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Evaluation of The State of French Language Teaching and Learning in Public Schools in Adamawa State

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Abstract

Nigeria as a nation is compassed by francophone countries. Hence, it has become paramount adopting French as the second official language beside English. This led its adoption as a compulsory subject into junior secondary schools' level by the reviewed National Policy on Education (2013, 2016). This paper evaluates the state of French language teaching and learning in Adamawa state public schools. It further highlighted the imperative and relevance of French language in the state. It further identifies some challenges faced by French education and deplors the pathetic present state of French language. Therefore, the paper recommends that, Adamawa state government should recruit more trained and retrained teachers of French language to fill the numerous vacancies in various institutions among others. The paper concludes that; stakeholders should continue crying out as the cry is bound to be heard someday by someone.

Key words: French Language, Imperative, Impediments, Francophone, French education

Introduction

It is no exaggeration to state that no other sector in Nigeria has suffered more buffeting than the education sector. The Nigerian education system has had no shortage of laws and official government declarations to guide it. Unfortunately, education across the country has been on the downward slide both in standard and quality over the last few decades; especially the public sector. And this is in spite of several government pronouncements and documents to the contrary. A few indices will suffice to buttress the point (Gogura 2019).

According to Gogura (2019), if anyone is to go on a casual visit to his Alma Mata in

any part of the state and see for themselves what the institution has become. Does it look like the school that produced those today's' professors, doctors, barristers, engineers, bureaucrats, etc.? Without any exaggeration, anybody (with a heart) will come to tears at the end of their visit. The experience would even get worse if anyone engages an average student of the school in a conversation on any subject. You would be amazed at the level of ignorance. How did we get here? The objective of this study is to evaluate the state of the French language in Adamawa state education system today: the need for its teaching and learning in



schools as well as the problems bedeviling the development of the language in Adamawa schools in particular, and among residents of the state in general. It is hoped that this modest effort will not only help to reexamine the lot of the French language in the Adamawa state education system, but also throw more light on the need to rescue from its current state the teaching and learning of the language in Adamawa schools, colleges and universities; thus giving it the pride of place it deserves and in line with the various government policies and educational enactments on the subject.

The Imperative of French in Adamawa Public Schools

Emphatically there is need for French in Adamawa education system and, by implication, for the state resident in general. The following reasons will suffice to underscore the point, although the list is by no means exhaustive.

1. For good-neighborliness.
2. For international diplomacy.
3. For business.
4. For education and intellectual development.
5. For technological development.
6. For tourism.
7. For leisure.
8. For national security.
9. For proselytization

As for the *raison d'être* of French in the Nigerian school curriculum, this concern has been adequately addressed by this categorical statement in the 1998 edition of the national policy on education: for smooth interaction with our neighbors, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and shall be compulsory in Nigerian schools.

However, despite this position taken by government, the practical realization of

this lofty ideal is another matter altogether. Suffice it to say that officially and realistically French language is an imperative for the Nigerian citizen. Even without government prompting, the Nigerian personality should not only want to be part of the fast evolving global village but also participate fully in its social, economic, and political endeavors. It is also true that French language is one of the dominant mediums of this unstoppable evolution. Needless to add, this dominant role of the French language has long been acknowledged universally, especially in the West African sub-region. Sonaiya (2007) opined that there is no reason for Nigerians to limit themselves to English language as their only international language.

French is an obvious foreign language choice for all resident of Adamawa state and Nigerians in general, very important for Adamawa due to its geographical position, situated in the north eastern part of country and flanked by republic of Cameroon in the northern part of the state and by republic of Chad in the southern part of the state, French speaking countries. This is particularly true in the northern part of state of Mubi north, Mubi south, Maiha, Toundou and Madagali Local Government Areas. Paradoxically, it is in this state that the teaching and learning of French has remarkably declined. But the situation has not always been like that.

Needless to add that one of the *Langue de Grande Communications* is French!

