

FRENCH LANGUAGE: A CATALYST FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR NATION NIGERIA

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Abstract

French language is an international language and its knowledge cannot be underestimated as it is of immense value to any nation. Our nation Nigeria is entrenched in the midst of francophone countries and the practical implementation of French as a second official language will boost rapid development of our nation. This paper, using the descriptive approach, seeks to explain the significance of French language as a catalyst for the development of our nation in all fronts; economically, technologically, industrially, in diplomacy, security and communication as well as social and human development.

Keywords: French language, Catalyst, Development, Nation

Introduction

Language is a means of communication primarily amongst humans. Its use both orally and in the written forms, helps in communication and expression of feelings among humans. Social interactions and meaningful communication are made possible by use of language. In the words of Michael (2022): Human languages are prone to “enhancing socio-cultural, political, economic and scientific activities of people in organised society.” According to Abati (2016), “Language connects people. Language defines and strengthens”. This paper focuses on the



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French language.

The Status of French Language at the International Level and the Importance of Multilingualism

French language is an international language and one of the working and procedural languages used in most international organisations such as; Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), United Nations Organisation (UNO), European Union (EU), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) etc. (Iwala, 2011). It is therefore one of the major languages used in world conferences and for commentaries in international sports like football and others. As stated by Adebisi (2004), “France role in contemporary global politics makes the mastery of French language of great significance to Nigeria. According to Stein-Smith (2016), “multilingualism, a tool for social transformation, is a core value of the European Union (EU), which supports plurilingualism as pragmatic educational objectives”.

Omonigho (2016) opines that, “Nigeria must join the trend for bilingualism and multilingualism due to its multiple benefits, as this will be of immense benefits to our nation. She further insisted that “political leaders will interact better with an ability to exchange better knowledge in international fora such as AU, ECOWAS, UN etc. if they acquire and speak the French language”. This advice if adopted and adhered to, will better the lot of our country as salient points raised in a second foreign language such as French will be heard directly without recourse to an interpreter or a translator because often times as indicated by the French people “traduire c'est trahir” meaning that translation sometimes “betrays” original meanings.



French Language as a Catalyst in the Development of Nigeria

According to Ndukauba (2020), French is a language of development and alongside Organization Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) supports the development of Network Centres for French as a Foreign Language in Africa (RECFLEA) currently operating in Togo, Benin, Ghana and Nigeria.

The mandate for the establishment of NFLV in Lagos was to explore areas of the practical application of the French language to the Nigerian situation and to promote economic, technical and social integration of the African Continent (Ndukaaba, 2020). French language though officially declared in 1996 as the second official language, is yet to be fully adopted as such in Nigeria. Since French language is a language of development as aforementioned, there is a need for its immediate implementation in Nigeria, as this will help as a catalyst to speed up the development of our nation in all fronts such as:

International Trade / Commerce

The advent of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) in 2018, a body whose main objectives are to create a single continental market for goods and services with free movement of business persons and investment, leading to the creation of a customs union as stated by Ndukauba (2020), is very vital to the commercial life of our nation. This will accelerate intra African trade and boost the trading position of Africa in the global market in turn, strengthening Africa's common voice and policy space in the global market. Our nation Nigeria will benefit greatly from this union if French language is given its place as the second official language, as many Nigerians will partake of these commercial activities thereby boosting the economic life of our nation.

For Nigeria, reputed to be the major economic warehouse in Africa,



to actively participate in this free trade activity, the knowledge of the French language and the ability to speak it is imperative as most of the members of this union are French speaking as reported in African Union Website. This will help to derive fully the benefits of this partnership. France is a global industrial power and a major trade partner of Nigeria with many of their companies such as PEUGEOT, CFOA, ELF, CHEVRON, TOTAL, IBWA, SCOA, DUMEZ, MICHELIN, IBBI, CAMESCO, AIR FRANCE operating in Nigeria. (Olusa and Akintayo, 2017). In fact as stated by Adebisi (2004), French investment in Nigeria are more than they are in the francophone West Africa, stressing the need for Nigerians to speak French, as the knowledge of French will enhance greater appointment/work opportunities in this international companies, thereby leading to continuous boosting and development of our economy.

