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# RE-DEFINING THE OBJECTIVE OF TEACHING FRENCH IN NIGERIA FOR PRODUCTIVITY AND DEVELOPMENT

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## **Abstract**

*Today, French in Nigeria is only theoretical as students who are "unfortunate" to have it included in their curriculum only struggle to master conjugation of few verbs in order to pass in examination. This attitude stems from the fact that until now no convincing reason has been presented to the students on why they should take the pains to study a language of countries which they may never have the opportunity to visit, perhaps throughout their life time. This paper, apart from elaborating on the need for Nigeria to show more commitment to the teaching and learning of French, looks at the relevance of curriculum formation. The question raised is whether in the present era of globalization, these objectives can, in anywhere, engender development. It calls for a redefining of these objectives in order for the exercise to have a positive contribution to the development of the nation.*

The need to bridge communication gap and encourage cultural understanding among people of the world is a major challenge facing humanity as a whole. People have been so much disconnected that dispute and cultural violence become inevitable.

## *Academic Excellence*

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Global peace has often been a recurrent decimal organization whenever they meet to brainstorm on global issues. If we should take a sociological look at why the world is so much threatened by crisis, we would discover that cultural and ideological misunderstandings are at the crust of this crisis. This is why countries of the world are busy developing a language system that will provide a platform for interconnectivity.

Obiechina (1990) highlights the facts that the even China is considering replacing its centuries-old ideographic writing with the alphabetic script. This is a way of making their literature/culture accessible to others in order to promote global connectivity. Even in India, Singhe (2007) advocates the need for Indians to key into internationalism by learning English. According to him,

*It will not be wrong to say that English is the only window through which we can see the process being made in the scientific, technological, agricultural, culture literacy, political, social and economic field of the world.*

Though here emphasis is on English Language, it points out the fact that learning of languages of international status has become business of the day for many countries of the world with a view of surmounting challenges of globalization.

In the Nigerian context, French is advocated and the knowledge of it will connect the country with the ever-increasing explosion of knowledge and technology. Even before now, the teaching of French had been introduced into the Nigerian school system. The reason, as always orchestrated, is that Nigeria is surrounded by French speaking neighbours. This may be a good reason for teaching French in Nigeria but should this alone constitute the thrust of bilingualism in Nigeria? This old adage, instead of promoting the culture of this language in the country, renders it an illusion.

Therefore to make French more practicable in the country and also to ginger the interest of students in pushing beyond the theoretical level to a more practical (communicative) level, the objective of having this programme in the Nigerian school curriculum has to be redefined.

### **Globalization versus Internationalism: Challenges for the Nigerian School System.**

Globalization, as a term, describes what the world is experiencing after the advent of boundaries dismantling technology. Amin (1998) in Ebijuwa (2001) refers to it as

*“the existing of relations between the different regions of the world. The reciprocal influence that societies have upon each other”.* Still in

### *Redefining the Objective...*

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Ebijuwa (2001), globalization is seen “*a compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole*”.

To the Nigerian school system, this means that the training of students should no longer be based only on natural needs as the background; the curriculum should be broadened such that it prepares the students to be productive in a world without natural borders, a world with ever increasing international joint ventures. Border dismantling technology such as the internet, digital communications utilities like Video conferencing, E-mail, and G.S.M have greatly engendered global interaction such that displacement may sometimes not be necessary. Therefore, the objective of teaching French in Nigeria in this era goes beyond the hitherto traditional objective of interaction between neighbouring francophone countries.

Globalization already describes an existing interaction across the globe, where it concerns us most as a nation is the reposition of the nation through her educational system such that she will benefit or be able to exploit the various development opportunities that will arise as a result of this trans-national/trans-continental interaction.

Apart from still depending or binding the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria to the weak motivation of geographical location of the country, internationalism can further motivate the interest of Nigerians in learning French. Internationalism here refers to linguistic diversification, the restructuring of the country through linguistic instruments in a way that a country becomes attractive to immigrants from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Imagine the consequence this will have on the nation's economy when the intellectual and technical know-how of these immigrants are invested in the economy.

