

# Teaching of French Language in Oyo State Colleges of Education in Nigeria: Problems And Ways Forward

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**Abstract** - *This paper examined the factors militating against effective teaching of French language in Oyo State Colleges of Education. The study however focused on the need for integrating French language into the schools' curriculum, the governmental efforts, and the major factors confronting effective teaching of French language. It was however concluded that all efforts to teach French as second language how failed. Possible solutions were recommended.*

**Keywords:** *Teaching, French Language, Colleges of Education, Problems and Ways Forward.*

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is an Anglophone country that is surrounded by francophone countries (Niger Republic in the North, Tchad in the North-East, Cameroon in the East and Benin Republic in the West). For effective interaction with the neighbouring countries, Nigerian citizens need the knowledge of French language. Nigerian citizens need to acquire the knowledge of should be noted that, French language for effective communication with the interaction the francophone world entirely. Its, French language is still given little or no recognition in Nigeria.

However, French language was introduced into the education of the country after the extinction of Latin language. The expatriates were brought into the country to come and teach the language in the secondary schools throughout the country at initial period.

In the recent time, Nigerian government has started deemphasizing the teaching of the language. In schools, French teachers are no more employed in and the already existing ones are made to teach some other subjects like English language, literature in English and some other subjects.

This attitude of the government has made both the parents and the students to have an aversion for the language. Many of the parents now consider French language learning as a waste of time. Consequently, the students to pay very little or no attention to French as a subject in the few schools (mostly private schools) where the language is still taught today. This attitude has led many French graduates into

unemployment.

The problem is now telling seriously on the departments of French in Nigerian colleges of education. Very few students voluntarily enroll for French language as a course. The departments now depend on prelim programme so as to have some students in the departments. The few students that are now offering the language are handling the course with levity because they consider it as a course that cannot guarantee them a better future. Base on the enrolment on the French language course the researcher investigate the factor militating against the teacher of French language.

In this research work, effort has been on the following problems. The attitude of the government, that of the parents and the students vis-à-vis the French language was researched into. Also, the adequacy of infrastructures on ground for the teaching and learning was researched into. Another area touched in the research is the mode of admission into the three colleges of education. After studying, every student will nurse the hope of securing an employment. This also made the researcher to treat the problem of joblessness on the part of the French graduates. The above problems and a host of the others were researched into. Nigeria, though an Anglophone country is surrounded by francophone countries as it has been earlier mentioned. Ogunkeye (2007) while pointing out the importance of French language in Nigeria made mention of the fact that Nigeria is surrounded by francophone countries. Onyemelukwe and Adie-offiong (2004:38) described

Nigeria as: an Anglophone country in a sea of francophonie”.

Though, the geographical location of Nigeria as a country has made French language learning necessary in the country. Onyemelukwe (1995) observed that Nigeria needs the knowledge of French so as to have a healthy relation with the francophone neighbours. Igonor (2011) opined that”... For Nigeria to enter a relation of mutual benefits with these nations, it is imperative, at least to some extent, for her to communicate with these countries in their own official language - French”

Onyemelukwe and Adie Offiong (2004) buttressed the point by claiming that “Bilingualism is relevant to communication not only with our francophone neighbours but with other French speaking countries of the world. In short, it promotes global communication in all spheres of life- education, commerce, religion, and politics”. Ogunkeye (2007) gave four reasons for adoption of French in Nigeria:

- Nigeria is surrounded by francophone countries; therefore French as an official language will facilitate communication and interaction with the country’s neighbours.
- The seat of ECOWAS is in Abuja, Nigeria; there are nine (9) Francophone and five (5) Anglophone countries in ECOWAS. French therefore is the natural choice being the language of the majority.
- In a world that is fast becoming a global village, French can only be an advantage. There will be access to foreign materials and other opportunities available in terms of communication, technology, international politics.
- There will also be job opportunities for individuals in organizations such as African Union, United Nations, UNESCO and other multinational companies who require their employees to speak French especially at various embassies.

Ogunbiyi (2012) also support the opinion of the others by asserting that “Since Nigeria is surrounded by French speaking countries, the importance of the language in Nigeria for social, political, economic and international relations cannot be overemphasized.” In spite of the above-mentioned importance of French language to Nigerian citizens, the language is yet to be taken serious.

### **Efforts of Nigeria Government on the Introduction of French Language**

Nigerian governments have on various occasions

expressed their desire to adopt French language as Nigeria’s second official language. At the end of the day, the adoption steps have been discovered to be politically inclined. In the seventies and eighties, majority of Nigerian secondary schools were offering French as a subject- at least for the first three years. Nowadays, even after the so called adoption as a second official language, majority of the public secondary schools in the country are no more offering French as a subject.