Communication / Media

The knowledge of French language gives one the ability to access information around the world. The reason being that French language is an international language hence, the language of international communication used by international media like TV5 Monde, France 24, RFL, CANAL + etc. French language is the fourth most widely used language on the internet. It is also the third most used language in business, the second leading working language of most international organisations and the second most learned language in the world (<http://www.diplmatic.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-pd>). French language through the impact of the mass media has been able to contribute to the development of our nation by supplying information that are economic, social, educational, political and technological based. Application of the knowledge from the different media listed above will help a lot in the



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development of our nation.

Education

The French government has contributed immensely to Nigeria's educational sector by organising seminars for Nigerians, enabling therefore Nigeria to achieve its desired goals and objectives. The establishment of various learning centres in Nigeria to help disseminate knowledge such as Alliance Française, Institute Français, Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD), Centre International d'Etude Francaise, Pilot Schools and the Nigerian French Project etc. attest to this. (Michael, 2022). Also the agreement signed between the Centre for Management Development (CMD) in Nigeria and Foundation Nationale pour l'Enseignement de la Gestion (FNEGE) which is the French Foundation for Management Education, enables executives in the country's public service to participate in seminars organised in France by Institute Supérieur des Sciences Économiques et Commerciaux (ISSEC). This opportunities demand a good knowledge of the French language to enable those privileged to attain such international seminars to be able to understand and harness the benefits released in such fora for the betterment of our nation (Olusa and Akintayo, 2017).

Technology

Bilateral relationships and partnerships between Nigeria and our francophone neighbors as well as France, which is a major industrial power as earlier stated can lead to major technological breakthroughs. As stated by Onuko (2011), French language can contribute towards the technological development of the Nigerian populace as this can lead to partnership with France in major industrial and technological



developments in various fields of life. Some of the above mentioned companies like DUMEZ has contributed to Nigeria in the domain of public works and has greatly influenced other companies like Fougerolle, Spie and Batignolles. This is very good for our national development.

The French language is used by the French people to promote learning and enlightenment as featured in National Concord (1981) and cited by Olusa and Akintayo (2017). “In 1980, the French government provided more than 200 scholarships in the field of geology, medicine, agriculture etc.” The trained professionals in these fields on their return work in different sectors of the country thereby enhancing national development. The above indicates that the French government had once shown much interest and contributed meaningfully to the technological advancement of our nation. With effective partnership and the knowledge of French by the citizenry of our nation, it will continue to contribute to our nation building and national development.

Diplomacy

A good diplomatic relationship with France and the francophone countries will do our nation good. This is very essential because in the words of Unioimvani (1984) cited by Olusa & Akintayo (2017),

No state or nation of the world can, in our time, all by itself advance its own development without regard to the outside world affairs, the co-operation of peoples in all sectors of human life has become a “condition sine quo non” if the progress of mankind is to be promoted and mutual understanding and practical co-existence among the nations and people of this common world of ours are to be guaranteed.



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With our nation Nigeria saddled in the midst of francophone countries and the commercial activities going on between them, a good diplomatic relationship is strongly encouraged to continue to further the multilateral relationship between them; this can be done by the acquisition of the knowledge of French in Nigeria. Also a former Nigerian Head of State lost his bid to be the United Nation's Secretary General because of his inability to speak the French language (Iwala 2011). Such opportunities may continue to elude Nigerians as a nation if the language barrier is not truncated because as stated by Adebisi (2004),

France which is one of the world's super power, an active player in contemporary global politics and a permanent member in the United Nation Security Council, will never allow anybody to accede any significant position within the UN or any other major international organisation without the knowledge of French.

This knowledge then should encourage the learning of French at all costs and at all levels to enable our access to very significant positions in the international organisations as a country as it will help to accelerate the nation globally.

Security

New trends in insecurity, insurgency and trans-border criminal activities are of great concern to our nation. The vital role language plays as a tool for peace and security maintenance as well as for socio-cultural and economic growth in nations cannot be over emphasized. In the words of Vygostky (1987) “language plays a role in organising activity in focusing on specific aspects of the environment”. The fight against all forms of crimes requires maximum cooperation from all personnel involved.



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These personnel come from different backgrounds, professions and careers; hence the need for a common working knowledge of the official languages of their different countries as these will enhance the effectiveness of their work. In the words of Iwala (2011) “... increasing regional integration and the need for cooperation between various countries are gradually forcing countries to stop being an island”. Since Nigeria's role in the peacekeeping operation is crucial, this implies that our officers and different workers involved in these operations such as soldiers, nurses, doctors, law enforcement officers – the police, custom and immigration; the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), embassies and social workers etc. must work together and often within the same vicinity in their bid to combat national and trans- border criminal activities. There is therefore a need to prevent language barriers in their various territories. This signifies that Anglophones like Nigerians must have a good knowledge of French and vice-versa to enable or facilitate ease in combating these criminal elements in our nations. This, if and when achieved will lead to a huge success in the fight against crime and furtherance of peace and unity, which are very crucial components in national stability and development.

