

Repositioning French Language Education for National Integration and Development

Olaosebikan O. WENDE
Osun State University, Department of Languages and Linguistics
College of Humanities and Culture, Osogbo, Nigeria
wende2011@hotmail.co.UK

ABSTRACT

Nigeria's linguistic diversity rather than being a blessing as it was at Pentecost has been a bane of national development and integration as it was at Babel. Nigeria parades over four hundred indigenous languages (Crozier and Blench, 1992) and two official foreign languages (English and French). Of these various local languages, three stand out for national prominence. While most developed countries are monolingual with the significant exception of Canada that is bilingual, with English and French spoken with equal degree of proficiency, most developing countries are bilingual or multilingual. This is to say that monolingualism is not the only yardstick for development. Therefore, if the French language is well repositioned and restructured, it may definitely take Nigeria to an enviable height. This paper therefore defines the concepts of language, national integration and development. It highlights the apparatus on ground to make the French Language more functional in an Anglophone Nigeria. The relevance of French to National Development is discussed, and strategies towards making it more functional for national development are pointed out in concrete terms.

Keywords: Language, national integration, national development.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Concepts of Language, National Integration and Development

Language is a means of arbitrary vocal symbols used for inter-human communication. It is globally accepted as the most effective instrument by man as he attempts to interpret phenomena he encounters in his daily life activities. It permeates our thoughts, mediates our relations with others and even creeps into our dreams. We begin our education in life with language, hence, there is a symbiotic relationship between language and education (Bamisaye, 1997:22)

National integration and development means gradual advancement of every aspect of national life of citizens of a nation. It is an improvement or growth through progressive changes in the body polity of the nation and in the life of the individuals that make up the nation. Nigeria is a nation with a population of over 140 million people with 250 ethnic groups speaking three major national languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (Census, 2006).

Unfortunately, Nigerian society places much emphasis on sciences and technology to the detriment of languages. Many people see the study of any of the three indigenous languages as the last resort when there is no other alternative. It is generally believed that the study of any discipline, like Medicine, Engineering and Computer Science, is not only more rigorous but also more prestigiously promising than the study of any of the languages which are reserved for the dull and unintelligent ones. Hence, many people still believe that language has little or no contribution towards national integration and development. Erasing this erroneous impression from the mindset of the average Nigerian is the focus of this paper.

2.0 Basic Apparatuses on Ground to Make the French Language Functional in Nigeria

For the sake of this paper, the scientific term "apparatus" is defined according to The new Webster's Dictionary of the English Language as "a complex administrative organization". This section of the paper seeks to create awareness of the existence of these specialized administrative organizations in Nigeria.

2.1 Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD)

This is an international education and cultural organization of the French Embassy. Its headquarters is in Jos, Plateau State, with zonal offices in the six geo-linguistics zones in Nigeria. It performs the following functions:

- ❖ Training and retraining of French teachers at all levels, both within and outside Nigeria.
- ❖ Award of scholarship to teachers and students of French alike for a fixed period in France.
- ❖ Organization of conferences and seminars to promote teaching and learning of French.
- ❖ Technical aids and partnership with Nigeria Government on issues affecting the French Language and Technology.
- ❖ Provision of teaching materials for individuals and institutions across the country.
- ❖ Provision of employment opportunity for Nigerians.

2.2 Alliance Francaise:

This is another educational organ of the French Embassy in Nigeria. It has its headquarters in Lagos with

branches in almost all the state capitals and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. Some of its functions are:

- ❖ Teaching of the French Language and culture at affordable cost.
- ❖ Advising the French Embassy on the needs of learners and techniques to adopt.
- ❖ Serving as a liaison organ between the French Embassy and the Nigerian populace.
- ❖ Provision of books and other relevant pedagogical aids for individuals and institutions for promotion of teaching and learning of French as a foreign language.
- ❖ Creation of job opportunity for the Nigerian Nations employed by the organ.

2.3 Nigeria French Language Village (NFLV)

The Nigeria French Village located at Ajar, Badagry, in Lagos State, is an Inter-University Centre for French Teaching (ICFT). It was established in 1990 by the Federal Government as an alternative centre to France or francophone countries where students of French must compulsorily spend their Year Abroad Programme. As an alternative centre, experts are; employed from France, from the neighboring francophone countries, as well as from Nigeria to carry out both curricular activities which under normal circumstances, should have taken place either in France or in any other recognized francophone environment. Its functions include:

- ❖ Preparation of French students in Colleges of Education and Universities for their final year studies in French.
- ❖ It serves as rendezvous for students and teachers of French for brainstorming on how best to improve on their methods and techniques of teaching.
- ❖ It organizes excursions, field trips and pique-niques for students and adults who can afford them.
- ❖ Another major function of the centre is the promotion of cultural and technical services among specialized individuals and corporate bodies. Under the scheme tagged "French for Special Purposes (FSP)", interested lawyers, medical doctors, engineers, scientists, evangelists, and the like trained in French with a view to enhancing cultural and technological transfer between Nigeria and France.
- ❖ Lastly, the centre creates job opportunity for its numerous multinationals.

