

MAKING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF FRENCH RELEVANT TO THE TECHNOLOGICAL NEEDS OF POLYTECHNIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

ANTHONIA NWAUKONI

*School of General Studies,
Delta State Polytechnic Ogwashi -uku*

And

JUDITH E. EZEAMAKA Ph.D

*School of General Studies,
Delta State Polytechnic Ogwashi -uku*

Abstract

The goal of teaching French language in Nigerian Polytechnics is to equip Polytechnic students with a solid profile that will enable them face and tackle the challenges in our ever evolving world. More so, the mastery of a second foreign language and adequate intercultural skills are certainly essential tools for solving Nigeria's economic crises. Language itself is dynamic in nature, so also its acquisition, hence, the traditional methods of language teaching and learning are giving way to better and innovative approaches that make language acquisition interesting. Therefore, this paper seeks to unveil some of the current trends in French language acquisition. It also highlights some of the pitfalls associated with the teaching-learning process of French language in Nigerian polytechnics. It is concerned with the seeming forsaken nature of the process and strategies involved in the teaching and learning of French language. The paper suggests that there is need for polytechnics to adopt best practices in the teaching-learning process of French language like other renowned institutions in the globe. Evidently, having good knowledge of a second foreign language opens doors of opportunities and positions graduates to compete favourably, hence this paper recommends that concerned authorities should maximize trending perspectives teaching methods that will make the teaching and learning of French language in polytechnics easy, attractive and lucrative. It is hoped that the submissions of this paper will re-ignite zeal for French language acquisition in Nigerian polytechnics. This paper is basically based on secondary sources besides observation and experience.

Key words: Polytechnic, French language, Language acquisition

Introduction

Research has continually been carried out on the teaching and learning of French in Nigerian higher learning institutions however none has ever targeted specifically the Polytechnic. This may probably be that the Polytechnic being technologically based has not considered the advantages of marrying professional abilities with spoken or written French competencies. Worthy of note is the fact that most of the influential innovations are from French-speaking countries. Gella & Kwaja (2017) are of the opinion that, the mastery of French Language will not only make polytechnic graduates bilingual but also more marketable in the international market. It is consequently a remarkable relief as French was once integrated in the Secretarial Studies branch of the Polytechnics via the National Board for Polytechnic Education.

The use of language is to facilitate communication, to promote understanding between language originator and language recipient and to enable useful, appropriate and efficient action to take place (Moody, 1970). French is one of the international language which is most widely used in commerce, scientific and technology research, administration, education, literature etc. With the gained knowledge of French language, Nigerians and francophone countries will be able to work hand in hand in areas of science and technology. This cannot be achieved if French teachers are not employed or if those employed are not encouraged to be teaching the language. French language was introduced into the education system of Nigeria just after English. The French language native speakers from France and other francophone countries were brought into the country to come to teach the language in the Nigerian higher institutions throughout the country.

Language acquisition strategy is a vital component in educational design and implementation of any teaching and learning to obtain significant mastery for personalized learning (Din, 2015; Din, 2006). There has been a vast body of research into language mastering strategies, both in second/foreign language (SL/FL) research and instructional psychology. The focus used to be on the approaches used through learners for managing their SL/FL learning and, more specifically, on identifying these techniques that make learners successful and those that lead to less successful learning. French language is regarded as one of the “world’s language” and is used as a reputable language for most global conferences.

Making the Teaching and Learning of French Relevant To the Technological Needs of Polytechnic Education in Nigeria - ***Anthonia Nwaukoni and Judith E. Ezeamaka Ph.D***

According to Aziz & Sah (2020) polytechnic students in most non-English speaking countries are required to take English language courses to meet the need of internationalization and communications with humans outside of the country. The same strategy can be implemented in non-French speaking country such as Nigeria. For example, in Malaysia, the vast majority of students begin to learn English language right from elementary schools, and polytechnic students are required to take three hours of English language courses each a period of 7 days during the first, third and 5th semester and they have to pass a national-level standardized test (Malaysian University English language Test) so as to get their diplomas in most polytechnic. This trend has enabled students acquire English language as a second language and has also enabled them secure lucrative jobs at the international sphere (Aziz & Sah (2020). In addition to this, the language is a major subject test for admission into university in Malaysia. If the students want to further their studies in degree or higher level, they are required to have MUET as this test is one of the requirements for university admission.