Sonaiya (2007), further anchor, if speaking a different language is usually seen as a barrier separating human beings and susceptible to leading to fundamental misunderstanding and ultimately war, then learning another person's language should be seen as an act of constructing a bridge across the divide and a means of establishing,



promoting or restoring good *entente* among the peoples of the world.

Learning French in the Nigeria context is for communication and understanding with our neighbours across cultural and linguistic diversities. This there is much to lose when one goes beyond one's country of origin and cannot understand one's neighbours. Hence the statement in the Nigerian bilingual language policy: "for a good relationship with our neighbours, it is desirable for all Nigerians to speak French. French shall be the second official language and it shall be compulsory in schools" (NPE, 1998).

The Practical Relevance of French in Adamawa State

French language has tremendous advantages in Adamawa state. Gogura (2019) goes on stating that today; a bilingual civil servant is a tremendous asset, not only in the ministry of external affairs but also indeed in all ministries of government. For example, the bilingual civil servant attending an international meeting will not have to depend on the services of interpreters. Moreover, most vital agreements are reached not in the conference hall but in the frank and free discussions that go on in the "corridors." The chances of reaching such agreements no doubt depend largely on the ability to understand one another's official language. Needless to add that a diplomat representing his country in international fora cannot depend on interpreters to promote understanding and cooperation between his country and the host country or even to sell his country abroad and Nigeria can use all the selling it can get on the international scene today!

Another important area where the French language will be of immense benefit for the Adamawa resident is tourism. Just as the Adamawa tourist

would derive maximum benefit from his visit to France or other French speaking countries if he can get around in the French language, so also the Adamawa resident tour operator would greatly enhance his business if he can relate to French and francophone tourists in their own language. But it is not all about international relations and commerce. There are numerous other spheres of human endeavor where the Adamawa resident will benefit from his competence in the French language. For competence in French language is not limited to the acquisition of linguistic skills alone, but rather extends to the acquisition of a profound knowledge of arts and culture of the indigenous speakers of the language. Through learning the French language awareness is created and across fertilization of cultural and philosophical ideologies are established. This is an invaluable asset to the Nigerian intellectual. There is no gainsaying; Nigeria is a country hungry for technological breakthrough, to achieve this breakthrough education of the youth must be paramount in the country's order of priorities. Competence in the French language affords the Nigerian youth the opportunity to pursue further studies especially in science and technology in France (ABAH,2016).

Another important angle through which one look at the relevance of French in is the geographical position of Nigeria which we have mentioned earlier. However, Okeke (1999) observed that for Nigeria's leadership role with ECOWAS to be more meaningful, Nigerians should be able to speak the official languages of the other subordinate countries in the sub-regional community, which is predominantly French.

It is pertinent to note that France is one of the eight most technologically



advanced countries in the world and is a major partner in the Nigerian economy; especially in petroleum, manufacture, construction and commerce. Adamawa citizen should therefore take full advantage of the various scholarships and training programs offered in assistance by the French government and various French companies operating in Nigeria: Elf, total, Peugeot, Bougues, Dumez, SCOA, CFAO, etc. in the area of employment, it also pertinent to note that the trend in the emerging global village is that competence in a foreign language like French is a prerequisite in many national and international organizations. Competence in the French language would therefore greatly enhance the employment potentials of the Adamawa youths, not only in Africa but also all over the world. It has been observed further that Nigerians are yet to fully exploit their natural capacity for learning languages, for we have often limited ourselves to our local languages (Sonaiya 2007). The result is that we are not competitive enough in vying for international jobs which require competence in international languages. From the foreign it is evident that the French language is not only desirable but indeed necessary for the Nigerian citizen. However, the need for the language has not been matched with accessibility to it in the country. For despite the federal government declaration of intent regarding the status of French language in Nigeria, very little has been achieved in practical terms toward making the language available to those who would like to learn it. This is probably why Emenanjo (2000) has classified French as an endangered language in a class by itself and therefore deserving a very special and practical consideration in the Nigerian education system. There was a time when the Nigerian education system

accorded the teaching and learning of French language its rightful place. But all this now seems like history. A little historical perspective would be necessary here.

