

Problems Facing the Teaching and Learning of French Language in Colleges of Education in Oyo State

OLAYIWOLA JIBRIL KOLAWOLE

Emmanuel Alayande College of Education Oyo, Lanlate Campus, Lanlate Nigeria
olayiwola.kola2011@yahoo.com

Date Received: April 10, 2015; Date Revised: May 13, 2015

Abstract - *The research work is set to examine the problems facing the teaching and learning of French language in the three colleges of education existing presently in Oyo State. The study adopted descriptive survey to collect the data on the problem at hand. Forty participants were involved in the study as a result of the limited number of French students in the colleges. Questionnaires on the Teaching and Learning of French Language were used to gather the data. The result of the research has shown that there are diverse problems such as negligence on the part of the government toward the language, unfavorable mode of admission, joblessness on the part of the French graduates, lack of motivation, attitudes of the parents and some other problems. As recommendation, the government has been advised to embrace a more positive attitude towards French Language learning in the country. The government has been called upon to start motivating both the teachers and the students of French language throughout the country.*

Keywords : *Anglophone, Francophone, Environment, Motivation, Infrastructure*

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. In fact, Onyemelukwe and Adie Offiong (2004) described Nigeria as “an Anglophone country in a sea of francophony” Nigerian citizens do not only need the knowledge of French language to be able to communicate with the neighboring countries but also to be able to interact with the francophone world entirely. In spite of the above- mentioned opportunities, French language is still given little recognition in Nigeria.

In the early sixties, French language was introduced into the education of the country after the extinction of Latin language. The language was held in a relatively high esteem then compared with how it is handled today. In the seventies and eighties, expatriates were brought into the country to come and teach the language in the secondary schools throughout the country.

Since early nineties, Nigerian government has started deemphasizing the teaching of the language.

Nowadays, French teachers are no more employed in the secondary schools 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 too 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 the three colleges of education in Oyo state. 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.

In this research work, effort has been made to research 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.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study is to assess the impediments on the way of teaching and learning of French language in the colleges of education in Oyo state of Nigeria. It also sets to suggest certain solutions to the problems.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Nigeria, though an Anglophone country is surrounded by francophone countries as it has been earlier mentioned, Ogunkeye (2007) 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) described Nigeria as: an Anglophone country in a sea of francophonie”

Importance of French in Nigeria

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. He is of the opinion that since Nigeria is surrounded by francophone countries the knowledge of French will facilitate communication with the citizens of the neighboring countries.

He also asserted that since the francophone countries form majority in ECOWAS, it will be better for Nigerian citizens to understand French. The third reason he advanced is that the knowledge of French is necessary since French is now gaining more ground in the world. The last reason the knowledge of French can guarantee job opportunities for Nigerian citizens in foreign organizations.

Ogunbiyi (2012) also joined 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.

Adoption of French as Second Official Language

Nigerian governments have on various occasions expressed their desire to adopt French language as Nigeria’s second official language.(Adesola, 2014, Olajide, 2011) 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 curriculum”. Meanwhile, the decision to place French language on a high pedestal turned out to be a deceit.

Obstacles on the way of French language

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. 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.

Performance of French Students in Colleges of Education

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.

METHODS

Research Design

In this research the researcher has used a descriptive survey design which involves an intensive study geared towards a thorough understanding of the population.

Sample and sampling procedure

Multistage sampling method was adopted allowing the selection going through stages. At stage one, the researcher used stratified sampling technique

to select teachers and students from the three colleges of, (Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo and Lanlate campus and Federal College of Education, Oyo). At stage two, the researcher used the French lecturers and the 300 Level students in the colleges. At stage three, simple random sampling was adopted. The researcher selected six (6) lecturers and 300 Level students from Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo while seven (7) lecturers and 300 Level students were selected from Lanlate campus. Twenty seven (27) lecturers and 300 Level students were selected from Federal College of Education, Oyo.

Research Instrument

To carry out the research, the researcher used Teachers Questionnaire on the Teaching of French language (TQTFL) and students Questionnaire on the learning of French language (SQLFL) so as to have a balanced result.