Before 1997, French language was an optional foreign language in the country’s educational system. But: “Late in 1997, the then Head of state late General Sani Abacha gave French a new status, declaring it Nigeria’s second official language. Thus, Nigeria became officially, an English/ French bilingual and this was documented in the National policy on Education (NPE) in 1998 (Ogunkeye, 2007).

The declaration of French language as a second official language was not limited to the Abacha administration. Igonor (2011) declared that: “The Nigerian government took a fundamental policy decision in 2002, making French the second official language as well as giving it a status of core subject in both junior and senior secondary schools curriculum. It was an unfortunate situation that all efforts was frustrated by the schools.

Towards the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the federal republic of Nigeria called for the establishment of department of French language and institute of French language all efforts failed woefully. It is based on these issues that the researchers examined the colleges of education in Oyo States Nigeria to find out the major factors militating against effective teaching of French language in Nigerian college of education.

### **Factors Militating Against Effective Teaching of French Language in Colleges of Education**

In spite of the benefits that the citizens of Nigeria are to derive in the acquisition of French language, there are many obstacles on its way. Ogunbiyi (2012) asserts that: “In the early sixties, scholarships were given to both French teachers and students. This was to encourage them to study the language” Nowadays, this financial motivation is no more available. French language is rather suffering utter neglect from the stakeholders.

Igonor (2011) too affirmed that: “... Learners of French were expected to have not less than 16 hours of contacts with their teachers in a week. In practice however, it is often realized that a lot of interferences

get in the way; learners are soon very tired, the teachers are unmotivated ... “. He also lamented on the dearth of course materials and infrastructures (p83). Ayeomoni (2012) while writing on Arabic and French languages affirmed that: “... However, the government policy on the use, teaching and learning of the language is bedeviled with a lot of problems which range from inadequate materials and personnel to handle the teaching ....”. Many other authorities have written on the problems on the way of French language.

### **Environmental Factors**

The environmental problems which the above-mentioned authors have made mention of above and a host of others have affected the standard of French language acquired in the colleges of Education. Many of the students pass out of the colleges without possessing the linguistic competence needed to pass O’ level French unaided. Simire (2002) paraphrased by Igonor (ibid) opined that: “the quality of French graduates rolled out varies from institution to institution though the general impression is that the performance rating of French acquired in the colleges of Education did not march with learners practical linguistic and communicative competence outside the school system.” This is a problem that needs to be addressed by the government so that the aim of studying French language might not be defeated.

### **Poor Government Attitude towards French Teaching**

Despite the fact that French has been declared as second official language in Nigeria, the government is doing nothing to improve the teaching of the language. In the seventies and eighties, French language was handled with more seriousness in the country. Majority of the secondary schools were offering French as a subject for at least the first three years. This afforded those that had interest in the language the opportunity to continue at senior class level. Nowadays, French language has been completely relegated to the background. Asake (2006) attested to this by saying that: “The Federal Government decree says that French is compulsory in schools, but does nothing to enforce it...”

There are unemployed French language graduates everywhere now who only have solace in the private schools since French is no more taught in majority of the public secondary schools. The already employed French graduates are made to teach some other

subjects other than French language.

### **Poor Admission Policy**

Since French is no more taught in majority of the secondary schools, students hardly gain admission into French department through direct entry since they do not have “O” Level French which is the prerequisite for direct admission. Therefore, French language departments depend majorly on prelim programme for admission. Consequently, it is the students that cannot meet up with the requirements of their required departments that are advised to opt for pre-French programme.

This has gone a long way in affecting the standard of the students produced yearly by French Departments. Majority of the students admitted into the departments through prelim programme are the less intelligent students. This is serious affecting their performance in the French class.

This mode of admission does not only affect the departments in term of competence but it also affects them numerically. Since the departments rely majorly on prelim programme and there are now many departments that are running the same programme (prelim programme), the students that come to French departments every year are very scanty.

### **Incompatibility of the Graduates to the Labour Markets**

Many of the French students have been observed dedicating more time and attention to the courses they are combining with French and their excuse is that there is no prospect for them in French language. The students cannot be blamed for this perversion of thought. There are many qualified French teachers that are not employed by the government. Therefore, since the students cannot be guaranteed an appointment after graduating, they either not come in for French at all or they just handle it as a “second class” combination.

