

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION THROUGH LANGUAGES: A PROGRESSIVE GLOBAL APPROACH FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF STUDENTS' USE OF FRENCH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Over the past few decades, significant socio-economic, political, socio-linguistic changes have taken place around the world. These changes have also put a significant mark on language teaching and learning practices across the nations. Given the long-standing history of multilingual in the 21st century, language policies and practices have become great matters of interests for linguists and policy makers around the world in order to enhance international communication. This paper addressed internationalization of education through languages: a progressive global approach for the enhancement of students' use of French language in Nigeria extending this usage internationally. Discussions in this article were focused on internationalization, internationalization of education through languages in Higher Education Institutions, multilingual perspectives, the global language system, policies, programmes of French language especially in Nigeria for a progressive global approach, challenges, prospects and suggestions.

Keywords: Internationalization, Education ,French Language, multilingualism, globalization.

Nations in the past three decades have experienced significant economic and political changes which have occurred all across these nations. Consequently, cross-cultural contact is at an all time high in human history, as physical and geographical boundaries are shrinking day-by-day (Wright, 2004; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Spolsky, 2009 and Zakaria, 2011). These changes have also affected language education policies and practices, as multilingualism has become a common phenomenon all across the nations. To date, around 200 countries in the world recognize two or more official languages (e.g., Canada, India, Luxembourg, Nigeria, Singapore, Hong Kong SAR of China, Malaysia, and South Africa). However, a small number of languages including Arabic, Bengali, English, French, Hindi, Malay, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish are also used as lingua-franca or languages of wider communication across the nations. These languages are also often spoken as second, third, fourth, or later-acquired languages (Tucker, 1999; De Swaan, 2001; Wright, 2004 and Spolsky, 2009). Intercontinental communication is possible through internationalization of education in a multilingual global system.

Concept of Internationalization through Languages

Internationalization refers to a linkage process within various nations, this linkage process is possible through diverse forms. De Swaan (2001) presented the organization of languages and their relationships in a global context, "it is multilingualism that has kept humanity, separated by so many

languages, together...It is this ingenious pattern of connections between language groups that constitutes the global language system" (p. 1). De Swann (2001) added that at the bottom of this system are the world's many small languages that he called peripheral languages. Peripheral languages constitute 98% of the world's languages and are used by under 10% of the population of the world. Often these languages have no written script, and are passed on orally and rely on people remembering them rather than recording them. At the next level, connecting peripheral languages, are central languages (e.g., Chinese, Hindi, and Russian). There are about 100 central languages in the world and they are acquired as second languages by speakers of peripheral languages. Central languages are often national or official languages and are used in politics, courts, education systems, television, textbooks and newspapers (De Swaan, 2001). For Hamel (2005), multilingualism is not only requisite for ecological sustainability, but it is also as an individual and collective asset. Taking into account internationalization of the economy, commerce and culture, languages have become very useful. Knowledge of these languages is part of the required capital first competition.

There is therefore an imminent desire to learn these languages on the one hand for professional use and on the other for communication among individuals since language is a system of expression and communication belonging to a social group. It is important to look for a common language, much more practical for communication that can improve relations among the countries. Furthermore, one would rather ask whether which French is relevant for Nigeria in this era of internationalization. Functional French is a pre-requisite for Nigerians to go internationally especially in French speaking country all over the world. Therefore specialized terms are needed to be used among specialists in the same discipline. In this case, one would talk about French for specific purposes (FSP).

The nature of language is such that general language and special languages can be accommodated within one natural language: the fundamental characteristics of language are manifested both in English, language of chemical engineering, French and in the language of physics. The difference between general and special language is a difference of degree rather than kind: the degree to which the fundamental characteristics of language are maximized or minimized in special language. Special languages are used more self consciously than general language and the situations in which they are used intensify the user's concern with the language, so it is therefore on the level of use that one has to look for more specific differentiating criteria.