The Golden Years

The teaching of French in Nigeria schools' dates back to the 1960s; especially after the meeting of the organization of African Unity where countries collectively took a decision to promote the learning of one another's language for the enhancement of good neighborliness. From its introduction in the early 1960s, the teaching and learning of the French language has gone through both smooth and turbulent waters. Gogura (2019) further observed that in Nigeria, the underlying philosophy of teaching and learning French has remained virtually the same over the last five decades: for understanding, information, and communication. For macro-economic and political considerations, French language teaching and learning received a boost in the 70s and the 80s. This was ostensibly necessitated by Nigeria's need to play her perceived role in Africa and in the integration of the West African sub-region in particular. To achieve these objectives everything was done to make the study of French pleasurable and rewarding for the students. For example, the year abroad Language Immersion Programme (LIP) which is a vital element in language acquisition was funded by the federal government with assistance from the French government. Students had the opportunity to really immerse in the French language in France or in a francophone country during a whole year at almost no cost to themselves or their parents. This is what gave the edge in learning the oral aspect of the language in particular. There are also



several other aspect of foreign language learning that we imbedded and which cannot be provided otherwise. Today student of French in Nigerian universities and colleges of education mostly undergo the language immersion programme in the Nigerian French language village, Badagary near Lagos and on self-sponsorship. How can the outcome be the same? It is therefore no wonder that today our students are scared of offering French especially at the tertiary level. In the 60s, 70s, 80s, and even 90s, Nigerian French language teachers used to benefit from various types professional refresher courses in France in order to update their knowledge and skills with new methods of teaching French as a foreign language. The cost was entirely borne by the French government. Today this vital element in the production and of high caliber teachers is only being offered by the center for French teaching and documentation in Jos. This as a poor imitation of what obtained in French institutions in Besançon, Grenoble, Le Mans, Bordeaux, etc. In the good old days even secondary school students were encouraged in their effort to learn the French language. One particular programme that stood out in this regard is the inter-secondary school French drama competition which was held annually. Apart from the prizes given to the schools that excelled, individual students who excelled in the completion were generously rewarded with trips to France or francophone countries. The above contribution in no small measure in creating awareness of French among young students; some of whom would go on to offer French at the higher level. In addition to the above there was also the Alliance Française in selected cities across Nigeria who worked assiduously to promote the learning of French language by offering certificate and

diploma courses to interested members of the host community. There were also French language centers in some state capitals manned by French coopérants sent from France. They offered similar services to those of the Alliances.

The Present

It is a generally accepted truism in scientific discourse that what goes up must come down. But this should not apply to education. Other nations of the world have kept moving upward, even in the attention they accord to the learning languages like French. A little look at the present state of things regarding the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria will convince the most uncharitable among us that something has badly gone wrong and that something needs to be done to rescue this ship from sinking. It is perhaps pertinent at this juncture to remind ourselves of the general objectives of French language teaching in Nigerian schools. In the 1998 edition of the national policy of education (NPE 1998) that states that for the smooth interaction with our neighbor's, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and shall be compulsory in schools. Thus the decision to move French from the elective bracket to the core line in the secondary school curriculum, whose general objective can be summarized thus, right from the junior secondary school syllabus which states that at the end of the JSS class, the pupil should:

1. Comprehend without difficulty simple spoken French necessary for day-to-day interactions.
2. Speak simple intelligible French appropriately in different language situations, in a way to be understood by other users of the language.



3. Read correctly, coherently and with comprehension simple French texts,
4. Write simple French in a manner within the structure, lexicon and orthography of the language.

It is, however, sad to note that even at the end of their senior secondary school education students of French are nowhere near achieving the competencies stated above. This sorry of affairs is what plays out at the university level as observed by Simire (1998), a lecturer in the Nigerian French language village, Badagry:

Nous avons été ébahis de remarquer que ces étudiants 'privés' en fin de module 3 (environs 6 mois) n'arrivent à s'exprimer en français et formuler des phrases grammaticalement acceptables. Ce qui à notre grand étonnement n'est pas le cas de nos étudiants universitaires qui ont plusieurs années de langue derrière eux et qui ont des difficultés à conjuguer des verbes du premier groupe au présent.

