

## **Re-Appraising the Benefits of French Language Education in Nigeria for Job Creation, Peace, Stability and Sustainable Development**

**Ogilo Mary**

French Department  
School of Languages

College of Education, Warri, Delta State Nigeria

### **Abstract**

One of the primary objectives of education in Nigeria is to ensure the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences as tools for the individual to contribute meaningfully towards societal development. French language education is one of such educational subject that can guarantee the attainment of this goal. This paper therefore sought to show how French language can be an instrument for job creation. It examined the concept of French language education, looked at the place of French language education in National Development. It also examined the role of French language education in promoting peace, security and regional integration as well as scientific and technological development. It looked at the role of French language education in job creation and the economic growth of the nation. It ended by proffering some suggestions before concluding. The paper shows that if French language is given the attention it deserves, Nigeria will take her place as the giant of Africa and contribute meaningfully in the world affairs. This paper serves as an awakening call to government at all levels in Nigeria from Local, State to Federal to formulate policies and programmes and implement them.

**Keywords:** Economic growth, French language, job creation, national development

### **Introduction**

The study of French language in Nigeria is justified by the need to facilitate contact with the French language speakers outside the country. According to Okafor (2008), the world has become a global village and participation in a competitive world requires peace and high proficiency in international languages. It is on the strength of this assertion that the Federal Government of Nigeria in a document called National Policy on Education (2004) stated thus: "Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and cohesion and preserving cultures. Thus, every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity, it is expected that every child be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. For smooth interaction with our neighbors, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official

language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools."

Being able to communicate in foreign language guarantees mutual relationship and understanding leading to the promotion of peace, cooperation, integration and economic development of the nations of the world. It also offers a platform that can provides some windows of work or job opportunities for its graduates through the inculcation of certain skills and basic competencies which are required in some job positions (Oguegbune-Okwuenu, 2014). Many continents of the world have over the years realized the importance of foreign language education and have come up with several binding policies. For instance in 1985, the US Department of Education published a list of 169 languages, which the US government considered to be critical, in the sense that the knowledge of them will promote important scientific research or security interest of a national or economic kind (Crystal, 1987).

This paper therefore sees French as a variable tool for job creation and sustainable national development in Nigeria. The write up will be guided by the following outlines: introduction, concept of French language and national development in Nigeria, the role of French language education in promoting peace, security and regional integration, the role of French language in promoting scientific and technological development in Nigeria, French language education for job creation and economic growth in Nigeria, suggestions and conclusion

### **Concept of French Language Education**

French language education is a form of training that is basically linked to the teaching and learning of French language, especially by non-speakers who are desirous of learning how to speak the language (Oguegbune-Qkwenu, 2014). However, the content seeks to expose learners to the culture, literature and ethics of the French people. Its main objective is to teach the learners to communicate in French language through the systematic use of the lively communicative methods.

### **French Language Education and National Development in Nigeria**

National development can be seen as a change at the level of economic, political and socio-cultural spheres, etc. that encompasses material, advancement,- industrialization, scientific and technological progress and socio-cultural transformation that results in general improvement in the welfare of the people of a given nation (Adagba, 2013). Psachoropoulos and Woodhull (1985), cited in Publish and Torkaa (2013), posited that national development is the improvement of a country's productive capacity through changes in social attitude, values and behavior and finally, changes towards social and political equity and eradication of poverty. According to Curie (1970) cited in Adagba (2013) "in order to develop, a country must have a very considerable promotion of trained citizens as doctors teachers, engineers, etc." Education therefore can be said to be the gate way to national development.

In Obasanjo and Mabogunji (eds) cited in Iffih (1989), development is conceptualized from several dimensions to mean, a transformation or change into a better state. According to him, education anywhere, anytime is recognized as the key to people's ability to manage and induce changes as it develops the ability to face challenges of making choice while also increasing the choice available As can be seen, development is about people and the same people must be seen as both agents and objects of change. If development is about people, and of course it is, then people actually constitute a repository of energy for development and it must be noted that the major factor in development is mental factor. The Federal Government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2004), while stating the national education goals, pointed out that one of the goals is the "Acquisition of appropriate skill and the development of mental, physical, and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society". Development therefore must be seen as a free release of the energy of the people. This release can come about only through the right kind of education and education in its widest sense, hence the relevance of French language education to national development in Nigeria.