Usage of language that are accorded international status such as English, French, Spanish and medium of social interaction means globalizing our economy since linguistics barriers to investment has already been dealt with. Barkindo et al (1989) clearly present a picture of what we are saying here when they examine factors that led to the success of Christianity in the old Sierra Leone. He found out that “*The spread of the Christian Faith was greatly aided by the fact that English was the Lingua Franca*” he continues that he continues that “*in other West African countries conversion of Christianity was made difficult because most of the missionaries could not speak the language of the people.*” For international investors to be attracted to the country; the Nigerian soil has to be made fertile and one of the ways is linguistic diversification. This can be achieved by giving foreign language such as French and Spanish proper placement in the school curriculum; the younger generation should be exposed to this

### *Academic Excellence*

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language from the primary school and in the tertiary level, these languages should be taken as courses in all Departments irrespective of the discipline.

The media institutions have greater role to play in this. French, as it is today, is only spoken in the classroom. For the impact of the language to be felt, it has to permeate the social life of the people, if the media houses should run some of their programmes in French; this will further promote the spread of the language. Here, productivity is already achieved.

Nigeria being a former British Colony, practices the English law, we can begin to experiment by introducing the French civil law into the law curriculum (in the universities or in law school).

Since law students will know that in the law school they will study the French civil law, their interest in the language right from Secondary School will be high. The benefit of this should not be underestimated, after all Canada has been able to sustain security and social stability through the diversification of her legal system; the coexistence of English common law and French civil law.

Adam (2004) maintains that Canada is not an enduring diversity, but she is leading the Canadian society to fulfil the potentials of diversity. Globalization, simply put, means that what happens in one part of the world will affect what is going on in other parts of the world. The world is now so interwoven that commerce no longer recognizes natural borders, we now talk of international trade partners, international customer and transnational transaction. Our students will be better placed if they understand and keep pace with global trends by understanding global issues and business strategies. They must understand how diverse political systems, economic, doctrines, religions, cultures and philosophy affect business transactions. Also, if Nigeria shows more commitment to multilingualism, she will become a global investment destination in Africa. Adams (2004) says that “*it is estimated that the volume of trade exchange between countries with a shared language is 1.7 times higher than that between countries with different languages*”. He concludes by saying that “*Globalization provides a comparative advantage to societies that have a particular sensitivity to linguistic plurality and diversity*”.

### **French in Nigeria: Tool for Economic Mobility and National Growth**

The 21st Century can best be described as the era that has witnessed significant development in communication technology; the consequence of this is the transnationalization of economies, as this process of, not only financial, but political and

### *Redefining the Objective...*

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cultural integration is blooming; human communication and interrelation have to be given serious attention. In doing so, bilingualism or polyglottism as coined by Boada (1997) cannot be ruled out. If Nigeria is a country is to respond to globalization she has to be ready to psychologically dissolve national boundary while expanding in line with the demands of globalization. This expansion will involve a review of her immigration policy such that the volume of immigrants having Nigeria as their destination will increase. This new situation will therefore exert new linguistic demands on the citizens and those that possess bilingual or multilingual competence will be at advantage.

Presently, the Federal Government is clamouring for the development of the National's tourism industry. If this is properly done, it will lead to national growth. But let us ask ourselves "Can Nigeria attract Global recognition in tourism while still remaining monolingual" should we not prepare linguistically to accommodate the expected tourists?"

