REVITALIZATION OF FRENCH LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL BUILDING IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Nigeria parades over four hundred indigenous languages (Crozier and Blench, 1992) and two official foreign languages (English and French). Of these various local languages, three stand out for national prominence. French is a foreign language in Nigeria and has a stance of copious advantages as regards its pertinence in all spheres of life. The language has gained ascendancy among different international languages especially in Nigeria because of her geographical proximity with French speaking countries. Besides, French is the second most widely learned foreign languages in the world. Therefore, if the French language is well revitalized and restrategised, it may definitely take Nigeria to an enviable height. This paper therefore defines the concepts of language and national biulding. It highlights the organizations on ground to make the French Language more functional in an Anglophone Nigeria. The relevance of French to National Biuldingt is discussed, and strategies towards making it more functional for national biulding are pointed out in concrete terms

Keyword: *French, French language, Nigeria*

Introduction

Language is a means of arbitrary vocal symbols used for inter-human communication. It is globally accepted as the most effective instrument by man as he attempts to interpret phenomena he encounters in his daily life activities. It permeates our thoughts, mediates our relations with others and even creeps into our dreams. We begin our education in life with language, hence, there is a symbiotic relationship between language and education (Bamisaye, 1997:22) National biulding means gradual advancement of every aspect of national life of citizens of a nation. It is an improvement or growth through progressive changes in the body polity of the nation and in the life of the individuals that make up the nation. Nigeria is a nation with a population of over 140 million people with 250 ethnic groups speaking three major national languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (Census, 2006). Unfortunately, Nigerian society places much emphasis on sciences and technology to the detriment of languages. Many people see the study of any of the three indigenous languages as the last resort when there is no other alternative. It is generally believed that the study of any discipline, like Medicine, Engineering and Computer Science, is not only more rigorous but also more prestigiously promising than the study of any of the languages which are reserved for the dull and unintelligent ones. Hence, many people still believe that language has little or no contribution towards national biulding. Erasing this erroneous impression from the mindset of the average Nigerian is the focus of this paper.

French Language in Nigeria

The history of French language in Nigeria started from 16th century. It was introduced as a secondary subject in Yaoundé Conference (1961). This conference recommended the introduction of teaching and learning of French and it were to be taught and examined as a school discipline in Anglophone Africa, including Nigeria. This was done as a result of the great importance of the language. It is on record that the first French trading company in Nigeria was: Compagnie Française de l' Afrique Occidentale (CFAO), established in 1902.It is also on record that by 1881, the French men had started so intense since Nigeria's independence (particularly since oil boom) , that in 1993 when the France-Nigeria chamber of commerce became a desirable necessity. Besides, there has been mutual cooperation and agreement signed by both France and Nigeria: The Guardian Newspaper, March 13, 1994. Equally, apart from the companies mentioned above, another one was established in Lagos- Société Commercial de l'ouest Africain (SCOA). The expatriate employees involved in the social exchanges that took place. The companies were also represented in smaller stations and that was where it was impossible to live a separate existence. This is because the French presence was minute in relation to the British presence, it was only to be expected that the French adapted more quickly and readily to the British ways which has an effect on the African countries in which Nigeria is not an exception. The French influence persisted in Nigeria in the custom of signing the Governor's book contained in a gate house at the entrance to Government House in Lagos. It was signed when you