Language has the potential of acting as a key allowing access to a new universe. In a certain way, the frontiers of our universe are linked to those of our linguistic knowledge. One who learns a new language opens himself/herself to a new cultural and linguistic system. In this case, the main function of a specialized language is to inform and to exchange an information on a specialized subject. This paper is also based on a reflection concerning French language for international communication with emphasis on Nigeria that is putting it into perspective with the new realities brought about by globalization that has continued to grow. The paper concerned first of all, the language needs, specifically the language competences required in response to personal and social needs in an international perspective. Secondly, the case of Kenyan education system which has tackled the language needs of students in the vocational schools as well as the role the institutions of higher learning should play in this regard.

Internationalization of Education in Higher Institutions

Highlighting on globalization which has a link with Internationalization; in popular discourse, globalization is often synonymous with internationalization, referring to the growing interconnectedness and interdependence of people and institutions throughout the world. Although these terms have elements in common, they have taken on technical meanings that distinguish them from each other and from common usage. Internationalization is the less theorized term. Globalization, by contrast, has come to denote the complexities of interconnectedness, and scholars have produced a large body of literature to explain what appears to be an ineluctable worldwide influence on local settings and responses to those influences. Higher education systems, policies and institutions are being transformed by globalisation, which is “the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness” (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton, 1999). Globalization drives and is driven by higher education. Higher education trains highly skilled workers and contributes to the research base and capacity for innovation that determine competitiveness in the knowledge-based global economy (Organization for Economic Corporation and Development (OECD), 2009). Though Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) often see themselves as objects of globalisation, they are also its agents (Scott, 1998). Research universities are intensively linked within and between the global cities that constitute the major nodes of a networked world (Castells, 2001 and McCarney, 2005). Characteristically, global cities have a high density of participation in higher education; there is a strong positive correlation between the higher education enrolment ratio of a nation or a region and its global competitive performance (Bloom, 2005: 23-24).

The evolution of globalization and of the knowledge society has led to institutional changes in higher education systems, such as changes in managerial attitudes and cultures (Deem & Brehony, 2005), in strategies and in the role of the state. Firstly, most universities have become more entrepreneurial, and this attitude has pushed them to extend the scope of their activities beyond national borders. Thus, activities of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) become more developed in international (in terms of cooperation) and global (in terms of competition) frameworks (Horta, 2009). Cooperation and competition are intensifying simultaneously under the growing influence of market forces and the emergence of new players (Organization for Economic Corporation and Development (OECD), 2009).

Secondly, according to Knight (1997) and De Wit (1995), internationalization requires two complementary strategies to enhance and sustain the international dimensions of university functions, namely, programme strategies and organisational strategies. The former include various academic initiatives in education, research and university services, and the latter involve organisational initiatives to facilitate and institutionalise international dimensions at universities through management and operating systems. Thirdly, the role of the state also plays a crucial role, since in a global world of higher education, most national governments want to have international universities that compete and cooperate with other universities worldwide. Thus, the role of the state – through funding and policy initiatives favouring the internationalization of higher education – seems to be critical. Indeed, a good example of the globalisation process lies in the spread of new public management in higher education. In nations throughout the world, the responses of systems and institutions to globalisation have been conditioned by ongoing reforms to national systems, and related reforms in the organisation and management of the institutions themselves Organization for Economic Corporation and Development (OECD, 2009).

There is more use of new public management tools, including market forces, financial incentives (competitive funding), increased autonomy and accountability, and deregulation. As a result, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are active on foreign education markets and have taken advantage of the deregulation of tuition fees (Van der Wende, 2007). Nonetheless, as Castells (2000) pointed out, globalisation leads at the same time to development and underdevelopment, and the need to address such imbalances requires Higher Educational Institution (HEIs) to broaden their missions for internationalization beyond the quest for profitability alone.