### **The Role of French Language Education in Promoting Peace and Regional Integration**

It must be pointed out that Nigeria shares its borders with some French speaking Countries like Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Republic of Benin. It is therefore expedient that Nigerians should also speak French so that they can effectively communicate with their neighbours in the vital areas of commerce, diplomacy and other mutual beneficial bilateral activities

To communicate effectively in a foreign language is a pre-requisite to have full mutual understanding among the people of different nationalities. it is a way of Promoting tolerance and respect for other people's culture and civilization. It breaks the communication barrier that may lead to suspicion, distrust and

antagonism. In its treat, ECOWAS stresses the principle of non- aggression peace and security and peaceful settlement of dispute among member states. The only efficient way to ensure this is to make sure that the people understand themselves, interact and relate well. And since the only means of exchange and the basic element in strengthening the ties of understanding between nations is language, French language education in Nigeria is sine qua non for peace, cooperation, and integration within the West African sub-region, Africa and the world at large.

There are peace keeping forces at ECOWAS, AU, and UN whose composition cuts across borders. For them to succeed in their mission, effective communication is a must. Unfortunately, most of the soldiers and delegates don't always speak common language except through interpreters. Those involved in peace keeping especially in West Africa, Africa and the world at large should be able to communicate in foreign languages. It is for this reason that the Federal Government of Nigeria recently introduced French as a compulsory subject in the military and Para-military curriculum and even opened a French Language Institute for military personnel at Ovim, Abia State.

### **The Role of French Language Education in Promoting Scientific Technological Development**

French language being an international language that is used in commerce, scientific and technological research, administration, education, literature, etc. it is quite inevitable that Nigerians and citizens of francophone countries will always find the need to work together especially in the area of science and technology. This cannot be achieved if French language is not given a priority in the overall educational scheme of the nation. French language can give greater access to useful information on scientific and technological discoveries and procedures thereby facilitating the much desired transfer of technology. According to Edung (2005:58),

Appropriate knowledge of the language and culture of the owners of a given technology can bring

about a better understanding of the technology and this facilitates its domestication or adaptation by those who find it useful and this' is a strategy in technological development.

Since Africa's scientific and technological development lies to a great extent in the "transfer" or "adaptation" or "domestication" of western technology, to understand and use it, there is need to understand the language which creates, regulates and supports it (Fiddo (1987) cited in Edung (2005)). The language of the owners of a given technology is thus a vital instrument to access that technology. Its proper study can greatly enhance the mastery of the technology, thereby facilitating its adaptation. There is no gainsaying that if French language education is given its proper place and the attention it deserves in Nigeria, it will contribute immensely to the advancement of science and technology in the country.

### **French Language Education for Job Creation and Development in Nigeria**

Nigeria is one of the countries in the West Africa sub-region which formed the body known as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) whose major objective is to unite its members into one large economic community, which can take advantage of the large market to promote regional development. Given that majority of the sub-regional countries use French as their official language, Nigeria cannot fit in well without learning and speaking French. Amosu (2005) cited in Yekini (2008:78) opines that:

At a time when Nigeria industries are struggling to gain a foothold on the African market in the spirit of ECO WAS, surely a new race of salesmen fluent in French (...) can attest to the seriousness of the venture. We cannot continue to delude ourselves that we can gain something without making concessions. To speak the language of others is to obtain a warmer welcome and in a situation where the bilingual

Nigerian is a rare bird, the effect is positively enhanced.

Marketing efforts can be delayed, damaged or disrupted by a failure to take account of the linguistic need of the customer. Success in the international world of commerce and industry is becoming more dependent of foreign language education (Crystal, 1987). The Lome, Togo meeting of ECOWAS Heads of States in 1999 set out detailed plans for regional monetary integration among Francophone and Anglophone states in West Africa. Their purpose was to have an independent common Central Bank with a common currency. The benefits include having low inflation and increase in trade volumes. This will improve the welfare of the community and eliminate the currency transaction costs in the international trade. These commendable plans are yet on see the light of the day probably because of communication barrier. Nigeria as well as other Anglophone member-nations on one hand and the Francophone member-nations on the other hand cannot take part in the planning and the execution of the monetary policies if not expose to French and English languages respectively. Now that inflation is at it's in the country, Nigeria should not continue to fold her arms and continue to experience stringent economy when there is a solution at her doorstep. Nigeria cannot afford to stand alone. She has to be integrated in the event going on around her by fully embracing French language education (Ukaegbu-Ezulike, 2008).