This policy has been practiced by Canada and the consequence is rather very attractive. According to Morin (1982). Canada is known as a country of immigrant. Statistic has it that from 1996 to 2001 Canada welcomed almost 100,000 French-speaking immigrants; and is supported by Elias (1970), who says that in a recent survey conducted in 44 countries, Canada proved to be the only group with a majority that had a positive opinion of immigrants – 77% Internationalism calls for the need for the Nigerian school system to shift from focusing only on national needs in the process of curricular development to such that will respond to global needs. If Nigeria adopts the practice of global economy, she will begin to witness an increase in the number of experts in various fields coming into the country. This will open new challenges to the nation's health care system. A recent research conducted in the United States precisely in 2003, reveals that:

*Health care facilities in almost every large united states city and many suburban and rural areas are serving diverse patient populations even though most health care providers want to offer them the same attention and concern as to any other patient, limited English proficient (LEP) patients encounter obstacle at every form.*

The report further states that:

*Even when patients arrive at the facility on time, they may be late for appointments because of difficulty communicating with registration staff. Furthermore, the medical interview and examination present unlimited possibilities for confusion and potential serious misunderstanding can occur since complete and accurate medical*

### ***Academic Excellence***

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*history is crucial to an accurate diagnosis. Sophisticated technology and diagnostic procedures are not substitutes for clear patient-provider communication.*

On cultural aspect the report concludes that “*Cultural based beliefs and traditions can affect the course and outcome of diseases*” it therefore advocates a situation whereby both providers and patients would bring their respective cultural backgrounds and expectations to the medical interview.

The report stressed that “*these cultural differences can present barriers to appropriate care*” the report concludes that:

*For professionals in the health care settings, awareness of personal cultural biased is a prerequisite for cross-cultural competence. The competent professional cultivates a non-judgement attitude of respect, interest, and inquiry. From this viewpoint, the cross-cultural encounter is approached as an opportunity for learning and growth.*

Knowing the importance of research in development, the report of this research should not be ignored with a wave of hand. It is right about time Nigeria began repositioning her health care system such that the system can respond to the demands of internationalism. This calls for the introduction of foreign languages such as French in the curricular of the school of nursing/midwifery, medical colleges in our universities in order to prepare, they would b health professionals for the challenges of internationalism.

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria is yet to fully comprehend what globalization is all about, or if she does, the government is responding to it with apathy, the global financial crises that is causing a wide spread of fear across the globe should serve as a warning to us. After reading Ebijuwa’s *Globalization, Africa and the challenge of Development; views of a philosopher*, I have come to appreciate the sceptism in the minds of the Africans about globalization. It will not in anyway, berate us for thinking this way because as Africans the scars of Colonialism are still very visible on us. But be it as it may we cannot ignore the phenomenon; this will rather be more harmful. Africans should learn from history. In the colonial days, empire that resisted trade treaty with the white’s were forcefully swallowed.

Although insecurity in globalization and linguistic acculturation may be exaggerated, these feelings of insecurity could rather, as Boada (1997) puts it, “be a good starting point for serious review”. Global economy, technological and political

### ***Redefining the Objective...***

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interdependence place us at the foot of another Babel which will serve as the new global social, political, economic ecosystem. The problem may be the way we perceive globalization, rather than globalization itself, as Boada (1997): put it “*the difficulty lies in thought and conceptual change, rather than in the notion that it would be impossibility*”. Globalization presents to us new opportunities though with challenges and for Nigeria, as a nation, to fully benefit from the opportunities, she has to first of all face these challenges.

The authors have seen that to make French teaching more practicable in Nigeria and to stimulate the interest of students in the subject to push beyond the theoretical level to the practical level, the objectives of the programme in Nigerian school curriculum has to be redefined. The paper examined Globalisation versus Internationalism, challenges for the Nigerian School System, French in Nigeria: Tool for economic mobility and National growth; and finally recommends the Nigerian Education System should compile resources through Curriculum development aimed at providing students with necessary competence for cultural dialogue and rewarding interaction.

### **Recommendations**

- i. The Nigerian Education system should be increasingly aware of her role in the global society. Apart from cultivating a sense of national identity, it should also compile resources through curriculum development aimed at providing students with necessary competence for cultural dialogue and rewarding interaction.
- ii. Since education is instrumental to development, the Nigerian educational system, through the curricular should be restructured such that it engenders linguistic and cultural diversity. We buy into the words of Adam (2004), which says that “*Just as ecosystem needs biodiversity, our knowledge, our intellectual and artistic creations; draw substance from human diversity*”.

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*Academic Excellence*

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