

**AFRICAN SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL
FACULTY OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
IMO STATE UNIVERSITY
NIGERIA**

VOL. 8 NO. 1 MARCH 2019

FRENCH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA: FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE LABOUR MARKET

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Abstract

In 1996, the Nigerian government declared French as the country's second official language. From legal and policy view points, the environment could not have been better for the flourishing of the language. However, classrooms in Secondary Schools and lecture halls in Universities have continued to witness diminishing student enrolment for French language programmes. Many researchers have adduced as many reasons for this decline of interest in French language by students and parents in spite of the favourable policy environment. But one striking reason peddled is that which attributes the declining interest in French to the lack of relevance of the language to present day Nigerian labour market. This misrepresentation further de-markets French language amongst students. This article discusses the various motivations of students for the learning of French as a foreign language in Nigeria. Concluding that the motivations are more instrumental than integrative, it further unveils abundant tapped and untapped employment and job creation opportunities for graduates who have acquired French language skills in the public, private, as well as, in the informal sectors of the Nigerian economy.

Introduction

French language is encountering conflicting fortunes in Nigeria. In 1996, a major shift in the Nigerian national language policy made French the second official language. The policy was welcomed with enthusiasm by teachers and lovers of French language and also by the French government (Igboanusi & Pütz, 2008). A flurry of bilateral agreements was entered into by Nigeria and France for the successful implementation of the policy. The French government was to supply needed instructional materials and equipment and provide training for teachers while the Nigerian government was to provide the teachers and the necessary infrastructure. French language was in the limelight!

But that was on paper, policy documents and diplomatic circles. In the classrooms and lecture halls, the mood was sombre as empty chairs and desks still stared teachers and lecturers in the face. Many teachers recalled with some nostalgia the late 1960s and 1970s when French language was the toast of many students. "(In) 1966, 2,022 candidates took French in WASC/GCE while in 1977, more than 4,000 candidates took French WASC/GCE examinations", recalls Ezeodili (2017). What then explains the subsequent situation wherein "a

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class of between thirty-five and forty students begin the learning of French in the secondary school only to thin out to 4 or 5 by the time they get to senior secondary school classes where they have to choose their examination subjects”? (Araromi, 1996 cited in Igboanus, 2008).

Researchers have advanced various reasons for the dwindling interest of Nigerian students in the study of French language (Ahmed, 1999, Igboanus et al, 2008). But the one that is at the core of the debate, and which attracts the attention of this paper, is the perceived irrelevance of French language certificate in the Nigerian labour market. “What are those jobs that await the French (language) graduate...?” asks Ezeodili. That leads one to ask what really constitutes the motivation of the Nigerian student to learn French. It is therefore the objective of this paper to discuss the broad motivation of the Nigerian French learner as well as his viable labour market opportunities. The discussion will also include economic sectors in which French language skills can be used to create sustainable small and medium-scale enterprises to generate employment and wealth. We shall adopt the descriptive approach in the course of this paper and make use of secondary sources of data and relevant available narrative texts.

Evolution of the Legal Status of French Language in Nigeria

National official languages in former colonized territories, especially in Africa, were the imposition of colonial powers. One would recall that in the educational system of the territories or countries colonized by France, the French language was taught at all levels of formal education. The situation was the same in Spanish and Portuguese colonial domains. In the British colonial territories however, the use of local languages was encouraged at the initial years of primary education while English took over at higher levels. However, there was a deliberate attempt by the British colonial powers to discourage the learning of other European languages in British controlled territories. That was in view of the stiff competition for colonial possessions. Towards that end, the “British Parliament enacted a law in 1882 interdicting the teaching of any other European language, apart from English, in British colonies” (Ade Ojo, 2006). It is therefore not surprising that as colonized territories adopted their colonial powers’ languages as lingua franca, Nigeria should settle for English.

The place of French in Nigeria should also be viewed within the context of the Constitution of the then emerging Nigerian nation and its National Policy on Education, which for good reasons, did not initially put much premium on French language. Both fundamental documents encourage the use of the mother tongues or the languages of the immediate community in pre-primary and primary school levels and the teaching of the three major Nigerian languages of Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba for national integration and English as the instructional language for secondary and tertiary education, bureaucracy, etc. However just before 1996, “selected extra exoglossic languages, especially French and Arabic, (were) admitted (as) languages of international communication and discourse” (Oreka, 2010).