Observation has revealed that, in recent times, there has been a wave of new teaching techniques that facilitates language acquisition. Oxford (1996) suggests that a more necessary difficulty in the choice of language acquiring techniques may be the purpose for which a language is learned. Language acquiring techniques are the crucial element that will aid students to identify the efficient ways to learn a second language. It's important for students to know the process and the product in learning a language. On the other hand, language acquiring techniques will confront various challenges as the students come from diverse culture and demographic settings. However, extremely little studies have been done on language acquisition in polytechnics especially as it concerns French language.

Polytechnic is one of the higher learning institutions believed to be adept to generate the nation's human capital in industrial sectors and others. In exhibit transformative phase, its role has been expended and its establishment has been re-branded in making sure the national missions are achieved by supplying the human capital source to the industrial sectors. Employability skills of new graduates have always got powerful attention in the local media. Lack of French language proficiency has repeatedly been quoted as one of the major factors playing a role in graduate inability to secure jobs at the international level (Sharif, 2005). It's additionally conceivable that efforts to design graduates' intercommunication and oral presentation skills during their undergraduate studies have effects on their later occupation performance (Mason et. al. 2006).

One of the biggest challenges faced by most polytechnic lecturers is making French language a full course that runs from first year to final year and also getting students to use French language in and out of the classroom. Students who have difficulty acquiring French language often come from social and family backgrounds that do not require a foreign language to communicate. Although some of them may try to use French in class, they are limited by the weekly contact hours, and the French language course only has three contact hours per week. Therefore, to understand what causes these students to encounter these difficulties, more research and research in this area is needed to determine the challenges they actually encounter. Students must be exposed to and be taught using the strategies that best suit them in order to become a successful language learner. Even though, the educators need to stick to the top down system as they cannot escape from the higher order instructions, however, they can still intertwine an effective strategy, as to create a holistic and significant individual for the future.

(1) The Efforts to Introduce French Language in Nigeria

Before 1997, French was an optional foreign language in schools, but late in 1997 the Nigerian government gave new status of French language as the nation's second official language which was affirmed by late General Sani Abacha, former head of state in Ouagadougou Burkina Faso in 1996. Binbo Fisayo, an educationist, speaking to the Daily Champion African News (2005), stresses the importance of speaking and also understanding a second international language, especially the French language. From the above accounts so far given, the desire for French language in Nigeria according to most prominent researchers, in Nigerians geographical, economic, political, and diplomatic as well as her educational research, makes it imperative for her to give enough attention to the teaching and learning of the French language. Therefore Nigeria become officially, an English/French bilingual and this was documented in the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1998 (Ogunkeye, 2007). However, in 2016, the federal government reaffirmed the new status of French language teaching across the country that “all levels of the country’s education system, from primary to university, must offer French language courses” (Daily Trust, 2016).

Significance of Study of French Language

Despite all these adversities, studying and speaking French can be of vital benefit to Nigerians because French and English are the official working languages of the United Nations, UNESCO, NATO, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).), the International Labor

Making the Teaching and Learning of French Relevant To the Technological Needs of Polytechnic Education in Nigeria - **Anthonia Nwaukoni and Judith E. Ezeamaka Ph.D**

Office, the International Olympic Committee, the 31-member Council of Europe, the European Community, the Universal Postal Union, the UIA, Interpol, Amnesty International, the World Health Organization (WHO) among others (Nathan, 2007 and Shriuk 1997-2008). Furthermore, French is the predominant working language of the European Court of Justice, the European Court of First Instance and the Press Room of the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium (Shryock 1997-2008). Also, French plays an important role in the official life of most African countries. This is because 22% of the French in the world live in Black Africa alone (Ajiboye, 2002). Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco account for 11% of the world's official use of French, and Africa as a whole represents 33% of the French used for official or administrative purposes in the world. In relative terms, it can be said that outside France, which in any case does not constitute more than 50% of the total French output, Africa is the most important center of French practice in the world. In Nigeria during the Eight African Games on 4 October 2003 attended by representatives from 52 African countries, events were reported in both English and French. In fact, the welcome speech given by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo was in English but has been translated in French. It is also used in conferences, seminars and presenting academic papers in various forms whose vital needs cannot be neglected.