### **Low Teachers’ Motivation**

In the seventies and eighties, both the teachers and the students of French language in the colleges of education were enjoying supports in form of scholarship from the government. Nowadays, there is nothing of that nature. Rather the students pay through their noses to be able to complete their course in French language. This forms of support will go a long way in stimulating the interest of the students.

As a result of the negative attitude of the

government, many of the parents are now biased about French language. In the few secondary schools where French language is still taught, many parents see the time used in teaching French language as a waste. They therefore discourage their children from paying attention to the language. Similarly, parents of many of the French students in the colleges of Education do not give enough support to the students because they are of the opinion that the language is of no importance. They rather spend their money on the other combinations of their children or wards rather than on French language. Igonor (2011) testified to this lack of motivation.

### **Poor Learning Environment**

The linguistic environment where these students are learning French language is purely Anglophone. This makes it very difficult for them to be able to learn the language effectively. To make up for this, the Federal Government has established a French language village at Badagry where the students of institutions of higher learning are going for acculturation. Meanwhile, the aim of the village has been defeated because the students are now speaking either vernacular or Pidgin English right there in the village. It should be noted that the reason for establishing the centre is to have a place where the students will be kept for some time in an atmosphere similar to that of a francophone country. Apart from the lecturers, majority of the administrative workers in the village do speak French fluently.

### **Expensiveness Acculturation Fee**

It is mandatory for each and every students of French language department of the three colleges of Education in Oyo state to go to Nigeria French language village, Badagry for a period of three (3) months for linguistic immersion. Students are now paying between thirty-five and forty thousand naira (₦35,000 - ₦40,000) for this programme. The author of this research work knows certain students who deferred this programme for one or two sessions as a result of the exorbitance of the fee attached to it. Some students have to go away from their respective colleges for many weeks sourcing for money for this programme. This may eventually lead to failure in some of the courses that such students were offering. This acculturation programme is now one of the things that are scaring the students away from the French departments.

### **Lack of Infrastructure**

The necessary infrastructures like language laboratory internet facilities and textual materials are not provided for the departments. For example, more than a year ago, the centre for French teaching and Documentation (C F T D) Ibadan gave (3) cartons of books to the French department of Lanlate campus. Surprisingly, the cartons of books are now in the office of the Dean lying waste because the college cannot provide a room where the books could be displayed for the consultation of the students. Absence of these materials has caused a lot of setback to the departments. The end result is half bakedness on the part of the students produced. To proffer a solution to this problem, Igonor (ibid) opined that: "If the curriculum is to be well implemented, then the department of French has to be well equipped."

### **Lack of Interest on the Part of the Students**

Many of the French students are seeing themselves as victims of circumstance. They do not see any prospect in French language which they are studying but they are there in the French department because they cannot do otherwise. As a result, they do not have interest in the language. Meanwhile, Interest is an essential tool in learning. Any student who lacks interest cannot learn effectively. What the students are seeing around them are enough to discourage them. Therefore there is a loss of interest!

### **CONCLUSION**

All along, it has been pointed out that Nigeria as a country needs the knowledge of French language to be able to keep her head above water. Also, the lukewarm attitude towards the language is a long standing one. A change has to be made to this effect. The government is called upon to adapt positive measure towards the improvement of French language in Nigeria. The parents too should stop discouraging their children and wards from studying French. The students too are called upon to be aware of the fact that a better future is awaiting them if they can master French language.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The researcher is hereby making the following recommendations so as to improve upon the teaching and learning of French language in Nigeria.

The Government should embrace a more positive attitude towards the French language learning. Learning of French language should be made

compulsory in all the secondary schools (both public and private) in the country. Also, passing French at credit level must be made compulsory for all the Arts students (as English language is in many francophone countries). This will go a long way in imposing more seriousness in the students. Also, it will settle the problem of unemployment of the French graduates as majority of them will be employed as French teachers in the secondary schools. This will also increase the number of students enrolling for French language in the tertiary institutions.

Both the teachers and the students of French language in the colleges of education should be motivated through scholarships to francophone countries. Also, modern French laboratories and libraries should be sited in all colleges of Education to facilitate the learning of the language. Equally, the government should be ready to subsidize the amount needed for the linguistic immersion programme.

The government should also sensitize the authorities of Nigeria French language village, Badagry on the need to enforce the students to be speaking French always while they are with them there in the villages for immersion programme. If this is done, the students will have a francophone feeling in the village rather than speaking different mother tongues or Pidgin English.

If all these recommendation could be followed, Nigeria will soon be a model among the other Anglophone nations in term of French language.

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