As noted earlier, the National language policy experienced a major shift in favour of French in 1996 when the language was declared as the second official language of Nigeria. The 2004 edition of the National Policy on Education clearly spells out the policy status as follows:

For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be

compulsory in primary and secondary schools, but non-vocational elective at the senior secondary school (NPE, 2004).

The policy is expected to provide the appropriate environment for the rapid development of French language in Nigeria. However, some scholars express their disillusionment at the realities on the ground. For example, Ademola (2010) states:

The good intention of the Nigerian government... is highly commendable. But... after 10 years (i.e.,2006), the vision about making at least 70% of Nigerians internationally bilingual in English and French languages has not fully materialised ... despite the fact that the Nigerian government wants French to be offered as core subjects in both primary and junior secondary levels, ... many public schools still remain adamant...

Ademola's observation might have been as a result of what Ade Ojo (2006) already noted in his inaugural address. He observed that the new National Policy on Education, in spite of its special status for French language, did not constitute a magic wand. Hangovers of previous policies, practices and deficiencies were still holding back the expected dividends. He continues: "The pall of darkness and gloom under which French was vegetating (was) evident in the fact that the highest percentage of candidates offering French in SSCE between 1999 and 2004 was a mere 0.21% ... of total entries for all subjects" (Ade Ojo, 2006).

Indeed, the following analysis of the statistics of candidates that applied for admission to Nigerian universities through the JAMB, within the academic years of 2017/2018 and 2018/2019, reveals the continuing diminishing attraction French language has for Nigerian students and a further worsening of an already abysmal situation.

Table 1: 2017/2018 JAMB figures of candidates who applied for admission in each department of 5 selected Nigerian universities

| | University | Total no. of candidates | Total candidates for French | no. for English | Total no. of candidates for English |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Ahmadu Bello Univ., Zaria | 88,784 | 43 | | 712 |
| 2 | Imo state Univ., Owerri | 32,302 | 25 | | 518 |
| 3 | Obafemi Awolowo Uni., Ile-Ife | 56,546 | 39* | | 1315** |
| 4 | Univ. of Benin, Benin-City | 75,952 | 40* | | 1063** |
| 5 | Univ. of Lagos, Lagos | 60,685 | 59* | | 1360** |
| | Total | 314,269 | 206 (about 0.07%) | | 4,968 (1.58%) |

* Figures include Education French

**Figures include Education English

Source: Benteleg: JAMB Statistics of Candidates That Applied In Each Department (2017/2018) in each of the 5 universities. (Details in our references).

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Table 2: 2018/2019 JAMB figures of candidates who applied for admission in each department of 10 selected Nigerian universities

| | University | Total no. of candidates | Total no. of candidates for French | Total no. of candidates for English |
|----|---------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Ahmadu Bello Univ., Zaria | 56,301 | 25 | 443 |
| 2 | Bayero Univ., Kano | 65,264 | 16* | 1078** |
| 3 | Covenant University, Lagos | 2,578 | 1 | 18 |
| 4 | University of Calabar, Calabar | 30,426 | 18* | 733** |
| 5 | University of Lagos, Lagos | 60,688 | 59* | 1360** |
| 6 | University of Ilorin, Ilorin | 100,359 | 56* | 1601** |
| 7 | University of Ibadan, Ibadan | 57,209 | 71* | 1471** |
| 8 | Univ. of Nigeria, Nsukka | 65,836 | 88*** | 906 |
| 9 | University of Uyo, Uyo | 40,724 | 33* | 1046** |
| 10 | Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka | 71,423 | 17* | 1328** |
| | Total | 550,808 | 384(about 0.07%) | 9,984 (1.81%) |

*Including Education French

**Including Education English

*** Including French with German and French with Russian

Sources: Figures compiled from (i) Education Nigeria (ii) myPastQuestion.com (iii) Prosper showcase. (Details are contained in our References).

