

French Language Teaching and Productivity Enhancement in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

Language Teaching has been greatly considered in Nigeria as the basic tool of national integration towards productivity and development. The reason is that language teaching is seen as a great investment to produce quality of human resources needed for productivity and development. But unfortunately language teaching in Nigeria is bisected with myriads of problems. These includes; poor funding, poor facilities, inadequate teachers, inadequate teaching aids (Projectors, Computers, Laboratories and Libraries) among others. In this paper, we attempt to discuss the concept of Language Teaching and Productivity in Nigeria. The paper examines French Language Teaching in Nigeria and the problem facing the language, bearing in mind the level of Government's input to enhance its productivity. It also discusses some of the factors bedeviling French language teaching and productivity in Nigeria and suggests possible ways of improving on the level of its present output. Keys: French Language Teaching, productivity enhancement, Issues and Challenges.

Introduction

In Nigeria, the educational sector has received good number of the annual budget of not only the Federal government but also the State government and the Local Government. This is simply because education

is seen as a huge investment through which any nation can attain development. According to the World Bank (1999:25), “successful development entails, more than investing in physical capital, or closing the gaps in capital. It also entails acquiring and using knowledge”. Education is all about knowledge and skills acquisition. Thus, to successfully confront the challenges of development; language education must be heavily invested into.

Similarly, Fafunwa (1979:26) defines education as “the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. It is also the process of disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both.” Odiya and Omofonmwan (2007:81). Going by the definition of education, language education is thus the process by which a child develops the communicative attitude which is of positive value to his society. In other words, language education is the formal acquisition or learning communicative skills.

Productivity according to Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary is defined as “efficiency, especially in industry, measured by comparing the amount produced with the time taken or the resources used to produce it”. Technically, productivity is the ratio of output to input. It is a measure of how efficiently and effectively a business or an economy uses inputs such as labour and capital to generate outputs, such as goods and services. Therefore, increase in productivity means that more goods and services are produced with the same amount of labour and capital. It is not about cutting cost but ‘doing things right’ and ‘doing the right things’ to achieve maximum efficiency and value.

In this paper, we perceive productivity as the amount of resources that government (Federal and State), institutions, (private and public) invested in the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria in relation to the number of competent graduates produced in the field. Invariably it’s a way of comparing the cost of investment in the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria to the competence level of teachers produced. In other words, if the Government invest more in French language teaching and produce less competent graduates in the discipline, that means the

productivity is low than when Government invest more and produce more competent graduates in the discipline. In this paper, we shall be taking a look at the level of Government input in French language teaching in order to enhance its productivity in Nigeria. The study evaluates French Language teaching in Nigerian institutions in general terms while describing the level of government input in order to enhance its teaching and learning in the Nigerian educational institutions. The study shall further consider the issues and challenges facing French language productivity in Nigeria.

French Language Teaching in Nigeria

Nigeria as an Anglophone country is surrounded by francophone countries. She is surrounded by the Republic of Benin in West, Niger Republic in the North, Tchad Republic in the North-East and Cameroon in the East. All these countries have French as their official language. Consequently, for Nigerian citizens to establish effective communication with their neighbouring countries it is important for them to learn their language. Ability to communicate in French language will help them to break the problem of language barrier which might occur during their interactions with the francophone neighbours. In the light of this geographic location of Nigeria, the Nigerian government deems it necessary to integrate French language education in the country Policy on Education.

In the Nigeria Policy on Education (2004:10), the place of French language education is well recognised. The policy states thus:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion, and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expedient 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 Nigeria to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and Junior Secondary Schools but Non-vocational elective at the senior secondary school.

