

Harnessing French Language Lucrativeness for National Unity

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Abstract

The enormous roles that French Language plays in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized considering its contribution towards meeting the geographical, economic, diplomatic and educational as well as the research needs of the nation, it is therefore imperative that adequate attention and priority be accorded the teaching and learning of French Language in Nigeria. This paper therefore is set to discuss language education generally. It examines French Language Education and National Unity in particular. It also highlights the relevance of French Language education to national unity in Nigeria. Finally, this paper proffers suggestions on how French language education can promote national unity which includes: Engaging a nationwide awareness campaign by the Nigerian's government on the benefit of learning French Language. More so, making the teaching of French language compulsory by the government should be encouraged in schools at all levels. The paper concluded that, the ability to speak French is a great advantage in the international job market and as such, it opens doors to French companies and also increases one's career opportunities and perceptions for foreign languages like French.

Keywords: French Language, Education, National Unity.

Introduction

Language impacts the daily lives of members of any race, creed and region of the world around us. Words gestures and tone are utilized in union to portray a broad spectrum of emotions. The unique and diverse methods human beings can use to communicate through written and spoken language is a large part of what allows us to harness our innate ability to form lasting bonds with one another, separating mankind from the rest of the animal kingdom. The importance of communication is often overlooked. Despite our great prowess, misunderstandings and mistranslations are in communication, misunderstandings and mistranslations are common phenomena. It is arrogant to travel the world and expect all of mankind to understand his or her native tongue.

According to Alabi and Ahmed (2018), language offers opportunities for man to communicate his feelings, opinions with fellow beings and at the same time, enables him to learn new ideas and information from them. In the course of interacting with other people, he acquaints himself with new ideas and information available within his environment. It is the vehicle of communicating both individual and collective norms of the society. It embodies peoples' culture and their societal values. When people are deprived of the use of their language, they lose their self-identity. If it is well harnessed, language promotes national unity and development. However, if it is not well managed, breeds the negative sentiments of animosity and rivalry within a country. Additionally, the ability to communicate in multiple languages is becoming more and more important in the increasingly integrated global business community. Communicating directly with new clients and companies in their native language is one of the first steps to finding a lasting, and stable international business relationship. Being able to do this automatically puts any multilingual person miles ahead of his or her peers in the competition for jobs and highly prestigious position.

According to Balogun (2017), there is no argument or denial of the fact that language is the only means by which humans communicate to express their feelings, their desires, their hopes and so on among themselves. As a means of communication, Adekola (2010) considers language to be an indispensable tool in humans' possession which “enables them to coordinate work, exchange ideas, express feelings, think, play and reflect their experiences”. Humans, being what they are, are insatiable in their quests for information about something or understanding a particular skill or subjects) and these can be achieved through the use of language(s). In reality constituting a crucial advantage to human language performs multifarious functions in human life.

Definition of Concepts

Language

Language is a system of conventional spoken, manual or written symbols by means of which human beings as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression and emotional release. Ebohon and Hounvenou (2018) define Language as a system of symbols designed for communication. It is a human involvement that distinguishes him from animals. Whatever Man

does, language plays an important role (Junaidu, 2007). Language, the divine benevolence to man is so inexorably tied to the effective existence of man in the society that any meaningful discussion of man must begin with it. It steers the course of and ends discussion. The end and the purpose of language is the enhancement of communication. Olaoye (2007) however states that language is a distinctively human system of communication, based on oral and written symbols. It is a pan-human development, a behavioural aspect of human beings which serves as a point of differentiation from animals.

Language is the means that enables man to transcend his physical existence. It transfers to him thoughts and he is capable of recording and preserving through these thoughts honestly. Shantali (2014), believes that language did not exist as a social reality and stronger bond to individual and group as it does at the present time in its clearest images, except when the human society reaches a stage of language acquisition, unless they have been prepared to do so. Although the instinct to acquire and speak any language is arbitrary. The predisposition and the availability of a language system and a competence, emanating from the application of this predisposition to the language system, over a period of time through the manipulation of the physical element such as sounds and words which are formal grammatical rules both of which a child permeates with meaning. Ayegbola (2014) submits that, language is the medium within which the totality of human knowledge is coded. Every person in the society or in the world is involved in some form of language usage (communication) and must be able to use language effectively to send and receive messages. Words are the major tools of language and they must be chosen carefully to express the intended meaning.

French Language

Ademola (2018) defined French language as the national language of France as one of the European countries. By virtue of colonization, all African francophone countries inherited it as their official language and lingua franca. Ugbijeh and Hounvenou (2018) describe French language as language of love, culture and enlightenment. They posit that French language is derived from Latin and spoken by over 200 million people globally.

Undoubtedly, French language is the only language other than English that is spoken either as a native language or as a first official language in the five (5) continents of the world. This is probably because colonial France took control of parts of Africa, the Caribbean and other parts of the world in the 18th and 19th centuries. One significant assimilation by the recipients and the subjects.

