

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF STUDYING FRENCH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

Michael N. Chukwu

Abstract

It's obvious that French Language has found its way into Nigeria. This is so because of many reasons which can not be over emphasized. The reasons could be viewed under the following; communication, financial, socio-cultural, political and technological reasons. French Language in Nigeria should be a must due to the geographical location of Nigeria which is flanked by French speaking countries like Chad, Niger, Benin Republic and Cameroon. Nigeria therefore, needs the study of French Language for effective communication with her neighbours. Although Nigeria is an Anglophone country, the study of French no doubt, has a lot of problems which can not be overlooked. The problems with the study of French in Nigeria starts from the environment which is not friendly, Government's attitude towards study of the language, financial aspect, lack of motivation, on the citizens of Nigeria, etc. This paper therefore, intends to reinvigorate and reawake the people of Nigeria towards the immeasurable benefits that could be derived from the study of French in Nigeria though not devoid of problems.

Nigeria is an Anglophone country surrounded by francophone countries. The knowledge of French Language in this country therefore, becomes a useful and veritable instrument for the citizens. The study and knowledge of the language is not only a veritable instrument but will bring along side rapid development into the country. As Onyike (1998:88) stated "The study of French language in Nigeria carries along side with it numerous advantages which range from communication to economical, political, technological, prospects, etc".

The need to study French language, which is the second language of the world, becomes an added advantage. This case is a special case to Nigeria our country which is being surrounded by her neighbours who are all Francophone countries like Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin Republic. The study and the speaking of this language by Nigeria do not only give her the knowledge of the language but it places her at an advantage of associating well with her neighbouring countries. Nigeria is known and called the giant of Africa because of her position in the continental politics and for this to be sustained and her position assured, French language is needed by Nigeria. Anyanwu (2006:105) maintained;

Nigeria is a member of world, continental and regional organizations such as UNO, AU, ECOWAS, etc, a good knowledge of French language by Nigeria places her at an advantage of assuring her position in these organizations as French language is the second language of international politics of the world.

There is nothing good that comes easy. There is no doubt that there are associated problems with the study of French in an Anglophone country like Nigeria. We are actually aware of the numerous challenges which have been militating against the study of French.

The problems associated with the study of French in Nigeria are the people and government based problems. On the part of the

people, they lack the motivation and the interest to embrace French language as veritable instrument of development. On the part of government, they have been found wanting in putting up policy that makes the study of French compulsory in the country and the release of the needed fund for this. The government at the Federal, State and Local government levels have not shown much commitment and support to the study of French language in Nigeria.

This paper therefore, should not be disregarded but seen as a reawakening to our duty and to a thing that should be done. The study and knowledge of French in Nigeria, obviously will give us rapid change and development.

French and the World

Truly speaking, France occupies a very important position in the world, be it political, economical, social, etc. The position of France as one of the "BIG FIVE" in the world, actually positioned it well in the international politics of the world. Girardet and Jean (2004:250) explained;

Quebec a province of Canada was in the 17th century one of the principal colonies established by French kings in North America, although it later became an English speaking country in 1763 till the independence of Canada in 1931, French language was guided and spoken till today by 80% of the population of Quebec.

The great need for this language propelled the Quebec to guide and to protect the French language that came to them which is spoken today by them as their official language of communication. French language today is widely spoken in the whole world. The language has spread to many countries in Europe through the French great revolution of 1789, the religious crisis of 17th century and to many countries in Africa, through colonization. Without missing words, twenty one countries in Africa are francophone countries including Nigeria's

neighbouring countries. Other Anglophone countries like Ghana, Gambia, Liberia, etc have shown greater interest in French language than Nigeria.

Prospects of Studying French Language in Nigeria

It's actually an understatement if one articulates that the study of French in Nigeria would not be beneficial to the individuals in particular and to the country in general. The benefits of studying French language in Nigeria can not be overemphasized. The prospects or advantages of studying French in an Anglophone country like Nigeria could be seen under the following;

- Political advantage
- Economic advantage
- Socio-economic advantage
- Technological advantage.

Political Advantage

Nigeria's political ambition at the international level, demands the knowledge of French language as it is the number two official language of UNO, AU, etc. Nigeria therefore, is considered a giant in the African politics especially in ECOWAS and AU, because of this, French should be known by Nigerian citizens. French language is necessary in Nigeria because her neighbours are all Francophone countries and for better interactions and communications with these countries, Nigeria and her citizens should study and speak French. Anyanwu (2006:77) maintained that;

French language is not only a language but also an important instrument of development. France in spreading her language has brought numerous developments to Anglophone countries. The establishment of Alliance Francaise in most African countries is such a contribution which has enhanced development in Africa.