Going by this pronouncement, one could identify the importance of French Language learning in Nigeria. It explains the recognition given to French Language teaching and learning in the general education of a Nigerian learner. Therefore, French language teaching was introduced as a subject in the primary, secondary and higher education of the country. Initially, expatriates were brought into the country to teach the language in the Secondary Schools, Colleges of Education and Universities throughout the country. At that time, Nigerian French students were sent to France for a year abroad in order to expose them to french language environment which give them opportunity to perfect their proficiency and competency in the language. Government realizing the cost of the year abroad programme, decided to establish the Nigerian French Village, Badagry which now serves as a language immersion centre for Nigerian learners of French in the Universities and Colleges of Education. Later, the French graduates produced by the Nigerian Universities and Colleges of Education were engaged to teach the language in the Secondary Schools across the nation.

French Language Productivity enhancement

With the government declaration in the National Policy on Education on the importance of French Language, its teaching and learning witnessed another dimension. Some school principals, administrators, provost, rectors and vice chancellors in the country are already awake to the development. Some of these developments are:

- i. The language curriculum has been re-organised in the interest of teaching and learning of the language at the various levels. French language features in the following sectors: University, Polytechnic, College of Education and secondary School as well as primary school.
- ii. The Higher Institutions have been able to produce teachers to teach the language at the primary school, secondary school, colleges of education, and other tertiary institutions.
- iii. At the colleges of education and university levels, departments of French/European/Foreign Language studies carry out research on the way to enhance the teaching and learning of the language.

- iv. Government has been able to establish a French Language Village which serves as an immersion center for effective learning of the language.
- v. At the Junior Secondary Schools level the language is taught as a core-subject. Unfortunately it is a Non-vocational Elective at the Senior Secondary Schools.
- vi. Private organizations also contribute to this development as French language learning centres continue to spring up.
- vii. The teaching and learning of the language now features in Television and radio programme in the country. We have examples of such programmes as “parlons Français” on Gateway television on Thursdays and on voice of Nigeria.

In spite of these numerous testimonies, the teaching and learning of the language is bedeviled with inadequate teachers of French language and low interest in French language learning among Nigerian learners. The question someone with keen interest will be compelled to ask is that, with the pronouncement of the government on the importance of French language learning, and the level of the government’s input for productivity in this area in terms of policy, structures and other things, why does there still exist a great gap on the output? This shall be discussed in the section below.

Issues on French Language Teaching in Nigeria

In recent time, Nigerian Government started de-emphasising the teaching and learning of French. After the adoption of the language as a second official language, majority of the public secondary schools in the country are no more offering French as a subject. In schools, students are no longer encouraged to learn the language because French teachers are no more employed and the already existing ones are made to teach other subjects like English, Literature in English, Social Studies, Computer Science, Christian Religious Knowledge, Yoruba or any other subjects. As a result of this attitude of the Government, many teachers and parents now see French language teaching and learning as waste of time.

The Universities and Colleges of Education are no longer getting more enrollment of candidates to study French language as a course

and the few ones enrolled for the course are faced with many problems ranging from lack of necessary teaching learning aids, decayed infrastructure, political instability among others. Consequently, the students pay little or no attention to the learning of the language which eventually has negative effect on their proficiency and competency in the language. This attitude has led many French graduates to be unemployed and discouraged many Nigerian citizens from learning the language. This attitude further creates fear in parents and young Nigerians who now see French language study as a course that does not guarantee a better future.

Challenges facing French Language Productivity in Nigeria

Ajiboye, (1990), Soyoye (2001), Bamgbose (1977) feel that the statuses of the languages taught in the Nigerian schools are unwieldy for proper implementation. There is need therefore to establish and maintain an appreciable status for the languages in the National Policy on Education for successful implementation and productivity. The status of French language in the National Policy on Education is contrary to the declaration made in 1997 by the then Head of State late General Sanni Abacha, giving French a new status as second official language of the country. This declaration was not limited to the late General administration. Olayiwola & Ogundele (2015:27) citing Igonor (2011) mentioned 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 is sad to note that French language is still been treated today as a foreign language. According to Soyoye (2001:64) "a foreign language is one that is not the mother tongue of any group in the country where it is taught". In other words, a foreign language is an exogenous language, with which a child does not share any socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic affinity. Going by this definition, English, French, Arabic, German, Portuguese, Spanish, and Russian could be said to have successfully qualified for that status in the Nigerian system of education. Meanwhile, French language (another foreign language like English) which is considered in the policy on education because of its peculiar advantages

to Nigerian citizens did not receive same recognition as been given to English language. It's based on this that the researcher highlights some other challenges facing French language productivity in Nigeria.