Tables 1 and 2 above are eloquent in their depiction of the declining interest of Nigerian students in the study of French language in our universities. Of the total of 314,269 candidates who applied to the 5 universities to read various programmes in 2017/2018 academic year in table 1, only 206 (approximately 0.07%) applied to study French language. Table 2 is also interesting. Of the total of 550,808 candidates who applied to the selected 10 universities to read various programmes during the 2018/2019 academic session, only 384 (approximately 0.07%) applied to study French language. Thus, the observation Ade Ojo made in 2006 still remains valid in 2018: “With this development, no university can draw all its candidates from UME/JAMB and so each university has to rely on pre-degree programmes and other sources for survival” (Ade Ojo, 2006).

Researchers have wondered over the years why interest in French language has waned among students at all levels of the Nigerian educational system. Indeed, Igboanusi and Pütz (2008) quote Igbeneghu (1999) as positing that the sharp decline noted between 1980 and

1996 might not be unconnected with the abolition by the Universities of the one year abroad policy. It was a policy within which students of French spent their second year either in France or in Senegal for a total French language immersion within the academic year. But that could only be a contributing factor. There are surely other more fundamental issues. In that direction, Igboanusi and Pütz (2008) quote Araromi (1996) as follows:

We are compelled to ponder seriously on why French has not been able to make the expected appreciable impact on Nigerians after decades of studying the language. We can thus surmise that there is something wrong, and a number of factors can be identified as being responsible for the inability of French to penetrate the fabric of our national life since its inception as a discipline in our secondary school curriculum.

The 6-3-3-4 education system that made French optional at the secondary school level is readily blamed. Our wiser Francophone neighbours make the study of English language compulsory in their secondary schools. Ghana, fellow Anglophone ECOWAS member, makes the study of French compulsory in its secondary schools. On the other hand, other Francophone countries in the rest of Africa make the study of English compulsory in their secondary schools.

If the curriculum shares part of the blame, teachers to implement the curriculum, the books and equipment to be used also contribute to the difficulties besetting the study of French language in Nigerian schools. Thus, Faniran (2017) identifies the lack of teachers as one of the obstacles in the way of the successful implementation of French as the second official language in Nigeria. It is a fact that at the inception of the policy, “the French government agreed to (and did) equip schools and trained French language teachers in Nigeria and in Francophone countries as well as in France” (Igboanusi et al 2008). However, the large number of French teachers to handle the subject at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels is overwhelming; therefore the few qualified teachers seem to be spread thin. As shown in tables 1 & 2 above, the Faculties are not registering enough students who are expected to be future teachers. The necessary multiplier effect is therefore being held back.

It is therefore not surprising that there is a lack of visibility and deafening silence of French language in the Nigerian society: there are no local French newspapers, no radio or TV stations. There is nothing other than specialised journals and some bulletins of Colleges and Faculties that speak about enlistment into French language courses or programmes. There is no official Federal or State government sponsored enlightenment on the need for Nigerians to embrace international bilingualism that our new official language policy advocates. One could imagine what difference it would make with a more systematic involvement of both the print and electronic media in the propagation of French language in Nigeria.

Some scholars express concerns about the attitude of Nigerians to French language as a major obstacle to the realisation of the objective of making French language a second official national language. Faniran (2017) writes about “... a growing concern about the attitude of many Nigerians towards the study of French. A good number of them are not informed about the usefulness ... or importance of French as an international language.” This concern is also made more palpable by the now towering status of English language in world affairs. “The favourable attitude of the population towards English due to the power, influence, and legitimacy associated with (it) arguably works to the disadvantage of French”, writes Orekan (2016). As Ade Ojo joked:

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With my infallible competence in English, unquestionably accepted universally as the number one modern language of science and technology, of international trade and high profile politics, as the most patronized world language, as the language of the most influential power brokers of the world, why on earth do I need to bother myself with French? (Ade Ojo, 2006).

Over and above the foregoing obstacles is the perceived limited career opportunities open to students of French language after graduation.

Indeed, many Nigerian parents and students still believe that the easiest employment that is usually envisaged for a French graduate is teaching or some other rare administrative job. That has led many people to question the competitiveness of a degree in French language in the Nigerian labour market. Ahmad (1999) believes that this false impression is harmful to the learning of French language in Nigeria: "The misconception that French is not an important tool out (there) in the real world is one that seriously undermines interest, enthusiasm and enrolment". Indeed, we consider this particular misinformed labour market share as one of the most de-marketing issues for French language learning in Nigeria. This is all the more relevant to students' strategic consideration in a country where youth unemployment ran at an average of 21.73% in the economy between 2014 and 2017 and poverty rate stood at 69% and 72% in 2010 and 2016 respectively (NBS).