French is a romance language spoken by millions of people, it is the third most spoken language in Europe after German and English, and is also spoken in parts of Africa, North America, South America, Asia and Oceania. It is an official language in so many countries like: Benin, Cameroon, Canada, Belgium etc. French was widely used as a diplomatic language from the 17th century until the middle of the 20th/century, when English replaced it in that role it is still used in many international organizations, such as NATO, the UN, EU institutions, and the world trade organization.

Ojelade (1999) posits that the knowledge of French language can easily integrate Nigerians into a global economic future, because most of the international jobs that require news and adverts are often made in international languages such as French. This enables one to be updated in world news. All these have

shown the relevance and need of French language in Nigeria. Moreover, if Nigeria as a nation must assume the role of leadership in Africa and to exercise our sovereignty in all spheres of life, we must be fluent, effective, and proficient in the two most dominant languages in Africa (Onyemelukwe, 2014).

Ugbijeh (2018) observes that globalization has made it easier for everyone to do business anywhere in the world without problems. There is no business without language and French language is one of the languages in the world in terms of business, medicine, technology, science, security, computer, art and culture among others. Therefore, Nigeria needs to incorporate French language in order to meet up with the growing challenges of globalization. Inyang (2010) · opined that with the cooperation of French government, French centers such as Center for Teaching and Documentation (CFTD), Alliance Francaise, Pilot schools and the Nigeria French projects were established to promote the study of the language.

Similarly, regional cooperation is also very important to avoid crisis and sometimes to resolve border disputes, conflicts, trans-border smuggling and other crimes. This cannot be achieved without bilateral relations between the affected countries. It will be a problem if both parties to discuss do not understand each other as a result of language barrier. This can lead to disintegration and complication of issues. For instance, Nigeria peacefully resolved and conceded some of its land around Bakasi area to Cameroon because both parties understood each other, peace keeping mission and conflict resolutions become more problematic and regional cooperation becomes truncated without the knowledge of French language (Obi and Agbagbatu, 2010).

Education

Education is the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Educational methods include storytelling, discussion, teaching, training and directed research. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators and learners may also educate themselves. Education can take place in formal and informal settings, and any experience that had a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. The methodology of teaching is called pedagogy.

Ademola, (2017) defines education as the transfer of knowledge from one person to another thereby awakening his consciousness not only towards his own rights but also towards the rights of others in the society. Therefore, such acquired knowledge usually helps an individual to fight for the so-called rights at any given time. Education is all-inclusive as age and gender are no barriers to it. Education could be formal, non-formal or informal. Seeing it from the general perspective, Ebohon, Ugbijeh and Ademola (2017:9) consider education as one of the means of passing wisdom, experiences, achievement and other activities of the past generations to the young ones. It entails imparting the necessary skills, ideas and values into an individual to enable him to be useful to himself and contribute meaningfully to the development of his society.

French Language Education

Ugbijeh (2013) defines language education as the acquisition of specific knowledge, skills and other capabilities in language, either foreign or second language, in a formal educational institution. Language as earlier defined as a system of conventional spoken, manual or written symbols by means of which human beings as members of a social group and participants in their culture express themselves. Egwutuoha, (2015) cited in Ademola (2017) defines language education as the process of teaching and learning a language. From the aforementioned definitions, language education is seen as the teaching and learning of language in an organized environment.

According to Maduewesi and Ezeife (2016), language education refers to the process and practice of acquiring a second or foreign language. In the same view, Aliyu (2010) cited in Ugbijeh (2016) sees language education as the process of training and developing the linguistics abilities of an individual in either the first or the second language situation or a means through which an individual can have a firm understanding of various forms of particular language usage. Going by the foregoing definition, one can easily deduce That French language education is a process and practice of acquiring or learning French language. Learning French entails the process of developing the awareness of the French world. While learning language, there are four competences to be acquired. These include oral comprehension, written comprehension, oral expression and written expression.

Ugbijeh (2016) posits that the study of French as a foreign language result in widening individual horizon, social and intellectual outlook; it enhances curiosity and creativity. Furthermore, he asserts that it provides learner the opportunity to develop sensitivity towards cultural dynamics and enable them understand the way in which language and culture interlock. Ademola (2018) posits that the teaching and learning of French language at the basic level of education in Nigeria cannot be easy without relevant books and instructional materials. It is well-known that language is naturally not only an element of culture but also serve as a tool towards making other areas of culture such as music, mode of dressing, gastronomy, sport etc. As a matter of fact, teachers need authentic materials, relevant books and teaching aids at their disposal in other to expand ideas for easy delivery of lessons.

Furthermore, for effective and learning of French language education, the general welfare of teachers must be the ultimate concern of government at all levels, thereby adequate funds should be released to see to the comfort of teachers in terms of regular payment of salary and increment of salary to boost the teacher's morale to perform their duty optimally and professionally. Additionally, at basic education level, intelligent pupils and students of promising brilliance, especially those from indigent homes, need to be encouraged via regular provision of bursary and scholarship by government at all levels and individual philanthropists as well.

