling the teaching of French. These major obstacles include:

### ***I. Infidelity towards the teaching of languages***

In spite of the massive resources spent on the adoption, teaching, and learning of French in Nigeria, the effect since its adoption in 2002 appears negligible. Adejo (2004) asserted that French is still lacking behind as compared to the adoption and speaking of English by Nigerians. He went further to remark that though French has been in the school curriculum before 1996, it was not taken seriously as there was no policy guiding it .Only few schools offered it as a subject. Probably, the Nigerian citizenry was not consulted before the adoption of the French language and thus there was no policy guiding it. Empirical studies also revealed that French language is not really having serious impact on the people and students. Mgbodile's (1983) research studies in Anambra and Imo state of Nigeria showed that only students in class one and two showed little interests in the study of French language. In the same vein, Odilora's (1977) research findings revealed that many French teachers he interviewed regretted having studied French or opted to teach French. Generally, the comments made by teachers and students about French are worrisome and needs to be addressed immediately if teaching and learning are to take place.

### ***II. Inadequate materials to sustain their teaching***

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. Emordi (1985) mentioned that a lot of factors make it difficult for learners who have studied French for five or more years not to express themselves and communicate very well. For instance, textbooks and course materials used in teaching students do not correspond to the sociolinguistic background and necessities of the students. Though, the impact of the

adoption of French is yet to be felt, nevertheless, the learning and speaking of French by Nigerians has a lot of benefits. These benefits are elucidated here. Non-availability of textbooks hinders the effective implementation of the French curriculum. Most of the materials recommended by the curriculum planners are not available in local bookshops.

In 1984, a committee of Anglophone French language teachers was set up to review *Pierre et Soydou* by Jacque David. It was discovered that most of the materials in book do not have the African child in mind. The book does not portray the African culture and civilization and as such the students find it difficult to read and understand. It could be said that, the textbook does not follow the main objectives of the French curriculum which states that the child must be able to discuss intelligently about his immediate environment. The knowledge of the immediate environment is necessary in order to make a comparison between his environment and that of the language he is learning. Researchers have shown that students learn language better if the textbooks portray their culture and civilization. This is the reason why Stern (1984) strongly believes that teaching a foreign language is concerned with the education of that country.

### ***III. Lack of competent teachers to teach French language***

House (1974) is of the opinion that the teacher at present is seldom the initiator of what will go for implementation at classrooms level, he ideally should and he should become more actively involved in the implementation process.

Undoubtedly, in Nigeria, French teachers are difficult to come by unlike in other fields of study. According to Oluranti (2012), 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. Worthy of note is the fact that, many schools in remote areas find it difficult to recruit language teachers. Indeed there is a shortage of competent teachers throughout the country. It should be stated that one possible source of language teachers is among the immigrant communities. The quality of teachers that teach a second language cannot be overemphasized. It is a shame that, some teachers who are not competent to teach the language are employed to carry out this task.

### ***IV. Attitudinal problem***

The attitude of many Nigerians, most especially parents toward French language learning is very poor. Most parents and guardians see the learning of French language as not profitable, not leading the one who studies it to a wider scope of career choice but only to the teaching profession (Adebayo, 2010). The attitude of the policy maker towards the implementation of the policy is equally discouraging. The insertion of a clause in a policy such as French as non-vocational elective is tantamount to unseriousness.

### ***V. Insufficient funding and Curriculum problem***

Another major factor is that of insufficient funding of the project. Most of the institutions where the language is taught are underfunded. As a result, the necessary and most reliable aid for teaching the language are not available. The laboratories are under equipped. There is lack

of access to uninterrupted power supply to watch French films and listen to French programmes on the radio. In the early sixties, scholarships were awarded to both French teachers and students in most States in Nigeria, such as, Lagos State. This was to encourage them to study the language. At this point in time, more people were attracted to teach and learn the language, but now, most French teachers are leaving the classrooms for industries. If teachers are adequately remunerated and given appropriate motivation most of them would prefer teaching to other jobs.