The internationalization of higher education is often seen as a possible response to globalization (i.e., a way to make HEIs more effective in response to the globalisation of societies, cultures, economies and labour markets) (Karlvermark and Van der Wende, 1997). By definition, internationalization is a process that governments can steer more readily than globalisation (Van der Wende, 2007). In this sense, higher education has become increasingly international in the past decade as more and more students choose to study abroad, enroll in foreign educational programmes and institutions in their home country, or simply use the Internet to take courses at colleges or universities in other countries.

Progressive Global Approach for the Enhancement of Students' Use of French Language in Nigeria

The indigenization of French language teaching in Nigeria is perceptible in two facts: (i) the objectives of French language teaching in Nigerian secondary schools as laid down by the official curriculum for secondary education in the French subject and (ii) the overriding philosophy of manuals and French language methods (*On y va!*) having being recently adopted in pedagogic situations in Nigerian secondary schools. These manuals and textbook are clearly in line with the philosophy of indigenization.

The two national curriculums (for the first and second cycles of secondary education) for the teaching of French reveal the desired afro-centric nature of the teaching of French. They all stipulate in their second and sixth points the aims of such learning. Its aims is also to widen the scope of the learner's knowledge about the French and the French speaking community [and] seek to be a synthesis of past Nigeria syllabuses as well as those of other countries and benefits from the experience of the past in order to fit into the present modern Nigerian context. (Federal Ministry of Education, 2001).

It is clear that these aims are informed by the country determination to promote 'Nigerianess'/'Africaness' even in the educational sector as well as is pushed by the desire to facilitate Nigerians' smooth integration in a sub-region (ECOWAS) numerically dominated by francophone countries. This move towards facilitating regional integration with francophone ECOWAS countries is spelt out in the country's national policy which stipulates that "for smooth interaction with our neighbours, 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 schools" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

French language teaching in Nigeria is therefore designed to provide the learners with the sufficient communication skills and aptitudes to make the language a tool for communication first with the immediate African francophone community (West African francophone community) then the rest (Western-France and Canada for instance) of the francophone world. This passes through the adoption of afro-centric syllabus and schooltextbook as seen in the adoption of the *On y va!*, French

method in the country's secondary schools (Onyemelukwe 2002; Mazauric and Sirejols, 2005; Mohammad 2005; Simire 2013 and Ariole 2013).

On y va! as a French method/text-book is afro-centric as its content is shaped in such a way as to appeal to a local public of learners and users. The scenes described in the textbook are mainly taking place in African cities. The main characters used in the textbook are Africans, bearing pure West African names and efforts are made by the authors of the textbook to adapt the lessons and civilization objectives to the socio-cultural aspirations of the English speaking community of West Africa (mainly Ghana and Nigeria).

The learners can easily identify with the main characters featuring in the textbook as well as with their various daily occupations. These characters visibly share in the dreams of many Nigerians. The learners are equally made to learn more about West African socio-cultural diversities than the Western (French) civilization. That is why, in their review of the textbook, Mazauric and Sirejols (2005: 3) underline the phonetic similarity between the title of the textbook "On y va!" and the Yoruba word "O ya!" (a call to action) and further describe the phrase both as an appetizer addressed to the local readers/users of the textbook as well as an energizer to the French learning process. They equally analyze the guiding philosophy of the conception of the book in line with the spirit of localization/indigenization. They argue that, indeed, the first possible motive of foreign language learning is geographical proximity and the practical interest the learner may develop in such an experience. It would of course be artificial to base the French language learning in Nigeria in the immediate environment of the learner who, in everyday situations, is compelled to use his mother tongue and perhaps other African vehicular languages, in addition to English. Meanwhile, they speak and write French in many neighboring and in remote African francophone countries like Benin, Niger, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso or Gabon. They finally observe that as a method of French language learning 'On y va!' capitalizes on geographical cultural proximity between Nigeria and the other francophone African countries; thus, this textbook also gives an insight of the internationalization in education through French language.