Motivation for the study of French as a foreign language in Nigeria

Motivation plays a crucial role in human activities and it can be no less significant in the learning of a foreign language like French. Motivation is the fundamental drive. As Guerrero (2014) puts it, "... the success and failure of a language learner to master a second language depends on the motivation".

Britannica.com defines motivation as "the forces acting either on or within the person to initiate behaviour". The online *New World Encyclopaedia's* definition, while embracing the significance of the desire and willingness to do something, goes beyond the initiation of behaviour to its "direction, intensity and persistence". Motivation can therefore be both the reason and the direction for an action. According to the encyclopaedia, "Motivation refers to the initiation, direction, intensity and persistence of behaviour". It also adds that motivation is a temporal and dynamic state that should not be confused with personality or emotion; "... a motivated person can be reaching for a long-term goal ... or a short-term (one)..."

The importance of motivation to education is explained by the determinant position it occupies in the process of learning. "Motivation is considered an important element not only in learning but also in the performance of the learned responses. In other words, even when (an individual) has learned the appropriate response to a particular situation, (he) will not necessarily produce the behaviour. The incentive to produce the behaviour is motivation" (*New World Encyclopaedia*).

Therein lays the core of the relevance of motivation to foreign language learning. According to Gardner, as cited by Alizadeh (2016), motivation is the attempt plus the desire to obtain the aim of learning language plus favourable attitudes towards learning the language". He therefore concludes that the success of any action (in this domain) is dependent on the

extent to which persons try to learn the language, along with the desire to do so; “motivation is a motive force that arouses, incites or stimulates action”. Guerrero (2016) further notes that

As a language teacher, you sometimes work with students who have definite goals and dispositions to learn. Sometimes, this translates into a more productive and satisfactory teaching experience. Nonetheless, other students seem to take a language class because they “have to” and their learning process might result in a slower or less enjoyable process.

It is evident that the students’ motivation would have a significant impact on the language teacher, the delivery process and the entire outcome of the teaching and learning process. Both the learner and teacher of a foreign language would be successful with the right motivation.

Motivation in foreign or second language learning implies the “extent to which the individual (learner) works or tries to learn the language because of the desire to do so and the contentment experienced in the task” (Alizadeh 2016).

Gardner and Lambert (1972) identified two types of motivation in second language learning: *integrative and instrumental*.

Integrative motivation refers to a person’s positive disposition to learning a foreign language, its culture and community due to a personal affinity for the target language community. The learner may want to learn the language because he wants to know the native community or the culture associated with that language. According to Gardner (1972), integrative motivated learners are apt to be more successful because their motives are stronger than the instrumentally motivated learners.

According to this theory, *instrumental* motivation is the learning of a foreign/second language for practical reasons. It could be for an enhanced pay, a (new) job or as a requirement for an academic degree. For example, in Salem University, Lokoja, International Relations and Diplomacy students are required to take French language courses. Many of the students take these language courses because *they are compulsory*.

Ghazvini, S. D. & Khajehpour M. (2011) view instrumental motivation as that “characterized by the desire to gain social recognition or economic advantages” through knowing the second language. It is also characterized by an interest in learning a second language for “pragmatic and utilitarian benefits” such as higher salary, influence, and prestige or career advancement. “Learners with instrumental motivation want to learn a language because of a practical reason such as getting a salary bonus, or getting into College. Many College language learners have a clear instrumental motivation for language learning: they want to fulfil a College language requirement” (verywellmind 2018).

However, Dönyei (1998) cited in Alizadeh (2016) expressed the view that in reality, there may be no clear-cut demarcation between the integrative and the instrumental as “a motivation construct involves both instrumental and integrative motives” and that in each situation of language learning, there could be an admixture of both. The author therefore maintains that “it is impossible to attribute language learning success to certain integrative or instrumental causes”.