Curriculum implementation is an enterprise of translating curriculum conception into new patterns of action. It involves a variety of decisions and the performance of certain tasks. The teacher-pupil ratio should not be more than thirty students to a teacher. A case 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. Experts in curriculum implementation have for long cried out that the French curriculum used in Nigeria does not take into consideration the environment of the Nigerian child.

### **SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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. For the purpose of this study, the following solutions have been outlined in order to solve the above mentioned problems that have hindered the smooth teaching and learning of French language:

1. There should be proper education and re-orientation of Nigerians on the need to encourage the learning of French at all level and in fact across disciplines.
2. Government should set up an independent monitoring committee to monitor the implementation of the policy in the primary and secondary schools.
3. Qualified and competent teachers of French should be employed and every qualification based on paper qualification or foreign identity should be discouraged.
4. Seasonal training and re-training of teachers of French should be encouraged in order to attune to the very latest method of teaching the language.
5. Teachers should be well remunerated for better output.

### **CONCLUSION**

A comparison between the present state of French language teaching in the country and its output reveals that not much progress has been made. This article discussed the concept of language teaching in Nigeria drawing from the Nigeria Language Policy. It also outlined the major challenges currently besetting the teaching of French language in and suggests possible solutions toward improving the present state of French language teaching in institutions.

Enakome Ovekaemo and Ganagana Peter: *Continental J. Education Research* 8 (1): 15 - 22, 2015

There is therefore a constant need to re-evaluate the level of development in French language teaching for restructuring.

#### REFERENCES

Adebayo, L. (2010). *French Language Teaching and Productivity Enhancement in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges*. Gale: International Academy Press.

Adegbija, E. (2004). *Language Policy and Planning in Nigeria*. <http://www.fafunwafoundation.org>

Adejo, A. (2004). Socio-Linguistic factors responsible for students' low performance in Junior Secondary Schools in Badagry. PGDE of Faculty of Education. Lagos State University Ojo, Lagos.

Ajiboye, T. (2004). Language Teaching in Nigeria Schools: Where the odds lie, in Jimoh, Y.A.A. (ed) *Journal of General and Applied Linguistics*. Vol 2: 1-8.

Awobuluyi, O. (1979): *The New National Policy on Education in Linguistics Perspective*. Ilorin. The. University of Ilorin Press.

Emordi, K. N. (1985). French language teaching in Africa: issues in applied linguistics. Lagos: University Press.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). National Policy on Education, Lagos, NERDC Press, 4th Edition.

Imoh, P. (2006). Constraints encountered in the teaching of French language in Nigeria. A case study of the Nsukka Education Zone. *Journal of Education in Developing Areas*. 15 (2), 220-226.

Kamal, S. (2002). Critical Imperatives of French Language in the francophone world: colonial legacy-Post colonial policy. University of Leeds, Leeds, UK. 3.

Mgbodilie, T. O. (1983). Essential Factors of teacher effectiveness in French language in Nigerian secondary schools. An unpublished article, Institute of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Moody, H.L.B. (1976): *Varieties of English* London: Longman Group Ltd.

Odia, L.O. and Omofonmwan, S.I. (2007). Educational system in Nigeria problems and prospects, Benin City, Kamla-Raj.

Enakome Ovekaemo and Ganagana Peter: Continental J. Education Research 8 (1): 15 - 22,  
2015

Odilora, N. (1977). A survey of the problems facing French teaching in East Central State secondary schools. An unpublished PGDE Thesis, Institute of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Oluranti O. (2012). Implementation of the Senior Secondary School French Curriculum in Lagos State: Problems and Prospects. *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* ISSN: 2046-9578, Vol.5 No.1: 23 – 35.

Simpson, E. (2009). *Translation Intervention Lagos*. Interlingua Limited.

Shryock, R. (1997-2008). French the most practical Language, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and state university. Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures. Blacksburg, VA 24061-0225.

Sonuga, A.T. (1995). The Effect of Schema Activation Strategy on Achievement in French as a foreign Language Ph.D Thesis. Department of Curriculum Studies of University of Lagos.

Stern, H.H. (1984): *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*; London: Oxford University Press.