THE FRENCH LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF BREAKING BARRIERS TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This paper examines the French Language as a means of breaking barriers to national development. Quite a large number of Nigerians apart from their mother tongue, speak and write English Language alone. Thus, so many opportunities elude them in and offshore due to their inability to converse freely in French. The researcher seeks infusion of French as a means of breaking barriers bedeviling national development. The researchers opine that language skill advantage tends to foster better acquisition of technical education details, including technical language registers.

Keywords: French, Barriers, National Development, Challenges, Prospects.

Introduction

The partitioning and scrambling of the continent of Africa during the pre-colonial era geographically place Nigeria in the middle of francophone countries. Nigeria is boarded by the East by Cameroon, at the North by Niger Republic. There are about 16 countries in West Africa, four of them namely: Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia and Sierra-Leone are Anglophone countries, there is one Portuguese Guinea, while the rest are Francophone countries.

Obviously, English Language is not enough to provide adequate and necessary skills needed to tap available resources within and outside the continent of Africa for national development. Suffice it to say that there is need for Nigeria to adopt French Language as second official Language which should not pose any threat to development. If an average Béninios which include para-military officers political leaders, policy makers can communicate in French and English/German without any hindrance to its development, the same gesture should be extended to Nigeria.

The focus of this paper is to ascertain whether French language can serve as tool for national development. The paper will try as much as possible to delve into the challenges and prospects of its adoption.

Communication in human beings is a process of interaction, an important part of daily life. It is a process of exchanging and sharing of ideas, information, feelings, and opinions among group of people. Thus language becomes veritable tools with which any form of interaction takes place a medium of breaking any form of barrier to human, interaction and development. Language plays vital role in national develop as it fosters understanding, unity and sense of belonging among the various members that form different ethnic and social groups that constitute a nation.

A nation building process entails the use of language for interpreting the blue print containing the architectural design of the structure. No country however rich as it may be cannot possess all the resources it needs to build its nation hence the fundamental basis of International Trade Dewett. (2005).

In spite of Nigeria's tremendous mineral resources and natural endowments, there is need to transact business with our francophone neighbors. Hence, the need for French Language to be integrated into the building process. In the words of Late head of state of Nigeria. General Abacha on December 14th 1996 as quoted by Ade Ojo in Onyeme Lukwe. (2004:20).

> "We have seen that we are virtually surrounded by French speaking countries and these countries are our kith and kin. But, because of the difference inherited in Language of our colonial masters, there is a vacuum in communication with our neighbors. It is our interest to learn French".

These statements translate to the fact that French Language is highly important in this scheme of nation building socially, economically, culturally by establishing mutual relationship with Nigeria's French speaking neighbours and France.

METHODOLOGY

The study focuses only on French language as a means of breaking barriers to national development. The qualitative study presents research aiming at demonstrating several language skills vis-à-vis English and French language sentence structure.

Current Status of French Language in Nigeria

There is no doubt that currently French Language is a second official language in Nigeria at the instance of its declaration as second official language by Late General Sanni Abacha through his Honourable Minster of State for Education, Prof. Anthony Anwukah in 1996. Since then, French Language was incorporated into the curriculum and taught in most secondary schools public and private. This was also extended to the tertiary institutions such as; universities, colleges of education and recently the polytechnics. In between, there are French establishments such as Alliance Française in some cities namely: Lagos, Ibadan and Jos. French village (village Français) in Badagry established in 1991 which provides for certificate courses, diploma, NCE and university programmes, drawn from universities across Nigeria, should be viewed as an added advantage to access the learning and teaching of French language.

For the teaching and learning of any language to be carried out successfully, its status has to be clearly defined in the education policy, Ademola (2018) The adoption of French language by Nigerian government as stated earlier gives the citizens the opportunity to learn the language ahead of the future benefits. The National Policy on Education NPE (2004) serves as reference point for official adoption of French language and for the language to be taught compulsorily in our 3tiers of educational system, name: Primary, Secondary, Colleges of education and university.

Ironically, the policy lacks genuine implementation on the part of the government who actually pays lip services in some areas. Materials needed to facilitate teaching and learning are not always available. According to Falade (2008) many public schools still remain adamant on the full implementation of the policy. The number of schools offering French both public and private are nothing to write home about. Learners on their part are either not well motivated or interested in learning French as second official language. Those who show their interest in the language have personal reasons for doing so, some either study French as a result of their failure in other disciplines, seeing the language as alternative others have the intention of formalizing their travelling requirements, as such, pick up a certificate course in French. In the polytechnics where French is recently introduced across the country the students rather see it as foreign language to be studied along with other courses for just two semesters only.

Language plays vital roles in the society which cannot be quantified. For any society to compete with others at the international level, there is need to embrace multilingualism. Nigeria as a developing country needs to embrace learn French a language that occupies a strategic position on the international scene. French being a language of development, diplomacy, trade and industry has the tendency to promote sustainable economic growth and a better quality of life.

French Language and Its Structure

Structurally, French language has almost the same structure as other foreign language of the world. Our comparison here is the English language. This closeness or similarity in structure of the two languages will no doubt facilitate easy learning for young and old learners. The normal sentence structure in English is the subject verb object and adjunct.

Let's examine some sentences in English and French for illustrations.

English	**French**
I'm going to the market.	Je vais au marché
She is cute	Elle est ravissante.
The nurse gives me a ring	L'infirmière me donne une bague.