Dönyei (1990) further identifies the psycho motive dichotomy of “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” motivation, any of which could underlay either the “integrative” or “instrumental” motivation.

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“Intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation to engage in an activity because that activity is enjoyable to do. Extrinsic motivation refers to the actions that are performed to get some instrumental aims like earning a reward or stopping a punishment” (Alizadeh, 2016). This category of motivations makes a distinction between internal and external rewards. In (verywellmind 2018) they are differentiated as follows: “Intrinsic motivation refers to behaviour that is driven by internal rewards. (The) motivation to engage in the behaviour arises from within the individual because it is naturally rewarding ...Extrinsic motivation refers to a behaviour that is driven by external rewards such as money, fame, grades, praise. This type of motivation arises from outside the individual”.

For Malone & Mark as cited by Kendra (2018), an activity becomes intrinsically motivated when “people engage in it for its own sake, rather than in order to receive reward or avoid punishment. We use the words fun, interesting, captivating, enjoyable, and intrinsically motivating ... interchangeably to describe such activities”.

The Nigerian French learner: Integrative or Instrumental Motivation?

For the learner of French as a foreign language in Nigeria, on the surface, the observation by Alizadeh (2016) that there may be no clear-cut distinction between the integrative and instrumental motivation construct in some language learning situations may appear plausible. Indeed, the very wordings of the Nigeria’s revised language policy indicate an *integrative motive* when it claims that adopting French as second official language is “for a smooth interaction with our neighbours” (NPE 2004). The question would be whether this so-called integrative motivation really sits well within the motivation construct of individual Nigerian learner of French language. Let us consider, in principle, the Nigerian learner of French, who may have integrative motivation. There are two poles of “desired acculturation”: the Metropolitan France and the Francophone West Africa. The French language learner would in principle aspire to have a certain “personal affinity with the target language community” which could either be West African Francophone community or the French community in France. However, the Nigerian language policy states clearly its target: “*smooth interaction with our neighbours*”. The question to ask again is what is the new integration impetus to galvanize most of the French learners in Nigeria?

Many Nigerians already have strong linguistic and ethnic affinities with their Francophone neighbours. The Hausa people of North-West Nigeria share the Hausa language and culture with large populations in Chad, Niger, and Burkina Faso, with even Benin Republic, Togo, and Ghana. Hausa is also spoken slightly in Sudan, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, and even Eritrea. Fulani language is spoken in Nigeria, Senegal and Guinea. Kanuri language, spoken in the North-East of Nigeria, is equally indigenous to populations in parts of Niger Republic, Chad and Cameroon.

The Western part of Nigeria presents another interesting scenario. The Yoruba of Western Nigeria share linguistic and ethnic affinities with large populations in Benin Republic, Togo, and with some Diaspora communities in Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal, Gambia and Sierra Leone (Freetown). The Ibo of Eastern Nigeria share some linguistic affinities with a minority community in Equatorial Guinea.

The reality therefore is that, at the regional level (ECOWAS) and even beyond, from time immemorial, there have always been linguistic and ethnic affinities with neighbouring countries and communities. These affinities have fuelled more or less “smooth interactions”. As Igboanusi et al (2008) note: “Although French or English has really not posed the kind of barrier referred to...among the different ethnic groups who regularly transact businesses across the borders... such barriers become visible at the levels of official or bilateral relations”. Therefore, the integration motivation according to which a Nigerian French language learner may want to speak the language because he wants to know the native community or the culture associated with the language may not be strong enough. This is because several Nigerians are in touch with their Francophone neighbours linguistically and culturally; although the same cannot be said of the French of France. The goal of interaction referred to in the new Nigerian language policy could only meaningfully refer to official (government - to - government) transactions. At the level of individual the motivation for the learning of French may be realistically different.

It is our contention that the main motivation is *instrumental*. It should be considered within the general framework of education as a tool to climb the social ladder, to aspire to sustainable employment, higher pay and professional advancement, or as requirement to earn other qualifications. This motivation has a large following. Nagel (2018) has this to say about it: “Of all the people I’ve surveyed and listened to over the years, career is one of the most popular motivators for foreign language learning ... People start learning a language because they want it to get them somewhere in terms of employment”. This position is further buttressed by the erroneous view that the limited labour market opportunities open to French graduates constitutes a serious obstacle to enrolment into French language courses and programmes in Nigeria. This is what Ahmed (1999) means when he writes about the “misconception that French is not an important tool out (there) in the real world (which) seriously undermines interest, enthusiasm and enrolment”. But is the instrumental motivation for the study of French language in Nigeria misplaced?