Lastly, the learning of French language offers access to the works of great French writers such as Victor Hugo or Marcel Proust and famous poets like Charles Baudelaire or Jacques Pervert, in the original text. It serves as mechanism for learning new way of perceiving and understanding reality it explains learner's vision of the world and their personal insight into the varieties of human conduct and communities. According to Ishyaku (1999) cited in Fabiyi (2016) the most important of aims of

learning French language in Nigeria is to facilitate communication without French speaking neighbours. If this is achieved, our economic, social and political links with all the French speaking countries of the world would be enhanced. This is because natural intelligibility is the greatest instrument of endearment amongst people that are trapped in the biblical tower of “Babel” (Omoniwa, 2018).

National Unity

National unity has been described as peaceful co-existence of the federating units that makes the entity called Nigeria (Nwonyeh, 2016) cited in Ugbijeh, (2018) argues that Nigeria's professed that unity has suffered multiple jolts since independence. She asserts that there has been ethnic district and religious of social anomalies such as nepotism, marginalization and power advocate. According to Ejiofor (2012) the inability of successive governments to assuage the various federating units, the feeling of injustice and threat have exacerbated the fear of domination, marginalization and insecurity which consequently have eroded whatever iota of unity that may have existed. Furthermore, he asserts that unity and nationhood foundation has never have laid and all that there is, is a mere deception of our entire history.

The evidence of disunity in Nigeria has been proven by the recent mayhem in some parts of this country manifested through a number of ethno-religious and political conflicts that have not only led to loss of thousands of lives and millions of property, but have badly shaken the fate of Nigeria's co-operate existence (Ugbijeh, 2018).

Importance of National Unity

- People respect the faith of one another.
- Minority communities and immigrant communities respect the faith of majority of origin.
- It strengthens a nation.
- It brings about the development of the nation.
- It helps the government of the nation to understand the people's need and choices.
- It brings about safety in a nation.
- National unity and integration encourages people to share ideas, values and emotional bonds.

Relevance of French Language Education in National Unity

The study of French as a foreign language results in widening individual horizon, social and intellectual outlook. It enhances curiosity and creativity. Furthermore, he asserts learners the opportunity to develop sensitivity that is; it provides learners the opportunity towards cultural dynamics and enables them understand the way in which language and culture interlock. In addition, the study of French language serves as mechanism for learning new way of perceiving and understanding reality. It expands learner's

vision of the world and their personal insight into the varieties of human conduct and communities. Moreover, the acquisition of French language just like English is a vital tool for mass mobilization and propaganda. It has great potentials for educating the citizens on the application of the rule of law for effective leadership and good governance. One of the pre-requisite for national unity is a social harmony and cohesion (Ugbijeh, 2018). None of the Nigerian national languages will meet this pre-requisite effectively without-rousing suspicion from other nationals taking cognizance entity called Nigeria is foreign language.

The acquisition and the ability to use a language is one of the most impressive process of learning that an individual achieves during the course of his lifetime. How essential would this be if this language will be French language in this our present circumstances in Nigeria where we don't understand one another. This type of acquisition goes a long way to facilitate national unity. The ability to speak French as an advantage for securing a job with the many multinational companies using French as their working language, in a wide range of sectors (retailing, automotive, luxury, goods, aeronautics etc.) it is a great privileged to hear the voices of actors Alain Delon or Juliette Binoche, and the pleasure of being able to understand the words of French songs sung by Edith Piaf or Charles Aznavour and even sing them yourself. French language offers insights into French culture, mentality and way of life.

To sum up, French is the language of the universal ideals advocated by the philosophers of the 18th century enlightenment, who helped to spread the idea of human rights throughout the world. In essence, French language is very important because it is both a working language and an official language of the United nations, the European Union, UNESCO, NATO among others, and it is an analytical language that structure thoughts and develops critical thinking. It is the language of great philosophers such as Escarte, Sartre and Derrida among others.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to highlight the importance of teaching and learning of French language education at all levels as language plays a vital role in national unity in times of communication among each other. It has also made it known that the current educational policy on French language education at middle and upper basic levels of education is not yet realistic in Nigerian public schools, Therefore, French language should be made compulsory virtually in all public primary and secondary schools in the country. This paper also appeals to government at all levels and all other stakeholders to generously fund French language education at all levels of education in Nigeria.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions should be considered as measures for advancing the progress of Nigeria:

- There should be proper education and re-orientation of Nigerians on the need to encourage the learning of French language at all levels and across disciplines.

- Having realized the importance and relevance of laboratory in the teaching and learning of French and other languages, especially at basic education level. It is suggested that government should endeavour to construct modern laboratory in all its public primary and secondary schools across the country to enhance the teaching and learning of French language.
- Good and reasoning financial remuneration remains a catalyst for job satisfaction among workers without exemption to teachers to ensure efficiency in service delivery.
- Although, basic education in Nigeria has been declared free and compulsory by the government, brilliant pupils and students at various levels in French language education who are of poor parents still need financial succor to enable them cater for other basic necessities of life such as feeding and shelter. In order to avoid any form of psychological trauma that could disrupt their activities in the class. This paper therefore suggests the government and various political office holders like, presidential, chairman of local governments etc. to discharge their duties in providing scholarship for the indigent pupils/students.
- French language should be made compulsory up to senior secondary school level in order to sustain its learning progression.

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