"C'est sur cette proximité géographique et culturelle que On y va! prend appui et sur l'intérêt que l'acquisition de la langue française peut représenter pour les jeunes désireux de communiquer avec des voisins africains, et plus largement, de s'ouvrir au reste du monde". On y va! capitalizes on this geographical and cultural proximity as well as on the interest the acquisition of the French language may represent to youths desiring to communicate with the neighboring African counterparts in particular and to get exposed to the rest of the world.

In other words, this may be strong indications that the textbook is really adapted to fit the Nigerian context. It represents a facet of afro-centrism which being an anti thesis of cultural imperialism is the best form of decolonization of French teaching the Nigerian government may have thought of. It would have been artificial to base the teaching of French in a purely Nigerian socio-cultural setting, given the fact that Nigeria is an English speaking country. It appears more practical to base such a teaching in a francophone West African socio-cultural context which is in many respects similar to (or engulfs) that of Nigeria. Afro-centrism may very much be effective here as we strongly believe that there is an evident affinity between the different African cultures (Summer-Paulin 1998; Salaudeen 2008).

Challenges Facing French Language as a Tool for the Internationalization of Education in Nigeria

- The first challenge facing teaching and learning of French language in Nigeria is that of bad policy making. In most cases, policy makers are usually short-sighted on the scope of French language teaching and learning in their policies. As a result of such short-sighted policy, French language education has suffered a lot of setback in this country. This should be one of the reasons why it was considered not compulsory at senior secondary school and a non-vocational subject in the senior secondary curriculum. Frankly speaking, such policy is very unhealthy as French is seen by Nigerians as not being enough to render them economically independent. In other words, people do not see any possibility of making a promising career out of French language apart from teaching profession which many regard as a job that could be done when there is no other choice (Bolarinwa, 1996).
- Some Nigerian parents see no need or reason to allow their children offer French in school knowing well that they would not be able to continue with it at senior secondary level of their education.
- Another similar challenge facing the teaching and learning of Nigeria is that of making French a single-major course in most of our state and Federal Colleges of Education. According to the Nigeria Certificate in Examination (NCE), Minimum Standards by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), students offering French as a single major course should be ready to combine with courses like Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Social Studies, English language etc. (NCCE, 2004:6). Such course combinations do often create diversion of attention on the part of French language students as the issue of clash of lecture periods usually occur on the time-table thereby resulting into missing of lectures. The aftermath of the foregoing is, of course, a poor performance in terms of low grades or carry-overs in French by the students. No wonder many NCE graduates in French do finally fall back to the teaching of their respective course combinations to the detriment of French language.
- Another area of concern is that of linguistic background of majority of students learning French language in Nigerian higher institutions. Walqui and Aidas (2000) noted that a student's knowledge of grammatical systems must also be taken into consideration with respect to the student's first language. As discussed earlier, majority of public primary and secondary schools in the country are not offering French yet; only few private ones have been able to include French in their programme just to make a difference. Therefore, many French students both at the University and College of Education levels do start through admission into Remedial and pre-NCE programmes respectively.
- A challenge here is that into such Remedial and pre-NCE programmes, unfortunately this kind of one-year academic activity can never be enough to substitute/make up for the loss of knowledge that is supposed to be acquired within 12 years of primary and secondary education; and since there is every tendency of such students to have come in contact with two or more languages (local languages and English) before engaging in the learning of French, there is usually the problem of linguistic interference both in oral and in written aspects. When these students finish their studies and join the system as French teachers, such people will either consciously or unconsciously pass their language imperfection to their students.
- One other challenge is that of the issue of disparity existing among schools, in terms of the distribution of academic materials especially Colleges of Education offering French as a course of

study is not healthy at all for the Nigerian educational system (Akubue and Ilefundi, 2006). The pilot ones do enjoy certain immunities over their non-pilot counterparts. The French Embassy in Nigeria that is supposed to be the promoter of French language in Nigeria is not helping matter at all. Whenever it comes to distribution of teaching materials such as textbooks and audio-visuals as well as sponsoring French lecturers and teachers for workshops and trainings, the pilot institutions are usually given preference. Such practice is very discouraging of a body or an organization that should play a peace-making role in this type of controversial situation.