French Language Graduate in the Labour Market

The Nigerian labour market is congested with over 1.5 million new entrants every year out of which about 500,000 are graduates of tertiary institutions. The competition for employment positions is intensive and obviously the degree has become its “sorting mechanism” (Pappano, 2011). This is where the graduate of French or of any other international language should possess a serious edge not a disadvantage; if a university degree is a prerequisite, foreign language is a definite plus. An international language permits its users easy insertion into a labour market that has become more and more globalised. The caveat is that to become successful in employment involving foreign languages, there is a need for some high level of proficiency and efficiency.

Granted that, as the misconception goes, the easiest employment that is usually envisaged for the French graduate is teaching. We have seen above that there are few students that enrol in French programmes in the universities. It also means fewer graduates with French degrees. In a situation where the Nigerian government has made French the second official language and made the teaching of the language compulsory at the primary and junior secondary schools, the few graduates of French from both Colleges of Education and Universities may not even suffice to go round all the secondary Schools, Colleges of Education and Universities. In the area of teaching therefore, French graduates might not be threatened

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by unemployment for some time to come, as the logic of demand and supply plays in their favour.

Other than the teaching jobs, which are presently viewed as second best by most young graduates, there are other wide-ranging employment opportunities for graduates of French language in the national bureaucracy and economy. Some Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) have special desks for foreign language graduates because of their special roles. Such MDAs include Internal and Foreign Affairs, Immigration, Information and Culture, the Police, Directorate of State Security Services, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Customs, etc.

On a personal note, in 1978, the author had the unprecedented privilege of serving part of his NYSC assignment in the then Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) within the framework of a three-month International Labour Organization (ILO) - sponsored Conference and Seminar. He took part as an interpreter/translator. He has also been privileged to be a member of Nigerian delegations, for a number of years, to the International Labour Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, as a specialized committee member and delegation interpreter/translator. All that happened because of his French language skills.

With more and more multinational companies coming into Nigeria, the horizon seems to be expanding for Nigerians who can speak French because of their competence in interacting across cultures. "Your ability to communicate across a whole spectrum of clients at the company will make your CV stand out, that is why multinational companies look favourably on foreign language skills when recruiting ..." remarks Arnerich (2018). The French economy remains one of the strongest in the world and there is an ever-increasing presence of French companies and economic interests in Nigeria. Some note-worthy companies include Total Nigeria Limited, Peugeot Automobiles Limited, Elf Petroleum, Bouygues Construction Company, Ace Geosynthetics, Honey well Oil and Gas, etc. A good command, or even a working knowledge, of French language provides a needed edge for Nigerians applying for places in these companies.

Further afield, the ECOWAS sub-region can offer employment opportunities for Nigerians that are competent in French language. ECOWAS is made up of 15 countries: 8 are Francophone, 5 Anglophone and 2 Lusophone. It has an approximate total population of 335million (2015); Nigeria has 177million, i.e., 53% of ECOWAS population. Many Nigerian companies, e.g., banks are establishing branches in many of the ECOWAS countries. Nigerians who are internationally bilingual have abundant opportunities to be recruited by these banks to serve in their francophone branches. As Arnerich (2018) notes

More and more, the world of finance is diversifying from its traditional talent pool of mathematics, economics and science graduates, recruiting from a broader range of academic backgrounds... with client-facing roles, all large banks will be working multi-nationally, and so the ability to communicate effectively is seen as a large bonus, as is the ability to liaise effectively with other offices throughout the world.