We are shocked to discover that those 'private' students at the end of module 3 (about 6 months) are not able to express themselves in French and make sentences that are grammatically acceptable. This, to our great surprise, is not the case with our university students who have had several years of French behind them and who still have difficulties in conjugating verbs of the first group in the present tense.

A lot has been said about the sorry state of the teaching and learning of French in Nigerian schools and even in the tertiary institutions. For example, in her contribution on the subject Mbanefo (1998) states:

Une chose est claire : c'est que depuis bientôt deux décennies la survie du français au Nigéria est terriblement menacé. La meilleure façon de saisir l'ampleur de cette menace serait peut-être d'analyser les faits du point de vue du triangle matière, enseignant, apprenant

One thing is clear: since almost two decades now the survival of French language in Nigeria has been terribly threatened. The best way to underscore the gravity of the problem is sharp to analyses the facts from the perspective of the triangle of subject, teacher and learner.

Of the various issues raised by Mbanefo (2009) in her article the problem of lack of teachers is of interest to this discuss as the following except seems to buttress:

Evoquer une menace à la survie du français au Nigéria c'est également évoquer les problèmes suivants : le manque de professeurs en général, la rareté des professeurs qualifiés, la qualité minable de l'enseignement, le manque de matériels didactiques.



To talk about the threat to the survival of French in Nigeria is to evoke the following problems: the lack of teachers in general, the scarcity of qualified teachers, the deplorable qualities of teaching and the lack of instructional materials.

The scenario painted above is responsible in large part for the state of affairs in Nigerian schools where although French features conspicuously on the time-table, teaching does not take place due lack of teachers. In his own contribution to the subject this writer submitted elsewhere that one of the most intractable problems facing the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria is the inability to match official declarations with concrete actions:

So far government position has been no more than half-hearted attempts at compelling public secondary schools and colleges to include French on their curriculum offerings, without providing the necessary manpower and equipment for effective teaching of language (Gogura, 2006:35).

The writer further reiterated that effective teaching and learning of French in Nigeria schools requires not only the provision of up-to-date equipment, but more importantly well trained practitioners of the language. The absence of these two vital component of the learning situation has greatly contributed to the less than ideal situation where the teaching of and learning of French have either regressed or stagnated throughout the country over the years. Gogura (2006:36) goes on to add rather ruefully, that it is an undisputable fact that currently Adamawa State does not have adequate supply of the high caliber of French

language teachers required to raise the level of the language in the state.

The following table reflecting the availability and deployment of French teachers in public secondary schools in Adamawa state graphically exposes this situation:



S/N	School	B.A. FRENCH	NCE
1	GDSS MAPEO	-	1
2	GSS JADA	-	1
3	GJSS KOMAJADA	1	1
4	GJSS BINYERI	-	1
5	GDSS SHANGUIHONG	-	2
6	GJSS HONG	-	1
7	GJSS GOMBI	-	1
8	GDSS MUCHALA	-	1
9	GDSS LAMORDE	-	1
10	GDSS BAZZA	-	1
11	GSS BAZZA	-	1
12	AMC (SS) YOLA	-	1
13	AMC (SS) YOLA	3	-
14	GDSS NAMTARI	-	1
15	GDSS YOLDEPATE	-	1
16	GDSS (JSS) NJOBOLYO	-	1
17	GDSS (JSS) CAPIYAL	-	2
18	GDSS (SS) LUGGERE	1	-
19	GGSS (SS) YOLA	2	1
20	GMMC (JSS) YOLA	-	2
	TOTAL	9	21

French Teachers in Adamawa State Secondary Schools: Availability and deployment, 1998.

Source: Adamawa State Post Primary Schools Board.