- i. Policy deficiency: The sub-section of the policy on education that provided for French language, as a non-vocational elective at senior secondary school, lacks the necessary encouragement needed. The teacher of French sees the clause as one that makes his or her teaching subject less attractive when compared to English language which is compulsory at all levels of child education. The clause also has effect of the learners in the sense that the child is cut off suddenly at the learning stage which shapes his/her competence in the language. As a result of this, learners are not encouraged to choose the course or take its learning serious since it is considered elective.
- ii. Lack of competent teachers: The quality of teachers that teach the language is another factor affecting French language productivity. Most of the teachers of this language are half baked. Few of them are trained teachers with NCE and B.ED or BA.ED qualification. Some teachers who are not competent to teach the language are employed to carry out this task.
- iii. Insufficient funding: Another factor affecting French Language productivity is funding. Twelve out of the fifteen schools where French language is taught that we visited in Abeokuta were underfunded. The necessary and most reliable aids for teaching the language are not available. Most of the schools do not have French language Laboratories and the few that had were under equipped. There is lack of access to uninterrupted power supply to watch French films and listen to French programs on the radio. The internet which could have enriched the learning of both teachers and learner is not available in institutions and where it is available, it is not functioning properly.
- iv. Curriculum problem: The course combination offered by many students in the Nigerian Colleges of Education is another serious factor affecting French Language productivity. Course combinations such as French/English, French/Yoruba, French/Sos, French/Igbo among others offered usually affect the performance of the learners. In this kind of situation, learners tend to embrace course that is

perceived easy and concentrate less on the one perceived to be difficult. This kind of situation creates a divided attention in the learner and can degenerate into confusion of purpose.

Recommendations

- i. French language should be made compulsory up to senior secondary school level in order to sustain and perfect its learning progression. Also, it must feature at least five times in a week in the school timetable as against one or two times in a week. Olayiwola & Ogundele (2015: *ibid*) citing 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. Time input as one would discover has great effects on the output.
- ii. Policy makers and other stakeholders in the education system should work out a working syllabus that will take care of immersion programme that is (exposure to French learning environment) for the primary and secondary education. It is observed that French language learning at this level lacks the necessary exposure to French environment which is one of the vital processes in language acquisition.
- iii. There should be proper education and re-orientation of Nigerians by the government on the need to encourage the learning of French at all level and across disciplines.
- iv. Government should set up an independent monitoring committee to monitor the implementation of the policy in the primary and secondary schools as well as in the higher institution. This will help the government to have access to adequate information on the state of matter in the institution as well as identifying areas that need to be improved on.
- v. The state and Federal government should equip the language laboratory with modern learning aid such as internet facilities, computers, audio-visual materials, with uninterrupted power supply.
- vi. More French language learning centres should be encouraged to provide educational support to other people who may be interested in learning the language outside school.

- vii. Courses like the French major should be offered at NCE level for a functional and effective learning of the language
- viii. Competent teachers of French with good communicative, writing, reading and listening skills should be employed and every other employment criteria based exclusively on certificate or foreign identity should be discouraged
- ix. Continuous training and re-training of teachers of French should be encourage by the government through scholarship, training workshops, seminars and any other form of developmental training in order to attune the teachers to the very latest method of teaching the language.
- x. Teachers should be well remunerated in terms of salaries and allowances for better output.

Conclusion

Language teaching as we have said at the beginning of this paper is a sine-qua non to national development. It therefore becomes not only important but also imperative to government and corporate bodies to enhance its development for a progressive productivity. This paper then highlights some of the factors that are currently besetting its productivity and equally made some recommendations in order to improve.

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