

An Investigation into Acceptability of French as the Second Official Language in Nigeria: A Case Study of Ansar-ud-Deen High School in Saki-West Local Government Area of Oyo State

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ABSTRACT

The paper investigated the attitude of Nigerians towards the status of French language as teaching subject and its acceptability as the second official language in the country. A secondary school was selected in Saki-West Local Government Area of Oyo State. Fifty teachers from different levels with different discipline were selected. The study also revealed that Nigerians were interested in making the language as the second official Language in the country. It also revealed that no adequate preparedness had been made in making it a success. The schools and the colleges which were supposed to be the centres of publicity did not have anything to show for it. It also revealed that out of twenty (20) statement which were about the significance of the language scored 80% of total number of the respondents while the remaining ones scored 20% of the respondents. It also revealed that the Federal and State governments had to do much to improve on the status of the language if surely they want the country to be a bilingual.

Keywords: French language, second official language, secondary school subject

INTRODUCTION

In the world of today, French language plays a vital role in all human sectors apart from English language in Nigeria. French language is an international language spoken in all francophone countries, as official language and in French countries as national language (Wale 2000:36). It is originated from Latin and was introduced and imposed on French people in all their daily activities after 1789 revolution as symbol of unity (Wale, 2000:37).

However, of all foreign languages in Nigeria, apart from English, French enjoys the highest prestige and was introduced into the educational system after phasing out Latin from the curriculum because of the effort of the French Government (Emordi, 2000) cited Omolewa (1971:399) has this to say:

French and German were among the earliest subjects introduced into Nigerian secondary schools as from 1859 when the first secondary (The Church missionary Society Grammar School) was founded in Lagos.

French language education is one of the most important areas where attention is needed for the balanced diplomatic conscience and socio-economic growth of a nation that aims at being virile and progressive especially during the world economic crisis. It is generally accepted that learning of foreign language like French, it will tremendously contribute to the socio-political, educational development and total cultural physiognomy of individual.

As a country, Nigeria is completely surrounded by French speaking countries in the world; in the north she is bordered by the Republic of Niger, Chad and Cameroon while in the West by the Republics of Benin and Togo and Cote d'Ivoire in the South (Lynn 2003:29) French

language also plays crucial role in the language of administration of law, international press, commerce and political unity of the world which gives birth to international organisations like *francophonie*, African Union, UNO – United nations Organisation, *L'Union Economique Monetaire d'Afrique de l'Ouest*.

French, is therefore, a necessary ingredient for improvement of Nigerian Educational system in order to improve her social interaction with her neighbouring states. This was one of the reasons why General Sanni Abacha Led Federal Government says as soon as possible French would be one of the official languages in Nigeria in 1994 Aliyu (2006:29). As English language teaching and learning has been made compulsory, French should be given that status because its relevance in the polity of Nations as well as its significance in the academic domains. French Government should also encourage the Federal Government of Nigeria to implement the agreement signed during the Burkina-Fasso summit – *La Francophonie* in 1994. In Africa, for instance Equatorial Guinea in 1997 declared French as their official language along Spanish as Cape Verde and Saotome are also members of *La Francophonie*.

Consequently, French is getting more popular everyday. There should not be any reason why the Federal Government of Nigeria should not declare French as a second official language before it is too late. Bilingualism has been the order of the day. No country will survive in isolation. Today Cameroon is doing fine in two languages.

According to Banjo (1991) apart from the English language, French is only language spoken in five (5) continents in the world; he further stated that French has been the official language in many countries of these continents along with English language. Today in the world of job security, the fluency in both languages is an added advantage to any job seeker. In fact, France is one of major destinations of the whole world; approximately sixty (60) millions tourists visit France in a year (C.F.T.D. 2009). This improves a lot the purse of French Government. Even, Britain, the closest European neighbour of France, has larger percentage of her population who can speak French fluently because of its role as means of instrument in many professional domains such as Technology, Science and Education etc.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There is a serious concern about the attitude of Nigerian towards the acceptability of French language as the second official language in the country. And only its teaching and learning can make it popular for the adoption.

Sample Design

Ansar-ud-Deen High school which is situated in Saki in Saki-West Local Government Area of Oyo west where fifty teachers (50) with different discipline were randomly picked as sample population.

Instrumentation

An aptitude questionnaire was developed to obtain the requisite information. Section A sought to obtain the demographic data such as gender, age, academic attainment and discipline. Section B was a 20 item multiple device test designed to measure their position and understanding on the concept of acceptability of the issue in question. The instrument had been used by Amosun (1999) and its reliability and validity had been established.

Procedure

The validated questionnaire was admitted to the sample teachers in the respective offices by the investigator. These were filled and collected on the spot. The sample teachers were

allowed to discuss, to ask questions on item they found difficult to comprehend from the investigator. The investigator, then, took his time to explain it better to them.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

From the above data collected from the field, the following analysis of the results was made. This would help in providing valid answers to the research questions.

Table 1. Distribution on Teachers' Sex

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Male	20	40
Female	30	60
<i>Total</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>100</i>

The above table shows the sex distribution of the respondents indicates that twenty (20) of them were male representing 40% while remaining thirty (30) respondents which was 60% fall into female category. This implies that the majority of teachers were female. That the school had more female teachers than male ones.