To establish the reliability of the test, the researcher adopted test-retest method. The researcher administered four (4) questionnaires among four (4) students of Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Lanlate campus who were not part of the samples used for the study. After a period of four (4) weeks, the researcher administered the same questionnaire to the same people using Pearson’s correlation coefficient and the two scores were correlated and arrived at 0.74 which affirmed the test to be useful for the study.

Validity of the instrument

Validity is the degree or extent at which a test measures what it supposes to measure (Oladele, 2002). To establish and affirm the validity of the instrument, it was given to four (4) lecturers in the colleges of education (Oyo and Lanlate) for vetting. Having corrected all ambiguities in the instrument, it was later confirmed and affirmed as being good for use in the study.

Research Procedure

The researcher administered forty (40) questionnaires among the lecturers and the students of the three (3) colleges of education as a result of limited number of French students in the three colleges.

Procedure for Data Analysis

The researcher used Frequency Counts and Percentages to analyze the data collected.

RESULT

The chapter deals with the analysis of data from responses of the questionnaire on a Survey of Problems facing the Teaching and Learning of French language in Colleges of Education in Oyo State.

Table 1. Distribution of sample According to sex, age, institution, school and level of the respondents. (N=40)

Variables	F	%
Sex		
Male	15	37.5
Female	25	62.5
Age		
16-20 years	10	25.0
21-25 years	18	45.0
26 and above years	12	30.0
Institution		
EACOED, Oyo	06	15.0
EACOED, Lanlate	07	17.5
Federal College of Education, Oyo	27	67.5
School		
Languages	40	100.0

Table 1 shows that 15 respondents (37.5%) were males while 25 respondents (62.5%) were female. The table also shows that respondents between the ages of 16-20 years were 10 and they contained 25.0 percent while those between 21-25 years were 18 which constituted 45.0 percent. Those between ages 26 and above were 12 which constituted 30.0 percent. It also showed that 06 respondents (15.0%) were from EACOED, Oyo while 07 respondents (17.5%) were from EACOED, Lanlate Campus. The respondents from Federal college of education, Oyo were 27 (67.5%). Meanwhile all the 40 respondent were from school of Languages (French department)

Table 2. Attitude of the Government and Parents towards the improvement of the learning of French

	Response	F	%
Positive attitude of the Government towards the improvement of the learning of French	Yes	04	14.28
	No	24	85.72
	Total	28	100
Parents have a positive attitude towards your decision to study French	Yes	05	17.86
	No	23	82.14
	Total	28	100

The respondents were asked regarding the positive attitude of the Government towards the improvement of the learning of French, there are 4 or 14.28 percent responded positively while the remaining 24 responded negatively, being 85.72 percent.

On the question on the attitude of the parents, 05 respondents responded positively being 17.86 percent of the population, while 23 or 82.14 percent responded negatively.

Table 3. Enough infrastructures to enhance the learning of French and willingness to study French in College

	Response	F	%
Enough infrastructures to enhance the learning of French	Yes	07	25
	No	21	75
	Total	28	100
willingness to study French	Yes	09	32.14
	No	19	67.86
	Total	28	100

The respondents were asked regarding enough infrastructure to enhance the learning of French in College, 7 of them responded positively or 23 percent while 21 responded negatively or 7 percent of the population.

If the respondents were asked whether the students would like to study French at the degree level, 9 or 32.14 percent responded positively while the remaining 19 or 67.86 percent responded negatively. This indicated that many of the students do not have interest in French language.

Table 4. Satisfaction with the services of the French Village and The Government encourages the teaching of French language

	Response	F	%
Satisfaction with the services of the French Village	Yes	09	32.14
	No	21	67.86
	Total	28	100
The Government encourages the teaching of French language	Yes	09	32.14
	No	19	67.86
	Total	28	100

The respondents were asked if they are satisfied with the services of the French Village, 9 of them responded positively or 32.14 percent of the population while 21 responded negatively or 67.86 percent of the respondents.

Table 5. The Government encourages the teaching of French language

Response	f	%
Yes	2	16.66
No	10	83.33
Total	12	100

The respondents were asked if the government encourages the teaching of French language, only 2

Lecturers responded positively, being 16.66 percent of the respondents while 10 of them responded negatively (83.33%).