The French equivalent of sentence 1 is "Je vais au marché" Je vais means I'm going, au marché means to the market. Je is the subject of the sentence, vais is the verb, marché is the object. Elle est ravissante is the French equivalent of she is cute. Here, elle is the subject of the sentence, est is the verb and ravissante functions as adjective. In the last sentence, there is presence of direct and indirect object in "L'infirmière me donne une bague" which is the French equivalent of the nurse gives me a ring. L'infirmière is the subject of the sentence, "me" is the indirect object, while "bague" is the direct object.

Without any doubt, French has the same structure as English despite their differences as foreign language. The question of whether one language is easier to learn depends on the interest and attitude of the learners. At this juncture, it will be of interest to know some resemblances in English and French words/expressions in terms of meanings, spellings pronunciations and implications for French language.

Related French and English Words/Expressions

Etymologically, there exits 58% of French and Latin words in modern English vocabulary in which French alone makes up of 29%, around 10,000 French words are borrowed into English. There are presence of 1,700 true cognates" i.e. words that do not only look the same or similar, but which are having exactly the same meaning in both French and English, as can be found in common food and dining related words.

French	**English**
le restaurant	Restaurant
la salade	Salad
le menu	Menu
l'apéritif	Aperitif
la soupe	Soup
bon appétit	enjoy your meal
hors d'oeuvre	appetizers
chef d'oeuvre	masterpiece

There exist a good number of French words that are commonly used today in both French and English language having the same meaning.

French	**English**
Vis-à-vis	regarding, concerning
Raison d'être	reason for being
Quel dommage	What a pity.
Par excellence	by excellence
la liaison	Bond.
Coup d'état	taking over of government
Déjà vu	Already seen.
Esprit de corps	Spirit of togetherness
Savoir-faire	Know how
Fiancé	Fiance
En route	On the way
Dossier	Documents
Rendez-vous	Appointment
Chauffeur	Driver
Rapporteur	Reporter.

Obviously, considering the similarities highlighted above in French and English language, there abound several opportunities for learners of French language, language skills acquisition are easily accessible for oral and written communication purposes.

French Language and National Development

Suffice it to state that in a country like Nigeria, English language alone as official language may not guarantee the kind of development that is expected of its citizen in the domains of politics and socio-economic spheres. Babajide (2001) is of the opinion that there exist about 400 indigenous language in Nigeria. Achebe (2012) affirm that these languages are spoken by about 250 ethnic groups. As such, effective communication becomes a problem since each of the ethnic groups will stick to his/her own indigenous language. In fact. It goes beyond communication there may be misunderstanding as a result of differences in languages which may result to serious conflict. Omonigho (2016) in Sunday magazine 21st February, 2016 opines that being bilingual has a positive effect on our intellectual growth and enhances our mental development. This translates to the fact that being. Bilingual widens the horizons, learners have the advantage of so many academic benefits. According to Nanduti (2009) "being bilingual opens the door to other cultures and helps an individual understand and appreciate people from other countries". A bilingual knowledge infuses a sense of belonging and brings about good interaction between English speakers and their Francophone counterparts without the assistance of any interpreter. Being bilingual creates more chances of job opportunity, a job seeker may be hindered both at home and abroad as a result of his/her knowledge of the English language alone.

Prospects of Adopting French Language for National Development

The adoption of French language in Nigeria will no doubt usher in numerous benefits for the nation to grow well and assume the status of a developed country. French language is no doubt a world language, a language spoken by 300 million people across the five continents.

French language is a language for the international job market today, we live in a polyglot world dominated by so many foreign/international languages. For a country to develop internationally vis-à-vis science and technology, tourism, trade and a host of others, two or three foreign languages are needed. Millions of Nigerians only speak one foreign language which is English and some indigenous languages. They are at serious disadvantages due to their inability to tap numerous opportunities that French may provide around the globe.

French is a language of higher education. There is need for a nation to empower her youth with vocational and entrepreneurship education for self-sustainability. Osuala (2004) maintains, vocational education is an organized educational programmes which directly aims at preparing every individual for paid or unpaid employment. In the polytechnics system where vocational courses, like Banking and Finance, Food Technology, Marketing, Hospitality Management, Leisure and Tourism and Office Technology and Management courses are taught French language will be an added advantage, most especially for training of learners to become bilingual secretaries.

French language is a language of communication. Most Nigerians who speak English alone do face challenges of communication at international conferences, seminars, workshops. During business transactions with their francophone counterparts, it is a must for them to look for the services of an interpreter at extra cost.

Challenges of Adopting French Language for National Development

The adoption of French language may be faced with certain obstacles.

Lack of motivation: In spite of the benefits that are associated with the adoption of French language, lack of motivation is an hindrance. Ogunbiyi (2012) opines, "in the early sixties, Scholarships were given to both French teachers and students. This was to encourage them to study the language." This kind of motivation is no longer in operation.

Lack of human and non-human resources. Ayeomoni (2012) affirms that, "the government policy on the use of teaching and learning of the language is bedeviled with a lot of problems which range from inadequate materials and personnel to handle the teaching". Today, both teachers and learners of French language are faced with inadequate infrastructures like language laboratory and textbooks to facilitate teaching and learning process.

CONCLUSION

Suffice it to mention that the adoption of French language will usher in so many benefits for national development. The adoption of French language will enable Nigerian citizens to be bilingual and equip them with the necessary language skills, to tap available resources both home and abroad that the adoption of the language may provide.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommends the adoption of French language for national development. The government should provide adequate motivations in the form of human and non-human resources. French language should be made compulsory in all our school, both public and private. French teachers and students should be given scholarship to study in France, both military and para-military officers, politicians, and traditional rulers should be encouraged to learn French.

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