Onyemelukwe (1995) notes that Nigeria needs to know French in order to have a healthy relationship with its French-speaking neighbours. Egonor (2011) held that "... for Nigeria to enter into a mutually beneficial relationship with these countries, it is necessary, at least to some extent, to communicate with these countries in its official language—French." Onyemelukwe and Adie Offiong (2004) support this point by claiming that "bilingualism is relevant to communication not only with our French-speaking neighbors but with other French-speaking countries of the world. In short, it enhances global communication in all areas of life – education, commerce, religion and politics" Ogunkeye (2007) provided four reasons to adopt French in Nigeria. He considers that since Nigeria is surrounded by French-speaking countries, knowledge of the French language will facilitate communication with the citizens of neighboring countries. He also emphasized that since French-speaking countries are a majority in ECOWAS, it would be better for Nigerian citizens to understand French. The third reason behind his progress is that knowledge of French is essential because French is now gaining more ground in the world. The last reason knowledge of French can guarantee job opportunities for Nigerian nationals in foreign organizations. Ogunbiyi (2012) also joined the opinion of others by emphasizing that "since Nigeria is surrounded by French-speaking

countries, the importance of language in Nigeria for social, political, economic and international relations cannot be overemphasized.” Despite the aforementioned importance of the French language to Nigerian citizens, the language has not been taken seriously. The importance of the French language cannot be overemphasized because Nigeria is surrounded as an island by these French speaking countries. Therefore, knowledge of the French language will not only be beneficial socially, economically, politically and culturally for Nigeria, but also help in negotiation and conflict resolution in the international forum. Moreover, it will enhance the academic and professional capabilities and potential of Nigerians apart from promoting good friendship with our neighbours. There will be great employment opportunities for our youth and graduates in that roam around the streets and corners of Nigeria in search of greener pastures. Most importantly, knowledge of French will broaden the horizon of individuals especially now that the world has become 'dispersed' as a result of globalization. For Aje, 2008 "Professionalism in French will certainly open the horizon and prepare the individual for a better future." Another importance of French can be seen in the recruitment process conducted by the international organization which showed that in various types of professional jobs, are required French, two Spanish, one Portuguese and one Arabic (Shryock, 2006 cited the UN Employment Information and Assistance Unit Bureau Release Paper Dec. 1, 2000). He also cited the latest list of international jobs (7/03/08) distributed by US the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as follows: 125 prefer French; While 31 Spanish, 25 requires UN language (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish); 10 Portuguese are preferred, 7 Arabic, 4 Russian and 2 German. Along the same lines, Aje (2008) as reported by Tunde Ogunsola in Education Times (March-April 2008) painfully recalled how a Nigerian lost the job of UN Secretary-General due to his inability to speak French. Until today, Nigeria has not had this seat. All this shows the great importance of the French language which makes it imperative for Nigerians to learn how to speak and write French.

Making French Language Teaching and Learning Relevant to Today's World

A lot has changed in the years... Twenty-first century students are tech savvy. In today's world, young people are well aware that sometimes they know more than many "over thirty" people, at least when it comes to technology. Adults regularly turn to youth for help and training on hardware, software, Internet, and other technology-related issues. Twenty-first century youth realize that they are sometimes the authority over concepts and skills that some adults struggle to understand. This is why old, traditional, hierarchical and patriarchal

Making the Teaching and Learning of French Relevant To the Technological Needs of Polytechnic Education in Nigeria - **Anthonia Nwaukoni and Judith E. Ezeamaka Ph.D**

attitudes give way to more collaborative approaches. Outdated and authoritative "teacher-centered" or "expert-centered" approaches to teaching are like black and white televisions.