arrived from leave or transfer into the territory band again when you went on leave. These are the activities that were on ground for making French language a known language in Nigeria. As a result of the values of the French language in Nigeria, the federal government of Nigeria established The Nigerian French Village in 1991 as an inter-University Centre for French studies. The centre offers a variety of programmes and services with the mandate of providing language immersion programmes include: certificate, diploma, NCE, university programmes. Furthermore, the importance of the language cannot be measured, as a result of this, the late General Sanni Abacha in 1996 declared the new status of French as the nation's second official language. Therefore for Nigerians to interact effectively with francophone countries locally and internationally, they should not only be able to speak the language fluently but also be able to attend international seminars and conferences without much problem. The Nigerian language policy should make provisions for the following areas of communication: Internal communication, international scientific or technical communication. French is one of the international languages most widely used in commerce, scientific and technological research, administration, education, literature etc. With the knowledge of French, Nigerians and Francophone countries will be able to work together in areas of science and technology. This however cannot be achieved if French teachers are not employed or if those employed are not encouraged to teach the language. There is a growing concern about the attitude of Nigerians towards the study of French in our schools. A good number of them are not sufficiently informed about the usefulness of French in our educational system or its importance as an international language. They feel that people who study French language especially in the tertiary institutions are slow learners, or a course for dumping students who did not pass their intended course of study. And therefore it's a waste of time studying it, but revise is the case. The need for French in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. Nigeria's geographical, economic, and diplomatic as well as her educational and research needs make it imperative for her to give adequate attention and to the learners of French. It is therefore necessary to make Nigerians realize the importance of French in our country. Some government officials and individuals are enrolling for French studies in French institutions and private French lessons in the country and this shows that the need for this language is quite alarming, the language should be encouraged among youths, teachers, curriculum planners, communicators, lawyers, military, Para-military, technologists and other professionals. French is an important language needed by the professionals . It is prominently known that right from the onset, we cannot underrate the role of French language in the development of Nigeria, because Nigeria is geographically surrounded by francophone countries. In the North, East, South and West are Republic of Niger and Chad, Cameroun and The Republic of Benin respectively. The benefits of language include the whole mechanism of human communication with the purpose of achieving total understanding. It is the crucial component of cultural identity and the most prominent factor in bringing out a distinction from one culture to another. For instance, Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa in Nigeria which share different linguistic identity, background, culture and social life within one defined nation can still express

their own different languages with full audacity. The roles of language include a substantial amount of people's historical experience, their thought patterns, and their world view. Language's roles are said to be related to the embodiment of culture leading to the depth of a person's reflection–beyond the practical necessities of life to such aspects of searching for knowledge, education and collaboration among multi-ethnic societies, In such a way, it revealed how language continues to operate signs and elaborate functions in almost all phases of Nigeria's life. Particularly unique position where it ranges in its usefulness in the exceptionally experienced in Nigeria is in the domains of politics, education, legal matters, mass media, art and leisure, all of which are typically carried out through the medium of languages, most particularly the so-called foreign languages such as French, German, Spanish and Chinese. Etc. Language is seen as an instrument that brings about wholesome exchange of ideas to be able to affect comprehension. French language is considered as one of the most widely used languages. It is a foreign language in Nigeria. The language has gained ascendancy among different international languages because of its pertinence in all spheres of life. Ajiboye (1999) opines that French could be regarded as one of the most important foreign languages used by most countries. Most of these countries need to interact to form unified bodies for economic, political and technological advancement. In spite of the place French is yet to be given its expected recognition in the country. It is quite obvious that the language is now popular in the country since its inception right from 16th century; the relevance of French language in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. Therefore, the revitalization of French language education in Nigeria has become a necessity because of the inevitable roles being performed by the French language in the development of the country.

Basic Organizations on Ground to Make the French Language Functional in Nigeria

This section of the paper seeks to create awareness of the existence of these specialized administrative organizations in Nigeria.

Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD)

This is an international education and cultural organization of the French Embassy. Its headquarters is in Jos, Plateau State, with zonal offices in the six geo-linguistics zones in Nigeria. It performs the following functions:

- Training and retraining of French teachers at all levels, both within and outside Nigeria.
- Award of scholarship to teachers and students of French alike for a fixed period in France.
- Organization of conferences and seminars to promote teaching and learning of French.
- Technical aids and partnership with Nigeria Government on issues affecting the French Language and Technology.
- Provision of teaching materials for individuals and institutions across the country.

- Provision of employment opportunity for Nigerians.

Alliance Française:

This is another educational organ of the French Embassy in Nigeria. It has its headquarters in Lagos with branches in almost all the state capitals and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. Some of its functions are:

- Teaching of the French Language and culture at affordable cost.
- Advising the French Embassy on the needs of learners and techniques to adopt.
- Serving as a liaison organ between the French Embassy and the Nigerian populace.
- Provision of books and other relevant pedagogical aids for individuals and institutions for promotion of teaching and learning of French as a foreign language.
- Creation of job opportunity for the Nigerian Nations employed by the organ.