Never mind that the above table reflects the general picture of lack of French teachers in Adamawa State Schools about twenty years ago. The situation has not changed much today. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this is the general picture in most States of the Federation, especially the Northern States. It is no doubt this bleak picture that prompted a renowned authority on French language teaching in Nigeria to declare at an important forum that "French is an endangered language in a class by itself" (Emenanjo 1999). In practical terms the implication of the above scenario is that immediate measures need to be taken to stem the decline of French language teaching in Nigerian schools.

Impediments

One of the most glaring contradictions of the teaching and learning of French in Adamawa is the inability to match official declaration with concrete actions. Having given the necessary official backing to the development of French language in Nigeria, the government has failed to give the much needed material backing to facilitate the effective teaching and learning of the language at all levels of the education system. So far government position has been no more than half-hearted

Attempts at compelling public secondary schools and colleges to include French on their curriculum offerings, without providing the necessary manpower and equipment for the effective teaching of the language.

The result is what Ihenacho aptly describes as follows:



In Nigeria, most schools still teach French like Latin; using the Grammar-T Translation Method, with the result that Nigerian students of French get into the university or Colleges of Education incapable of holding a decent conversation in the language.

What has happened to all those modern methods or teaching French? From the through the 90, Nigerian colleges and universities could boast of language laboratories equipped with such programmes as *En France comme si vous étiez, Voix et images de France, De Vive Voix, bonne Koule, Studio Cent, Entrée Libre, practical French, Pierre et Seydou, Ony va, Je démarre, et J 'avance*, to mention Just a few. Today there are very few institutions that can boast of a functional language laboratory, let alone a full complement of modern programmes for teaching French. the Needless to restate therefore that government's noble goal of promoting the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria cannot be achieved unless the language 1s taught in modern and practical ways using modern methods in appropriate environments and by knowledgeable, trained and motivated teachers. Sadly, all these necessary ingredients are either in short supply or not available at all. French is a foreign language in Adamawa; and is quite distinct from the numerous native languages and English, which is the Nigeria's official language. The earning process of a foreign language differs radically from that of the native code. For while the latter is acquired intuitively solely by an infant in the indigenous environment, foreign language learning is characterized by serious and systematic programming under specific conditions. The foreign language learner being a "linguistic adult, the leaning pathway for him or her is riddled with problems originating from several factors: age,

linguistic interference, adult complex, reprehensible the speech habits, etc. Hence, the need for careful programming and conditioning to the learner. Because the acquisition of foreign language 1S a systematic and a linguistically orderly process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the point of view of this study it is observed that French language teaching and learning is in a sorry state in Adamawa state education system. The experience has been both bitter and sweet. Bitter because it might have aroused your sympathy for French language, her teachers and students in the state and you feel sorry. You should feel the same for the entire education system in Nigeria because that is where the problem is. Sweet because all hope is not lost despite the sorry state of things. For it is no use throwing up our hands in despair because of the bleak picture painted before us. We are incurable optimists who believe that the problems are not beyond our collective ability to fix. That is why we proffered solutions in exhaustive as they may be. It is important to add that this pathetic situation is not peculiar to French alone. But everybody has to carry their own cross. There is a Hausa adage that says *ruwa da ya dake ka shine ruwa*. It is also observed that Colleagues in the foreign languages feel the same way. Please let us cry out someone is bound to hear our cry someday.

. In order to make French more relevant than it is at the moment and equally sustain its relevance in Adamawa state, the following steps are recommended:

1. The Nigeria language policy should move from theoretical stage to the practical and effective implementation of the language policy which will give French



language teaching and learning a priority

2. Adamawa State government should employ more trained and retrained teachers of French to fill the vacancies available in various institutions of learning.
3. The teachers and students of French language should be motivated by the government with special packages and awards.
4. Adequate equipment of French language laboratories with modern facilities
5. The using of multi grading teaching methods
6. The study of French should begin at the early stage of a child's academic training

Adamawa state government should partner with the French government to promote the language in the state

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