Linguistic laboratories began with the twentieth century. It came into existence in the late 1940s and early 1950s when modern foreign language programs began to develop as a major in high schools and universities. Before that, classical languages such as Latin and Greek were preferred over modern languages. With the advent of modern language software, the concept of a language laboratory was born. Audio labs were set up, and students in the lab were brought together at a specific time and collectively followed a set audio program. This follows the behavioral model of language teaching. The purpose of the language labs was for students to gain auditory exposure to the language they were studying. This was considered an important innovation in the mid-20th century, as it allowed students to hear the language they were studying in the voice of a native speaker. At that time, students had much fewer opportunities to travel. There was no such thing as the Internet. There were no foreign TV shows. Phone calls to family members who were living abroad were terribly expensive.

All this has changed. In today's world of everything digital, audio exposure to foreign languages is readily available at little or no cost. Satellite radio, internet radio and podcasts are available. Even in the 1980s, insightful scholars began to see that the language parameter would one day be extinct (Chen, 1996; Froelich, 1982) they were right. In the 21st century, creating a phonetic language lab is not a wise use of the school's limited money, time, and other resources.

(2) French Language in Nigerian Polytechnics from the Sociolinguistic Stand Point

From a geographical and historical perspective, Nigeria is surrounded by French-speaking neighbouring countries. Therefore, it is very necessary to bridge the language gap between Nigeria and its French-speaking neighbors in various fields of international contacts. According to data from the National Technical Education Commission, Nigeria currently has 103 approved polytechnics: 25 federally owned, 40 State owned, and 38 privately owned. Nigeria has enough polytechnics to meet the needs of learners, but the problem is that candidates usually prefer Federal Polytechnics for better physical and human infrastructure reasons. The aim of science and engineering education is to train candidates in technology, science, and any other fields of knowledge that are beneficial to the country. The Department of Secretarial Studies trains students to be employed in

English or French organizations. The French study of the department adds important value to the major. Polytechnics do not teach French as a subject like universities do. Therefore, it is natural that students who want to study a language in a polytechnic have no choice but to enter the university to at least obtain a certificate.

The Polytechnic takes French as an elective course, so it is indifferent to the problems of its teaching and learning. Immersion courses are essential to improve learners' language skills and are not included in polytechnic courses. There is no universal syllabus, and the available syllabus does not emphasize social functions related to basic daily communication needs. Due to the large class size and the lack of qualified French teachers, the emphasis is not on oral comprehension and production. Therefore, methodology is more traditional than communication or interaction. The plan includes a large number of other courses, so that a class of more than 60 students has no more than 2 hours of exposure to French lessons per week, and there are no teaching aids to promote teaching and learning. Some people want to know what a learner can achieve in this situation. Therefore, it is not surprising that students cannot form complete sentences. The French of the Polytechnic is not a requirement of any course, nor is it its own subject, but one of the other courses in the department. The West African Schools results in French from 2011 to 2015 shows good performance in candidates' scores for French and many would have preferred to learn French in the polytechnics as there are few spaces in the universities; but this is impossible as French is just an elective course. It is indeed a non-motivating situation that needs immediate solution otherwise the future of French Language in the Nigerian polytechnics remains bleak.

(3) Challenges in the Teaching of French Language in Nigerian Polytechnics

Several setbacks have been identified as pitfalls associated with the teaching and learning of French language in Polytechnics. However, this paper will discuss only major ones. The problems among others include: Inadequate Period, Lack of Infrastructure, Learners Attitude, Learning Environment, and Curriculum content and implementation.

Inadequate Period Allocation

There is also another problem of inadequate periods allocated to French in the institutions' timetable. In most polytechnics, French is allocated only one period per week. Only few polytechnics allocated two periods to French language. It is again, observed that most of the periods allocated to French language are in the

Making the Teaching and Learning of French Relevant To the Technological Needs of Polytechnic Education in Nigeria - **Anthonia Nwaukoni and Judith E. Ezeamaka Ph.D**

afternoon and usually on Fridays when both the students and teachers are all tired. Undoubtedly, no effective teaching and learning can take place in this kind of situations.