Nigeria French Language Village (NFLV)

The Nigeria French Village located at Ajara, Badagry, in Lagos State, is an Inter-University Centre for French Teaching (ICFT). It was established in 1990 by the Federal Government as an alternative centre to France or francophone countries where students of French must compulsorily spend their Year Abroad Programme. As an alternative centre, experts are; employed from France, from the neighboring francophone countries, as well as from Nigeria to carry out both curricular activities which under normal circumstances, should have taken place either in France or in any other recognized francophone environment. Its functions include:

- Preparation of French students in Colleges of Education and Universities for their final year studies in French.
- It serves as rendezvous for students and teachers of French for brainstorming on how best to improve on their methods and techniques of teaching.
- It organizes excursions, field trips and pique-niques for students and adults who can afford them.
- Another major function of the centre is the promotion of cultural and technical services among specialized individuals and corporate bodies. Under the scheme tagged "French for Special Purposes (FSP)", interested lawyers, medical doctors, engineers, scientists, evangelists, and the like trained in French with a view to enhancing cultural and technological transfer between Nigeria and France.
- Lastly, the centre creates job opportunity for its numerous multinationals.

Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

All tertiary institutions in Nigeria, with significant exception of few, have well-equipped Department of French, Foreign Languages Department or Department of European Studies with the sole objective of inculcating French Language education and cultural values into the lives of their students. In spite of government's poor funding of tertiary education, most of these Departments still strife to improve on their standard. Their functions are:

- Admission of students (Nigerian and Foreign) into the Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E) and other university degrees (Bachelor, Master and Doctoral).
- Teaching of non-francophone students to become proficient and competent in French Language education.
- Organizations of Year Abroad Programme for students to enable them have face-to-face interaction with native speakers of French, either at the French Language Village, Badagry, or outside Nigeria.
- They are traditionally and statutorily established to carry out pedagogical activities as well as evaluating students both in learning and character in view of ascertaining qualification of such students into various degrees

Tertiary Institution Accredited Commissions

Two tertiary institutions accredited commissions stand out for national prominence in Nigeria as far as French Language Education is concerned. They are: National University Commission (NUC) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). The National University Commission (NUC) is the regulatory body for all federal, state and private owned universities, while the NCCE regulates the activities of federal, state and private owned colleges of education. They carry out the following functions:

- Granting license for establishment of new tertiary institutions after a thorough assessment of the existing infrastructures, documents and personnel qualification.
- Accreditation and re-accreditation of programmes being mounted by the institutions every five years in order to ascertain their compliance with the international standard.
- Formulation of policies guiding the activities of the institutions to ensure a degree of uniformity across all tertiary institutions in the country. Apart from the above-mentioned bodies, other organs exist in the Ministries of Education, UNESCO and national examination bodies, such as: Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB), Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) and National Examination Commission (NECO). They are all stakeholders in promoting French Language education in Nigeria.

Relevance of French to National Biulding in Nigeria

France occupies the forth position among the technologically advanced countries of the world. She is not leaving any stone unturned in ensuring the propagation of her language

and, by implication, her technology. Some French companies, through their educational policies that are based on French educational system, have been able to contribute significant and meaningfully to the development of Nigerian technological advancement. France also founded Peugeot in 1792 with the aim of producing Peugeot automobile vehicles of high durability. Nigeria has tremendously benefited from this invention. Renault and Citroen are also products of French automobile advancement in technology. Furthermore, French Government, through its embassy in Nigeria has been able to provide scholarships in so many fields so as to contribute to the various fields of technology in Nigeria. The National Concord (1981:4), quoted by Babalola (2004), maintains that: In 1990, the French Government provided more than 200 Scholarships in the fields of Geology, Medicine, Agriculture, Management, Education, Public Administration, etc. Apart from the above, France is a key partner in the petroleum multinational companies, such as TOTAL, CHEVRON, and the like in Nigeria. With the aid of her foreign technologists and engineers, indigenous staff, employers have been adequately assisted and well trained. There is no gainsaying the fact that French Language teaching and learning in Nigeria had further strengthened the economic and political ties between the two countries. This economic interaction ensures not only financial benefits, but also cultural benefits. French companies, such as Dumez, SOCA or CFAO, have heavily invented in Nigeria and have thereby contributed to the national biulding for quite a long time as a result of their technology of communication. The National Concord, (1981:4) posits that: The agreement signed between the Centre for Management Development (CMD) and the French Foundation for Management Education (FNEGE) will enable to executives of the Nigeria public sector to participate in seminars organized in France by the Institut Superieur des Sciences Economiques et Commerciales (ISSEC) In the area of education, France is aware of the fact that uneducated citizens are liabilities to the nation and that education is a better safeguard for liberty than a standing army. Nigeria has, therefore, obtained a lot of inspiration from the French educational system. In fact, the likes of Victor Cousin, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot Jean Paul Satre, and Descartes in the area of comparative education have positively impacted on the learning and implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. French Language teaching is no longer limited to the acquisition of linguistics competence alone, but rather, it has extended to profound knowledge of arts, culture and civilization. Awareness has been created; cross- fertilization of cultural and philosophical has also been established. For instance, so many works of arts have been translated from French into English and Yoruba and vice-versa. L'Enfant Noir of Camara Layé has been translated into African Child; Xala of Sembène Ousmane is translated into Mágùn; L'Antigone of Jean Anouilh has been translated as The Gods Are not to Blame. Soyinka's The Loin and the Jewel has been translated into Le Lion et la Perle; Fagunwa's Ogoboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole has been translated into Le Preux dans la Forêt infestée de Démons. Thus, through the teaching of French, cultural and artistic heritage of France and some francophone countries like Canada