Culture / Tourism

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) encourage the formulation of language policies that enable linguistic diversities and multilingualism in the society by member states. Cultural diversity and multilingualism as portrayed by UNESCO, plays a very vital role in fostering open and inclusive knowledge as well as pluralistic and equitable relationships in societies (Ndukauba 2015). Multilingualism can be enhanced through tourism and acquisition of culture of a new society. This way, new places of interest are visited in



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different countries and new cultures are learnt during such visits

The knowledge of French language enables the visitation of Nigerians to France, a country of luxury, fashion and beauty (Anyanwu-Wenzel 2017), also known as the world's top tourists centre attracting more than 79.5 million tourists in a year (Onyemulukwe and Karo, n.d.). Such visits will enable one come face to face with some of the world's top fashion brands like Channel, Louis-Vuitton, Dior, Lacroix etc. headquartered in Paris as well as other fashion brand shops such as Valentino, Gucci, Loewe, Escada, Abercrombie and Fitch flagship stores. This may lead to economic/commercial partnership with this brands leading to economic progress of our nation. Culturally, French cuisines, known to be very healthy due to their organic contents such as green salads and red wine made from grapes, as opposed to genetically modified contents contained in the food products of other countries can be learnt and brought for our consumption. This will greatly improve the health situation of Nigerians.

The ability to speak French offers one the opportunity to access great works of arts and literature in their original French versions; such include the works of Moliere, Hugo, and Sartre, Camus, Madame La Fayette, Senghor and Césaire. Insights drawn from this great works of arts can help shape different aspects of our nation. Also the French fashion, architecture, dance and visual arts which are core aspects of the cultural heritage of French can also lead to great insights and diversity in fashion, architectural designs and new concepts generally in our arts and culture leading to increased cultural diversity and national development. (Anyanwu-Wenzel, 2017).



Observations on the Current Status / Situation of French Language in Nigeria

Despite the many advantages that the knowledge of French language will bring to Nigeria, coupled with the fact of its pronouncement, adoption and integration as a second official language in our nation, its official status can be described as very weak. There are many factors militating against the full implementation of this pronouncement as well as the teaching and learning of this language in Nigeria. Some of these factors are:

1. The lopsided educational policies and curricula formation in most states in Nigeria which enable the allocation of very limited time to French language teaching as compared to English language and other courses. (Olayiwola, 2010).
2. Inadequate French teachers, technologists and technicians inhibit effective teaching and learning of French.
3. Insufficient materials such as books and teaching aids for French language hinder effective teaching of the language.
4. Lack of scholarships and bursary awards to both teachers and students interested in their furtherance of the knowledge of French.
5. Inadequate language laboratories and audio visual centres in schools.
6. Late commencement of teaching of French grammar in secondary rather than primary schools (Motaze, 2006).
7. The assumption that French language is difficult to learn. Iwala, (2011).

These factors and many more, are some of the obstacles that hinder the progress of French language teaching and learning in Nigeria.



Recommendations

1. Educational policies and school curricula in all the States of Nigeria should allocate enough time for the teaching of French language equivalent to that of English, Mathematics and the Science subjects.
2. Ministries of Education in all States of the federation should recruit adequately trained French language teachers, technologists and technicians.
3. The government through the Ministry of Education should furnish schools with relevant books and teaching aids for the study of French.
4. The government should provide scholarships and bursary awards to both teachers and students to encourage furtherance of knowledge of the French language.
5. Government and public spirited individuals, institutions should build language laboratories and audio visual centres in schools to ease and facilitate the learning of French.
6. The teaching of French grammar should commence in primary schools.
7. The method of teaching of French should be more simplified to encourage more learners of French and prevent the assumption of it being difficult.

Conclusion

The French Language is a catalyst in the development of Nigeria as a nation because of its importance in the past, currently and even in the future. There is therefore a need, very crucial and succinct, to give the French language its pride of place as the second official language in Nigeria as it will help in the rapid development of all facets of our nation.



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In the words of Adelakin (2016), “language is a very valuable resource and those who understand one go through life with a handicap. It is about privilege and access, and of course the ability to use it for our own advantage is paramount.”

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