Insufficient Infrastructure

Lack of the necessary infrastructures like language laboratory, internet facilities and textual materials are not been provided for polytechnics in Nigeria. Therefore, the absence of these materials has caused a lot of problems to polytechnics as regards French teaching and learning. To suggest a solution to this problem, Igonor (2011) observed that: "If the curriculum is to be well implemented, then the schools have to be well equipped with the necessary materials.

Attitude of Learners

The negative attitude of most polytechnic students towards French language is also a major setback militating against qualitative teaching and learning of French language. The negative attitude is seen through their nonchalant attitude or show of no interest in the subject. The reason for this negative attitude is informed by their ignorance of the importance of French language in their career.

Learning Environment

In Nigeria, the linguistic environment where students are learning the French language is purely Anglophone. This makes it very difficult for them to be able to learn the language effectively. To make up for this, the Federal Government has established a French village at Badagry where the students of institutions of higher learning go for acculturation. Meanwhile, the goal of the French village has not been achieved; this is because the students are now speaking either vernacular or Pidgin English right there in the village. It should however be noted that, the reason for establishing the Centre is to have a place where the students will be kept for some time in an atmosphere which similar to that of francophone countries. Apart from the lecturers, majority of the administrative workers in the village do speak French language fluently.

Curriculum content and implementation

French lecturers are hard to come by in most polytechnics. Most of the lecturers available received advanced training sufficient to teach the language. Because lecturers are so important to the implementation of any curriculum, their preparation should be considered essential in any meaningful instructional implementation strategy. It is a well-known fact that some French lecturers in polytechnics avoid teaching some sections of the curriculum (for example, oral exercises) on the pretext that our students have not reached the necessary

intellectual levels or do not need to attain the levels because it is considered as a general course. Since it is the lecturers who interpret the objectives and contents in curriculum plans and manages the learning situation; quality, quantity, desire, self-motivation, interest, commitment, and use of methodology are absolutely essential to the success of the programme. The teacher interprets the objectives and content in curriculum plans and manages tendencies. The learning situation; their quality, quantity, willingness, self-motivation, interest, commitment and use of methodology are very essential for the success of the programme. In order to have dedicated, qualified and well-trained French lecturers for polytechnics for effective teaching, French lecturers must have pre-service and in-service training. Also, conferences and workshops should be organized for them. The teacher-pupil ratio should not be more than thirty students per teacher. A Case where a French lecturer teaches from forty-five to fifty students in a class is not appropriate. When the classes are large, the entire curriculum cannot be implemented. Implementation of the curriculum is that which will be essentially surrounded by uncertainty, bias, imagination, imprecision, limited resources and high risk of probability (Adegoke, 1984), since polytechnics are so crowded that three or more polytechnics are set up in the same state. The lack of material/infrastructure resources is a major obstacle in the implementation of the French curriculum. The lack of teaching aids and a language laboratory impedes effective teaching of the French language. The language laboratory is very essential in teaching and learning French. In the language laboratory, the lecturer is able to teach the students basic skills with the help of tape recorders, video tapes and radios.

Conclusion

Perhaps the problems identified give a glimmer of hope regarding the teaching of French in polytechnics. Teaching French should provide the following situation as correctly predetermined. For example, it would be desirable to increase the time allotted from 35-40 minutes in the current week to about 1-2 hours per week. This is the best practice and will enable learners to achieve language proficiency. Certainly, this will give brighter future prospects for teaching and learning French in Nigerian polytechnics. Drills and practice are a means of overcoming the linguistic problems of the mother tongue or first language interference. If emphasis is placed on exercises and practice starting at the middle school level, this will facilitate future learning and teaching of French as a social language. If there are enough qualified French teachers, the students' interest in the subject may increase. Modern teaching aids such as video films,

Making the Teaching and Learning of French Relevant To the Technological Needs of Polytechnic Education in Nigeria - **Anthonia Nwaukoni and Judith E. Ezeamaka Ph.D**

tape recorders, and projectors should be provided along with a modern language laboratory to encourage effective learning and teaching of the French language.