and Belguim has been transferred to Nigeria not only for learning purpose but also for national integration and development.

Towards Making French Language more Functional for National Biulding

In order to make the French Language more functional for national biulding, certain measures focused at improving its teaching and learning, both in quality and in quantity, have to be put in place.

Self-Reliance Focused Curriculum

If French Language Education is effectively and objectively sustained in the school curriculum and in strict compliance with national objective of education, evidently, it will nourish and perpetuate societal ideas which will take Nigeria to the pedestal of national development. The curriculum referred to here is the type designed by those who are really concerned in its implementation and not the few opportunistic novice or elites, who, in the real sense of it, know or have nothing to do with education, but who, by fraudulent means and political exigencies, passed through the back doors and fixed themselves among educational policy-makers. This curriculum should not lay emphasis on micro-linguistics like Phonetics and phonology, Morphology, Syntax and Semantics alone, but also on Macro-linguistics like Sociolinguistics, Computational Linguistics, Mathematical Linguistics, Forensic Linguistics and Applied Linguistics to compete with the modern development of this technological world which Nigeria so much desires for the realization of national integration, as well as the Vision 20-20-20.

Behaviour Control and Management

This is the exhibition of behaviours that are capable of negatively affecting acquisition of linguistics instructions by "debutante" of foreign language including French, Portuguese, German and Arabic as a result of types of fear which Oyawale (2007:68) lists as follows: • Francophone phobia:- Fear of French Language learning • Neophobia:- Fear of anything new • Logo phobia/verbophobia:- Fear of words • Glosso phobia:- Fear of speaking in public • Geloto phobia/Katagelo phobia:- Fear of ridicule • Atychi phobia:- Fear of failure Being a foreign language which most Anglophone learners come in contact with for the first time at secondary and tertiary institutions, these different types of fear grip them and, in fact, it is major factor that determines linguistic competence of learners. As suggested by Oyawale (2007:68), it calls for special resolution oriented strategies based on thorough grounding in behaviour therapy.

Improved Methodology

Various studies, including Bouton (1969), Hymes (1972), Moiramo (1991), Busson (1996)))) and Fancwlli (1996:1998), have established the efficacy of "Methode Communicative" over the so-caleed traditional method" because it lays emphasis on making learners speak the languages at different levels and occasions. We must quickly add here, however, that "Bain Linguistics and "Méthode Audio-Visuelle" are best combined. The fusion of the three methods will bring about rapid, easy and natural learning of the French Language, thereby making national development, as well as the Vision 20-20-20, a reality.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the concepts of language and national biulding. It has equally assessed the French language in Nigeria amd the various organizations on ground to make French Language Studies in Nigeria a reality. The relevance of the French Language to national development in Nigeria was also discussed with special interest in technology and education. Improving the quality and quantity of French Language education delivery was the focus of the last segment of the paper. We want to conclude then by saying that what is worth doing at all is worth doing well. When the chips are down on the unquestionable issue of national biulding, we all know that what matters is not the wealth accumulated or the elevated positions held, but it is integrity coupled with contributions to the well- being of man in his society which education stands for.

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2024

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