It is no exaggeration that employment opportunities for French graduates and other foreign language practitioners are expanding by the day. As Arnerich further notes, almost all job descriptions in major multinational companies mention foreign language as "highly desirable". "In fact, Goldman Sachs claims to actively seek language graduates or native

speakers for around 50% of its roles, and large language employers HSBC and Credit Suisse both suggest a second and third language will be a huge advantage in the application process” (Arnerich, 2018). Testimonies abound as to what sharp edges foreign languages have added to the CV of candidates. Gilbert, who was a Finance graduate attaché, Royal Bank of Scotland studied Spanish and Mathematics (double major) from the University of Manchester, UK. He says:

I would say that having studied a language ... definitely helped me when it came to applying for jobs. Obviously, my Maths degree was the main factor in securing a job in the financial services sector, but I feel that having Spanish as well added another string to my bow and it made me stand from the other applicants. I think it shows that I was not just a numbers person; but that I had strong communication skills...I had an appreciation of other cultures and meant I could get on with other people from different backgrounds (Guardian, 2013).

The fact is that in Nigeria today, there is a rush for international employment amongst almost all professionals. This should increase demands for the learning of foreign languages like French, in addition to other professional qualifications. Professionals in Nigeria, including the Military, should begin to go the extra mile of registering at French Centres, Alliance Française/ French institute and even in Universities and Colleges to acquire that international bilingual capacity needed to strengthen their profile for better positioning on the labour market. After Nigeria lost the Command position of the Multination Intervention Force in Mali due to the inability of our top commander there to speak French, the Military has taken steps to remedy the situation by introducing French into the curriculum of the War College. In this domain, Ade Ojo (2006) laments “(the) disappointment of very highly qualified Nigerian professionals who have been disgracefully rejected in their bids to clinch top positions in international organisations” because the rule stipulated that a knowledge of a second international language, especially French, was required.

The classical illustration of this disappointment was in 1991 when retired Gen. Obasanjo, former Head of State of Nigeria, contested for the position of the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN). He was eminently qualified but could not satisfy the language requirement.

Boutros-Ghali who won the coveted position (1992-1997) at the expense of Obasanjo, was a diplomat with a PhD in International Law but was also knowledgeable in both English and French. His successor, Kofi Atta Anan (1997-2006), a Ghanaian economist was also bilingual.

The language phenomenon that moderates appointments at the highest echelon of the UN replicates itself in similar proportions at the lower ranks. Although, all the official languages of the United Nations have attained the status of “working language” since the late 1970s, the UN General Assembly Resolution of 1st February, 1946, clearly shows the significance of French: “In all the organs of the United Nations... Chinese, French, English, Russian, and Spanish shall be the official languages, and *English and French, the working languages*” (Language and Diplomacy, 2013). That is because French is one of two global languages spoken in all the 5 continents of the world. It is furthermore, one of the official working languages of UNESCO, NATO, OECD, ILO, ICC, Council of Europe, European Community, International Red Cross, among other organizations. It is evident that to read, write, speak and understand French

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constitute an undisputed added value to any other qualifications when one competes in both national and international labour markets.

Entrepreneurship Opportunities

Employment opportunities for French language graduates are not limited to government bureaucracies, organised private sector or even international organizations. Self-employment opportunities also abound. Indeed, because of the congestion in the labour market the attention of youths is being drawn on a continuous basis to entrepreneurship to improve their business skills and increase the number of entrepreneurs. This is to raise the pace at which new business ventures are created in order to create employment and improve the economy.

The National Universities Commission (NUC) introduced Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) into the curriculum of the Universities to encourage enterprises creation by young graduates. The objectives of the Nigerian Universities' EDP are to empower students, create employment, diversify the base of the national economy and give confidence to graduates.

Graduates of French language have all gone through this programme in the course of University education. After the National Service they have the opportunity to apply the concept and skills acquired. Various related business opportunities exist for the French language graduate to exploit in order to create employment and wealth both for the self and others.

Nagel (2018), in a blog titled "*7 Excellent Career Ideas for language Learners*" provides very interesting hints towards making a successful career in foreign languages. We find the blog relevant to this article as some the enterprises options he identifies are relevant to the Nigerian situation.

Language Home Coaching

Teaching of French language can be done outside the walls of schools. This is a lucrative business since it could be arranged for the convenience of clients and learners. We noted that, as globalization progresses, there is an increasing awareness of French language in Nigeria. Some professionals will begin to register to learn French to strengthen their profiles. The language graduate could tap into this new development to use his skills to earn a living by setting up home coaching ventures. There may not be any initial need to hire premises since the home of either the teacher or the learner could be used.