2.4. Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

All tertiary institutions in Nigeria, with significant exception of few, have well-equipped Department of French, Foreign Languages Department or Department of European Studies with the sole objective of inculcating French Language education and cultural values into the lives of their students. In spite of government's poor funding of tertiary education, most of these Departments still strive to improve on their standard. Their functions are:

- ❖ Admission of students (Nigerian and Foreign) into the Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E) and other university degrees (Bachelor, Master and Doctoral).
- ❖ Teaching of non-francophone students to become proficient and competent in French Language education.
- ❖ Organizations of Year Abroad Programme for students to enable them have face-to-face interaction with native speakers of French, either at the French Language Village, Badagry, or outside Nigeria.
- ❖ They are traditionally and statutorily established to carry out pedagogical activities as well as evaluating students both in learning and character in view of ascertaining qualification of such students into various degrees.

2.5 Tertiary Institution Accredited Commissions

Two tertiary institutions accredited commissions stand out for national prominence in Nigeria as far as French Language Education is concerned. They are: National University Commission (NUC) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). The National University Commission (NUC) is the regulatory body for all federal, state and private owned universities, while the NCCE regulates the activities of federal, state and private owned colleges of education. They carry out the following functions:

- ❖ Granting license for establishment of new tertiary institutions after a thorough assessment of the existing infrastructures, documents and personnel qualification.
- ❖ Accreditation and re-accreditation of programmes being mounted by the institutions every five years in order to ascertain their compliance with the international standard.
- ❖ Formulation of policies guiding the activities of the institutions to ensure a degree of uniformity across all tertiary institutions in the country.

Apart from the above-mentioned bodies, other organs exist in the Ministries of Education, UNESCO and national examination bodies, such as: Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB), Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) and National Examination Commission (NECO). They are all stakeholders in promoting French Language education in Nigeria.

3.0 Relevance of French to National Integration and Development in Nigeria

France occupies the fourth position among the technologically advanced countries of the world. She is not

leaving any stone unturned in ensuring the propagation of her language and, by implication, her technology. Some French companies, through their educational policies that are based on French educational system, have been able to contribute significant and meaningfully to the development of Nigerian technological advancement. France also founded Peugeot in 1792 with the aim of producing Peugeot automobile vehicles of high durability. Nigeria has tremendously benefited from this invention. Renault and Citroen are also products of French automobile advancement in technology.

Furthermore, French Government, through its embassy in Nigeria has been able to provide scholarships in so many fields so as to contribute to the various fields of technology in Nigeria. *The National Concord* (1981:4), quoted by Babalola (2004), maintains that:

In 1990, the French Government provided more than 200
Scholarships in the fields of Geology, Medicine, Agriculture,
Management, Education, Public Administration, etc.

Apart from the above, France is a key partner in the petroleum multinational companies, such as TOTAL, CHEVRON, and the like in Nigeria. With the aid of her foreign technologists and engineers, indigenous staff, employers have been adequately assisted and well trained.

There is no gainsaying the fact that French Language teaching and learning in Nigeria had further strengthened the economic and political ties between the two countries. This economic interaction ensures not only financial benefits, but also cultural benefits. French companies, such as Dumez, SOCA or CFAO, have heavily invested in Nigeria and have thereby contributed to the national development for quite a long time as a result of their technology of communication. *The National Concord*, (1981:4) posits that:

The agreement signed between the Centre for Management
Development (CMD) and the French Foundation for Management
Education (FNEGE) will enable to executives of the Nigeria public sector
to participate in seminars organized in France by the Institut Supérieur
des Sciences Economiques et Commerciales (ISSEC)

In the area of education, France is aware of the fact that uneducated citizens are liabilities to the nation and that education is a better safeguard for liberty than a standing army. Nigeria has, therefore, obtained a lot of inspiration from the French educational system. In fact, the likes of Victor Cousin, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot Jean Paul Satre, and Descartes in the area of comparative education have positively impacted on the learning and implementation of educational policies in Nigeria.

French Language teaching is no longer limited to the acquisition of linguistics competence alone, but rather, it has extended to profound knowledge of arts, culture and civilization. Awareness has been created; cross-fertilization of cultural and philosophical has also been established. For instance, so many works of arts have been translated from French into English and Yoruba and vice-versa.