The rate of unemployment in the country today is alarming. The consequence is the astronomical rise in the rate of criminal activities which is a great danger to sustainable growth and development of the entire nation. While seeking to break even, these unemployed youth engage themselves in acts that constantly threaten the security of the populace (Oguegbune-Okwuenu, 2014). Unemployment can be reduced if Nigeria fully embraces French language education. The young Nigerian French language graduates can easily get work in tourist centers such as Obudu Cattle Ranch in Cross River State, Ogbunike

Resort in Anambra State etc. in Nigeria where French foreigners always go for relaxation.

Teaching is a strong option for graduates. Translating and interpreting also offer a wide range of opportunities. Proficiency in French language facilitates contact with French businessmen. It can offer job opportunities in French enterprises or establishment in the country. Other professionals like doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc. can enhance their productivity if they have a sound knowledge of French language. French language education indeed is a veritable tool for job creation and economic development.

### **Suggestions**

This paper has shown that effective language education in Nigeria can help reduce the rate of unemployment and contributes in national development. The paper therefore suggests as follows:

1. Government should organize a French language consciousness campaign in all the local government areas in the country. This will involve children, parents, the teachers of French and the school authorities.
2. Government should ensure the full implementation of the national policy on French language education. The clause that makes it an elective non- vocational subject at the senior secondary level should be revisited. All primary and secondary schools in the country should as matter of urgency incorporate the teaching and learning of French in their academic programs.
3. French language study should be a compulsory course in all areas of study in Nigerian tertiary institution.
4. Government should give priority to the training and professionalization of French language by awarding scholarships for further studies among native speakers, organizing workshop and in-service training for the teachers.
5. French language teachers should be well remunerated for better output.

- The government at all level should implement policies and programmes instead of paying lip service. According to the National Policy of Education (2004), the French language is supposed to be taught from Primary school level in Nigeria, but this policy has not been fully implemented.

### Conclusion

The key to National Development rests on security, peace, technological advancement and economic growth among others. This paper has shown that given the attention it deserves, French language education can contribute immensely to national development in Nigeria. French language education should therefore be seen as a primary education right which should be made available to all citizens. Government should

as a matter of urgency evolves policies that will support the study of French in Nigeria. The paper also highlighted the array of job potentials that abound for those that will offer to study French. Nigeria as a giant of Africa and bothered by French speaking countries in the West Africa sub-region cannot afford to relegate French language to the background. With the adoption of French as second official language in the country, government should initiate Nigerians into the functional usage of French by introducing French programs in the radio and television as well as other media. The gains of making Nigerians true bilinguals outweigh whatever resources that are needed to actualize the French language dream in Nigeria.

### Bibliography

- Adagba, O. (2013): "Repositioning Education in Nigeria Tackle the challenges of Poverty, Self-Reliance and National Development" in *Journal of teacher perspective* 7(1), Pp1- 22.
- Crystal, D. (1987): *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of language*, Cambridge University press, London.
- Edung, T.(2005): "Foreign Language studies for scientific and technological Development in Nigeria: the case of French" in *Calabar studies in language (CASIL)*, 12(1), Pp58 -73
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004): *National Policy on Education (4<sup>th</sup> Edition)*, Lagos, NERDC Press ( 2004)
- Iffih, N. (1989): "Theoretical issue in Nigeria Development" in *Nsukka Journal of the Humanities*, 5(6), Pp 78-89.
- Oguegbune-Okwenu, A. (2014): "French as a Tool for job Creation", A paper Presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference of the school of languages, federal college of education, Obudu, 1<sup>st</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> December, 2014.
- Okafor, J. (2008): "Using Multi-media facilities to improve French Language Learning towards Global peace" in *Journal of the Inter-College Association of French Teachers in Nigeria*, 8(2), Pp13-23.
- Polish, S and Torka, Y. (2013): "Citizen Education as a Veritable Tool for self-Reliance and National development in Nigeria" in *Journal of Teacher perspective*, 7(1), Pp96-105.
- Ukaegbu –Ezulike, H. (2008): French language Studies in Nigeria and the Economic integrated in west Africa sub-region". Paper presented at second Annual National conference of the school of languages, Federal College of Education, Obudu, 7<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> July.
- Yekini, K. (2008): The place of French in the quest for regional and international peace, cooperation and integrated" in *Journal pf the inter-college Association of French Teachers in Nigeria*, 8(2), Pp73-80.