Table 6. The parents of the students encourage them to study French and enough infrastructures that can enhance the teaching of French in college

	Response	F	%
The parents of the students encourage them to study French	Yes	4	33.33
	No	8	66.67
	Total	12	100
Enough infrastructures that can enhance the teaching of French in college	Yes	3	25
	No	9	75
	Total	12	100

When the respondents were asked about the parents of the students, they are being encouraged to study French, table 6 shows that 4 or 33.33 percent of them responded positively while the remaining 8 or 66.67 percent responded negatively.

In terms of enough infrastructures that can enhance the teaching of French in college, three (3) of them responded positively or 25 percent of the respondents while nine of them or 75 percent responded negatively.

Table 7. Students show enough interest in French Language and the atmosphere in the French Village, Badagry can enhance the learning of French language

	Response	F	%
Students show enough interest in French Language	Yes	5	41.67
	No	7	58.33
	Total	12	100
the atmosphere in the French Village, Badagry can enhance the learning of French language	Yes	5	41.67
	No	7	58.33
	Total	12	100

When the respondents were asked if the students show enough interest in French Language, there are five (5) respondents responded positively (being 41.67 percent) while the remaining seven (7) responded negatively (being 58.33 percent of the respondents). This indicates that the students have little interest in French Language.

When the respondents were asked if the atmosphere in the French Village, Badagry can enhance the learning of French language, five (5) respondents responded positively (being 41.67 percent) while the remaining seven (7) responded negatively (being 58.33 percent of the respondents). The result of all the research questions

(students research questions and lecturers research questions) tally with the opinions of Igonor (2011) and Ayeomoni (2012) on the subject.

DISCUSSION

Government Attitude towards the Language

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. Ogunkeye (2007) 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.

Mode of Admission

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.

Joblessness on the part of the French Graduates

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.

Lack of 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 form 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.

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.

Exorbitant 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 Infrastructures

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.

Limitation to the study

The study has been limited to the colleges of Education in Oyo state. The other colleges of education in Nigeria may be experiencing similar or different things but a generalization cannot be made since the researcher cannot really access what is going on in their French departments.

Suggestion for further studies

The researcher of this project work has limited himself to the three colleges of education in Oyo state. So as to be able to arrive at a generalization, interested researchers should try to make a research on similar topic in the other colleges of Education in Nigeria. This will go a long way to ascertain that the problems occurring in the colleges of education in Oyo state is happening all over the country and the Federal government will thereby be called upon to rectify the problems.

REFERENCES

- Adesola M.O. (2014) Observation sur le français au Nigéria :contact avec le pôle véhiculaire et le pôle grégaire. *Revue du CAMES, Lettre, Langues et Linguistique*. Vol. 00 (0).
- Ayeomoni M.O. (2012) Socio-Politico-Pedagogical Problems of Language Teaching in Nigeria. *English Language Teaching*, 5(5), url: www.ccnnet.org/elt
- Igonor J. (2011) Quality Assurance in the Training of Teachers of French as a Second Language in the Nigerian Colleges of Education. *The Nigerian Teacher Today*. Abuja. NCCE.
- Ogunbiyi O. (2012) Implementation of the Senior Secondary School French Curriculum in Lagos State: Problems and Prospects. *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 5 (1), url: <http://journal.co.uk/BJASS.aspx>.
- Ogunkeye O. (2007). Bilingualism and the Teaching of English and French in Nigeria. *Journal of Social and Cultural Studies*, 10(2), url: <http://contextjournal.wordpress.com/>
- Oladele J.O. (2002) Guidance and Counselling: A Fundamental Approach (3rd ed). Lagos. John-LAD Publishers Ltd
- Olajide A. (2010) Global Economic Meltdown: Implication for Acculturation in the Learning of French Language. *The Pacesetter (Journal of Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo*. 15(1)
- Onyemelukwe I. (1995) Teaching French Effectively under Difficult Circumstances in Secondary

- Schools: The Case of Kaduna State, Research in Education, 1 (1)
- Onyemelukwe I. & Adie-Offiong V. (2004). Deceptive Cognates in a French class in Nigeria. Education et Societes Plurilinguistiques. No 17.
- Simire G.O. (2002). Our Children: Future Teachers or who are they? Unpublished paper presented at the Nigerian French Language Village, Badagry.