L'Enfant Noir of Camara Layé has been translated into *African Child*; Xala of Sembène Ousmane is translated into Mágùn; *L'Antigone* of Jean Anouilh has been translated as *The Gods Are not to Blame*. Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* has been translated into *Le Lion et la Perle*; Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole* has been translated into *Le Preux dans la Forêt infestée de Démons*.

Thus, through the teaching of French, cultural and artistic heritage of France and some francophone countries like Canada and Belgium has been transferred to Nigeria not only for learning purpose but also for national integration and development.

4.0 Towards Making French Language more Functional for National Integration and Development

In order to make the French Language more functional integration and development, certain measures focused at improvement at improving its teaching and learning, both in quality and in quantity, have to be put in place.

Self-Reliance Focused Curriculum

If French Language Education is effectively and objectively sustained in the school curriculum and in strict compliance with national objective of education, evidently, it will nourish and perpetuate societal ideas which will take Nigeria to the pedestal of national development. The curriculum referred to here is the type designed by those who are really concerned in its implementation and not the few opportunistic novice or elites, who, in the real sense of it, know or have nothing to do with education, but who, by fraudulent means and political exigencies, passed through the back doors and fixed themselves among educational policy-makers.

This curriculum should not lay emphasis on micro-linguistics like Phonetics and phonology, Morphology, Syntax and Semantics alone, but also on Macro-linguistics like Sociolinguistics, Computational Linguistics, Mathematical Linguistics, Forensic Linguistics and Applied Linguistics to compete with the modern development of this technological world which Nigeria so much desires for the realization of national integration, as well as the Vision 20-20-20.

4.2 Phobia Control and Management

A general dictionary is not a safe of scholarly instrument of conceptual clarifications.

Morbid or pathological fear and dislike: aversion. According to Webster's, All-in-one dictionary and Thesaurus phobia is defined as "an irrational persistent fear or dread" This is the exhibition of behaviours that are capable of negatively affecting acquisition of linguistics instructions by "debutante" of foreign language including French, Portuguese, German and Arabic as a result of types of fear which Oyawale (2007:68) lists as follows:

- Francophone phobia:- Fear of French Language learning
- Neophobia:- Fear of anything new
- Logo phobia/verbophobia:- Fear of words
- Glosso phobia:- Fear of speaking in public
- Geloto phobia/Katagelo phobia:- Fear of ridicule
- Atychi phobia:- Fear of failure

Being a foreign language which most Anglophone learners come in contact with for the first time at secondary and tertiary institutions, these different types of fear grip them and, in fact, it is major factor that determines linguistic competence of learners. As suggested by Oyawale (2007:68), it calls for special resolution oriented strategies based on thorough grounding in behavior therapy.

4.3 Improved Methodology

Various studies, including Bouton (1969), Hymes (1972), Moiramo (1991), Busson (1996))) and Fancwlli (1996:1998), have established the efficacy of "Methode Communicative" over the so-called traditional method" because it lays emphasis on making learners speak the languages at different levels and occasions. We must quickly add here, however, that "Bain Linguistics and "Méthode Audio-Visuelle" are best combined. The fusion of the three methods will bring about rapid, easy and natural learning of the French Language, thereby making national integration and development, as well as the Vision 20-20-20, a reality.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper has examined the concepts of language and national integration and development. It has equally assessed the various apparatuses on ground to make French Language Studies in Nigeria a reality. The relevance of the French Language to national integration and development in Nigeria was also discussed with special interest in technology and education. Improving the quality and quantity of French Language education delivery was the focus of the last segment of the paper.

We want to conclude then by saying that what is worth doing at all is worth doing well. When the chips are down on the unquestionable issue of national integration and development, we all know that what matters is not the wealth accumulated or the elevated positions held, but it is integrity coupled with contributions to the well-being of man in his society which education stands for.

Frankly speaking, the French Language Village, Badagry, has almost abandoned the objectives for which it was established. It now delves in to other areas of money-making ventures instead of concentrating on building the language competence of Nigerian Students. Government should therefore hold the bull by the horn in sending French French Students outside the country at a subsidized rate. It is a common knowledge that the few Professors of French remaining in our tertiary institutions in Nigeria today all had their Year Abroad Programme (one full year) either in France or Senegal with full financial and diplomatic complements.

Career opportunity is another solution to serve as incentive to French learners. Government should ensure that square pegs are not put into round holes. This can be done by employing many French graduates into the foreign services of this country. Nigeria Embassy in all francophone countries must be filled with French graduates for effective service delivery, interaction, communication and diplomatic relationship. If all these are looked into, the millennium aspiration of national integration and development and of course the vision 20-20-20 in Nigeria will be realized.

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