Prospects and Challenges of Studying French Language in Nigeria

The knowledge of French language gives Nigerians the opportunity of understanding the more, the political system of her neighbouring countries and that of France.

Economic Advantage

Nigeria is an agricultural nation that produces a lot of foods and other products. These products can not be fully consumed by Nigerians hence the need to be marketed internationally. The language of bargaining in our neighbouring countries is no other language than French. Any Nigerian business man who travels to French countries for business and does not express himself well in French language stands the risk of not getting the best because of difficulty in communication in French.

Socio-cultural Advantage

Sport is an aspect of socio-cultural advantage. Sports have been the great instruments that bind people into one family. Jacque (1999:150) said that "sports establish friendly rapport among nations of the world. French language permits people to listen to French commentaries in sports and to read French sports journals".

Tourism: When we talk of tourism, it refers to places of interests and attractions in Nigeria or outside Nigeria. In visiting places of attraction in Francophone countries, one should know how to speak and write the French language which creates the enabling environment during the visit.

Technological Advantage

It has been the wish of Nigeria to be an industrialized nation; for this reason, it is necessary for Nigeria to study French. One advantage attached to this is that it will enable Nigeria to borrow technological ideas from France because France is one of the five most developed countries of the world.

Medical Advantage: The exchange of medical ideas is very important, especially as it refers to good health. There are various diseases that can be well treated with medications fabricated in France and for our Doctors to know this and apply these medicines, they should be able to know French, this makes the Doctors to read and understand the directives and application of the medicines.

Scientific Research

Nigeria is greatly in need of scientific development and this can not only come from the developed countries like Britain and America but also from France. Our engineers should therefore engage themselves in the study of French language to enable them tap the abundant scientific ideas from France and other Francophone countries.

Challenges of Studying French in Nigeria

It's an understatement if we say that the study of French language in an Anglophone country is actually without a problem. The challenges therefore are seen in this order;

- Interference
- Language Laboratory
- Government Attitude to Study of French
- Motivation
- Unqualified French Teachers
- Sponsorship

Interference: This is always a psychological problem in learning be it in language or any other subject. Nwokocha (1999:75) stated:

Interference is a psychological problem. It is a situation where what a learner had previously learnt prevents new knowledge or where what is being learnt by a learner distorts what the learner had learnt before.

Nwokocha's contribution makes the situation much more clearer. A learner of French who had previously been speaking his mother tongue or another official language would

definitely be confronted by this problem of interference. This challenge finds itself in the spoken and written aspects of French language.

Language Laboratory: It's quite unfortunate that most schools if not all, do not have what we call French language laboratory where exercise and oral practices are done by the learners of the language. The lack of this therefore, is a big minus in the study of the language.

Government's Attitude to Study of French:

Our government on her part has not been helping matters the way it should be. The Government has not come up with a strong policy that can make the study of French language compulsory and a must study course in the country. The government of Nigeria has not been so apprehensive of her geographical location in Africa and even the position it occupies in African politics and the world, a knowledge of French then, is to her greatest advantage.

Motivation: The propelling desire on the part of the learner is motivation. This is the desire or the need for something. It comes from within the learner. Nwokocha (1999:50) maintained that; "Motivation is the engine that directs a learner. It could be intrinsic or extrinsic motivation but the greatest is the intrinsic motivation which leads to faster actualization".

Unqualified Teachers

This is a very great challenge in the study of French language. When a foundation of a building is wrongly established, the entire building is in danger. The simple reason is that most of the teachers found in our primary and post primary institutions both private and public, teaching the language are inexperienced or mediocres. We can not

therefore, realize the best from this group of teachers.

Sponsorship

The government of Nigeria has as well failed in this area. The government does not encourage the learners of this language by offering them scholarship to study the French language here in Nigeria or in France. This situation has not helped matters at all.

Conclusion

The views of this paper may not be the views of many but the point is that we need to study French language for obvious reasons. The reasons have been enumerated in the body of the work which includes communication reason, financial, political, socio-cultural, technological reason, etc. The aim of this paper is to bring to mind the unquantifiable prospects associated with the study of French language in Nigeria. It's obvious we should know French based on Nigeria's geographical location which is surrounded by Francophone countries. Although the study of French is faced with a lot of challenges, it does not discourage the study of French because the prospects of the language are unquantifiable.

Recommendations

It is the wish of this paper therefore, to recommend the following; It is high time for Nigeria to take the study of French Language serious because of her geographical location. The government of Nigeria should pass a law making the study of French in Nigeria compulsory. There should be also government sponsorship given to students and individuals studying the language both in the country and outside the country. This will go a long way in motivating them. The acquisition of this language by Nigerians will actually place us at a vantage position in Africa.

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Michael N. Chukwu
Department of French,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education,
Owerri.