Recommendations

The following are therefore the recommendations proposed in order to improve upon the method through which French language is acquired in Nigerian polytechnics. First of all, the mode of learning has changed tremendously from paper and pen to technology as a result, there is need for modern French laboratories and libraries in all polytechnics to facilitate the teaching and learning of the language. Government should embrace a more positive attitude towards the French language learning. Learning of French language should be made compulsory right from the primary schools to secondary schools (both public and private) in the country. Also, passing French at credit level must be made compulsory for all the Arts students (as English language is in many francophone countries). This will go a long way in imposing more seriousness in the students who seek admission into polytechnics. Government needs to produce and provide schools with adequate infrastructural facilities such as laboratories, textbooks etc. The existing ones which are in bad condition should be renovated. Equally, good quality chalkboards be provided to enhance functional teaching and learning. The government should also subsidize the amount needed for the linguistic immersion programme in French Village Badagry Lagos. The government should also sensitize the authorities of Nigeria French language village, Badagry on the need to enforce the students to be speaking French in and outside the environment. If this is done, the students will have a francophone feeling in the society rather than speaking different mother tongues or Pidgin English. If all these recommendation could be followed, Nigeria will soon be a model among the other Anglophone nations in term of French language.

References

- Aja Nwachukwu, 1. (2008). The Benefit of French language. Journal of Nigerian Education Times 20th July- August, 6.
- Adegoke, K.A. (1984). Curriculum Implementation: Its Nature and Essence. In Aisiku, J.U. (Ed) Fundamentals of Curriculum Studies.
- Ajiboye, T. (2002). Nigeria and French: A Paradox of Closeness and Distance

- Aziz & Sah (2020). Language Learning Strategy (Lls) for English Language Learners in Polytechnic. *Journal of Personalized Learning*, 3(1) 71-78.
- Chen, J. F. (1996). CALL is not a Hammer and not Every Teaching Problem is a Nail! Changing Expectations of Computers in the Classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal* 2(7)
- Din, R. (2015). Foreword from the Chief Editor: The Inaugural Issue of JPL. *Journal of Personalized Learning*, 1(1), i-iii.
- Din, R. (2016). Notes from the Chief Editor: On Designing Personalized Learning. *Journal of Personalized Learning*, 2(1), i-iii.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). National Policy on Education (4th Edition). Lagos: NERDC.
- Froehlich, J. (1982). The Language Lab: Renaissance or Extinction? *Die Unterrichtspraxis / Teaching German* (15.2), 15(2), 264-269.
- Gella & Kwaja (2017). The Problems of Teaching French Language in Secondary Schools in Adamawa State: Problems And Prospects.
- Igonor J. (2011). Quality Assurance in the training of teachers of French as a second language in the Nigerian Colleges of Education. *The Nigerian Teacher Today*. Abuja. NCCE.
- International Journal of Advanced Research in Public Policy, Social Development and Enterprise Studies Vol. 2, No. 1.
- Mason G., Williams G. & Sue Cranmer (2006). Employability skills initiatives in higher education: what effects do they have on graduate labour market outcomes? Retrieved from the London: National Institute of Economic and Social Research: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/employability/>
- Moody, H.L.B. (1976). *Varieties of English*. London: Longman Group Ltd.

Making the Teaching and Learning of French Relevant To the Technological Needs of Polytechnic Education in Nigeria - ***Anthonia Nwaukoni and Judith E. Ezeamaka Ph.D***

- Ogunbiyi O. (2012). Implementation of the senior secondary school French curriculum in Lagos State: Problems and Prospects. *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 5 (1), URL: <http://journal.co.uk/BJASS.aspx>.
- Ogunkeye O. (2007). Bilingualism and the teaching of English and French in Nigeria. *Journal of Social and Cultural Studies*, 10(2), url: <http://contextjournal.wordpress.com>
- Onyemelukwe I. & Adie-Offiong V. (2004). Deceptive Cognates in a French class in Nigeria
- Oxford, R. L. (1996). Employing a questionnaire to assess the use of language learning strategies. *Applied Language Learning*, 7(1 & 2), 25-45.
- Sharif, R. (2005). Government to launch national grid computing project. *The Star*, p.9.
- Shryock, R. (1997-2008). French the most practical Language, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Department of foreign Languages and literatures. Blacksburg, VA 24061-0225. <http://www.fil.vt.edu/frenchMay,6>.