- Another major challenge facing French language education in Nigeria is in the area of putting into practice the communicative method of teaching in relation to available teaching materials. It has been discovered that contents of textbooks such as *Studio 100* available to set this new language teaching technique in motion are too foreign. Therefore, Nigerian students studying French do find such materials difficult to understand as their contents do not reflect learners' cultures or things in their immediate environment. These several challenges are followed by the following prospects for the internationalization of French language through education for a Nigerian targeted population.

Prospects of French Language Education in Nigeria

- Nigeria, as a nation, has every cause to take French language education more seriously like never before. The trend of globalization nowadays is number one reason why Nigerians should strive to embrace the teaching and learning of French as the officially recognized nation's second official language. Connections are becoming inevitable among people, nations and organizations of the world which warrants a huge need for knowing more than one foreign or international language, because of these connections, the use of common language remains a strong key in the areas such as trade, tourism, international relations between governments, technology, science and media.

- Nigeria needs to borrow a new leaf from Japan and China. These countries, according to Kubota (1998) and Kirkpatrick and Zhichang (2004), ensure, in their educational policies, a strict adherence and compliance to teaching at least one foreign language at primary and secondary school levels.

- On the issue of self-reliance after graduation that the country has been clamouring for, French language education will definitely do a lot of Nigerian youths good if incorporated into vocational and entrepreneurship education. Going by their definitions, vocational education, according to Osuala (2004), is an organized educational programmes which directly aim at preparing every individual for paid or unpaid employment; while in the opinion of Ijaiya (2007), entrepreneurship education sees to the training of all students irrespective of their area of specialization, towards developing an ability to identify business opportunities that can make them self-sufficient.

- As language of international society that is only rivaled by English, French will surely serve as a linguistic visa in disciplines like Banking, Pharmacy, Secretaryship, Medicine, Commerce, scientific and technological research (Bariki, 2004).

- In the military, learning of a foreign language is very important. As we all know, communication of ideas, either in oral or in writing, can never be ignored among human beings. Developing more passion for French language education by our fellow Nigerian military men and women will help them communicate better during their various military operations abroad, especially those on peace-keeping mission in some neighbouring francophone countries. In the United States of America of 21st century, for instance, foreign language training programmes are organized for various security agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Defence

Intelligence Agency etc. All of them have individual foreign language training programmes and capabilities that can enable them meet their respective needs in the course of discharging duties.

- Furthermore, additional knowledge of an international language like French is a must for every Nigerian delegate who wants to be more relevant and comfortable at any meetings, conferences, seminars and workshops outside the shores of this country. Perhaps this was why, on NTA, French language was used alongside live broadcast of the Presidential Inauguration on Sunday, 29th May, 2011. Such initiative was of course necessitated by the presence of other Presidents from francophone countries at the ceremony.

Conclusion

This paper, in all its discussions has made it clear that multilingualism is very important for all the nations. Nigeria as a nation needs another international language like French to function effectively in this era of internationalization. There is need, therefore, for national commitment to French language through education at all the levels from primary to tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The time of ignorance has passed. All Nigerians should be ready to be French compliant, if they want to remain functional at the international scene especially in the French speaking countries in this fast changing world.

Recommendations

Based on issues discussed in this paper, the following recommendations were made:

1. Multilingualism should be encouraged in all nations of the world because it a unifying factor in all human endeavours.
2. French language should be made compulsory for all students in the academic ladder at all levels in order to sustain and perfect its acquisition progressively because it is relevant in this era of internationalization.
3. French language as a non-vocational elective subject at Senior Secondary School in the National Policy on Education (NPE) be modified to make it a compulsory. Discipline at all levels of education in order to pave the way for the opening of wider doors of career opportunities and professionalism for Nigerian graduates.
4. The internationalization process of languages through the teaching and learning of French should be enforced by policies based on their socio-cultural, economic, commercial, sociolinguistic and diplomatic expansion in various nations for a sustainable development.

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