Table 2. Distribution of Teacher according to their age

<i>Age</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
25-29	4	10	14	28
30-39	10	12	22	44
40-49	6	-	6	12
50 years and above	-	8	8	16
<i>Total</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>100</i>

Table 2: shows that fourteen (14) of the teachers representing 28% were between the age 25-29 years. Out of fourteen teachers, four are male teachers while ten are female teachers. It is also understood from the table that those who were between the age 30-29 years were ten (10) male and twelve (12) female representing 44% of the respondents. Those who were between the age 40-49 years were six (6) male representing 12% and no female teacher while those who were fifty years and above were only eight (8) female teachers representing 16% of total number of respondents.

The implication of sex distribution is that teaching workforce of the school was high and effective because majority of the teachers fell between the ages of 25-49 years representing 84%.

Table 3. Qualification of the Respondents

<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
M.A, M.Ed. M.Sc.	3	6
B.A., B.Sc., B.Ed.	26	52
H.N.D.	7	14
N.C.E.	12	24
O.N.D.	2	4
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>100</i>

Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents were degree holders which were 29 out of 50 representing 58%. It implies that the level of their academic attainment would help them to take appropriate decision on the research questionnaire which the investigator believed that it would help the county to move forward politically, socially and economically.

Table 4. Respondents Teaching Experience

<i>Years</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
1-5	08	16
6-10	06	12
11-15	13	26
16-20	15	30
21 and above	8	16
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>100</i>

Table 4 also shows that thirty-four 34 out of fifty (50) respondents had more than ten (10) years of experience representing 68%. It indicates that they were well exposed to understand better what the topic in question was about. It also implies that their exposure was an added advantage to take decision on the betterment of the country academic.

Table 5. Respondents according to their discipline

<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
French	3	6
English	15	30
Arabic	7	14
Government	5	10
Economics	5	10
Geography	4	8
Computer Science	5	10
Intro-Technology	6	12
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>100</i>

Table 5 above shows that the respondents were selected from different academic disciplines. The English teachers had the highest number of the respondents which was fifteen (15) representing 30% while French had three (3) the smallest number representing 6%.

Table 6. Percentage distribution of teachers' attitude responses to acceptability of French as second official language

S/N	STATEMENT	Y	%	N	%	NE	%	TOTAL
1.	Do you like French language as Nigerian?	37	74	10	20	3	6	50
2.	Do you want French to be compulsory subject in Nigerian educational system?	22	44	20	52	2	4	50
3.	Do you want French to be the second official language in Nigeria?	38	74	7	14	5	10	50
4.	Can French help Nigerian locally and internationally after its adoption?	40	80	4	8	6	12	50
5.	Can French language help our educational system in Nigeria?	32	64	16	32	2	4	50
6.	Can Nigeria French language village promote the fluency of the language?	38	76	12	24	-	-	50
7.	Do you learn French for communication?	26	52	21	42	3	6	50
8.	French should be taught only in secondary schools in Nigeria.	36	72	14	28	-	-	50
9.	French language will promote our economy if adopted as the second official language in the country.	42	84	08	16	-	-	50
10.	For better interaction, Nigeria needs French language.	42	84	06	12	2	4	50
11.	French should be taught at all educational levels.	40	80	7	14	3	6	50
12.	French helps to improve the principle of bilingualism in a country.	48	96	-	-	2	4	50
13.	Can French promote international friendship if adopted as second official language in Nigeria?	41	82	9	18	-	-	50
14.	By making French as the second official language in Nigeria, France will come to the assistance of Nigeria.	24	48	26	52	-	-	50
15.	After its adoption, Nigeria will be better placed to fight her international interests and requests.	39	78	11	22	-	-	50
16.	French should be taught only at university level	11	22	30	60	9	18	50
17.	Do you want it to be learnt at primary schools?	26	52	24	48	-	-	50
18.	Does the country need French before economy improves?	27	54	23	46	-	-	50
19.	Have you been learning French?	24	48	26	52	-	-	50
20.	By making French as the second official language, the socio-political and cultural situation of Nigerians will improve.	28	54	22	44	-	-	50

Key: Y = Yes, N = No, NE = Neutral

Table 5 shows that out of twenty (20) statements which had to do with the relevance and role of French language in Nigeria were sixteen (16) that scored over 50% representing 92% of

total number of respondents while the remaining four (4) statements scored less than 50% representing 8% of the total number of the respondents.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been argued that all human languages of have their own function to play for the betterment of human race. According to Oluwole (2001:4), languages differ in ten (10) functions and the degree of use in function allotted to different language varies from scholar to scholar. He, therefore, recognises seven (7) functions in a country namely group function, official, languages of wider communication, education, religious, international and school subject. In Nigeria of today, a country which has more than three hundred and fifty (350) local indigenous languages (Ayo, 2001:153), English only is not enough to communicate or to transact business or to interact with other countries because French and English are the most acceptable two (2) languages used during the conferences or meetings of international organisations as mentioned above.

Therefore, French as international language will add more ingredients into linguistic function of English in Nigeria so as to give birth to principle of bilingualism. If Nigeria becomes a bilingual country, she will be able to stand in the comity of international friends and fight for her rights and interests in all domains.

From the above findings, the Federal Government of Nigeria should stop paying lip service to the adoption of French as second official language in Nigeria as agreed by General Sanni Abacha Led Federal Government of Nigeria in 1994. No country can develop in isolation. And the Nigerian educational system should be restructured in such way that it would accommodate this new linguistic status of the country after its implementation.

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