Translation and Interpretation

Translation and interpretation constitute areas where French language graduates could set up self-employment ventures. It is to be noted that translation and interpretation are not the same thing. What are common to them are target languages but the skills required are different. A good translator may not necessarily be a good interpreter and vice-versa.

Nagel (2018) states that to be a good translator demands three specific skills: proficiency in the target language, academic or professional background in the specific area of translation and writing skill. Armed with these skills, the graduate of French language can set a translation outfit by the self or in partnership with others. Indeed, graduates of French and other foreign languages like Spanish, German, Portuguese, Russian, Arabic, etc., could partner in such an enterprise. The translation and interpretation enterprises could be very rewarding in

Nigeria because the country hosts the Headquarters of ECOWAS and other international organisations. Many multi-national companies are also here, including oil companies. Many of them organize international meetings, they have documents to translate. They need the services of interpreters and translators. It is a very lucrative business, demanding expertise and hard work.

Tourism and Travel Agencies

The tourism industry contributes enormously to employment generation and poverty reduction. Indeed, it is considered as one of the world's biggest industries. "For developing countries, tourism generated foreign earnings of more than US\$260 billion in 2007... Tourism is one of the major export sectors of poor countries and the leading source of foreign exchange in 46 of the 49 least developed countries" (Bolwell, 2008). French graduates are well placed to establish Travel Agencies and Tourism Bureaux to exploit their employment and wealth creation potentials due to their ability to communicate across cultures.

Bilingual/multilingual business centres

One of the business opportunities that is not being sufficiently exploited by French and other language graduates is the bilingual or multilingual business centre. Indeed, this could even run as an added business to a translation and interpretation outfit. The outfit caters for persons and businesses needing bilingual/multilingual services or secretaries.

Free-lance Journalism and Foreign Correspondent

For French language graduates who may have developed additional skills in mass communication, establishing oneself as a foreign correspondent of some reputable newspaper could constitute a worthwhile enterprise.

Other areas where sustainable enterprises creation for French language graduates include cross-border marketing, on-line marketing, cosmetics and cosmetology, make-up, printing and publishing, various consultancies, including the establishment of schools and crèches.

It is important to note that the acquisition of basic administrative and business skills, including information technology skills, to complement the language skills, will definitely enhance the success of enterprises to be set up. Gone are the days when graduates of Nigerian universities position themselves only for paid employment; graduates of French language have fewer reasons to do so due to the tremendous opportunities open to them in the entrepreneurial domain.

Globalisation and the importance of language skills

The globalisation phenomenon is one of the best arguments in favour of the acquisition of French language skills in Nigeria. "Globalisation is the trend of increasing interaction between people on worldwide scale due to advances in transportation and communication technology" (Wikipedia). This increasing interaction between countries, peoples and persons has resulted in the growth and exchange of commodity, trade, ideas and even cultures. Economically, these trans-border movements involve goods and services, capital, data and inevitably bi- or multilingual actors. Language plays a crucial role in global transactions as it forges and reinforces relationships among individuals, groups, companies and countries for their mutual benefits. Professionals in international languages possess the tool that facilitates

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partnership among peoples across the globe; the tool that activates the flow and exchange of knowledge across cultures. The Nigerian possessing French language skills becomes a stronger and more enlightened player in the global arena.

Recommendations

In order to raise the visibility of French language in NIGERIA, improve student enrolment and increase the share of French language graduates in the labour market, the following recommendations are made, among others:

1. A French language Radio or Television station or Newspaper should be established within the framework of collaboration between the Nigerian and French Governments and the Private Sector. In the interim, University Faculties and other stakeholders should liaise with some Newspapers, TV and Radio stations to maintain French language columns or programmes where opinion articles or discussions in French could be regularly published or aired.
2. The Federal Government should amend the National Education Policy to make the study of French language compulsory and vocational up to SSS 3.
3. French Faculties and Departments in both Universities and Colleges of Education should establish Career Counselling Units to assist French language students and graduates evaluate their skills and capabilities as well as to enable them have a good understanding of the globalised world of work. This is to facilitate the making of well-informed career choices and taking advantage of available employment opportunities.
4. There should be a review of the curriculum of the Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) of the Universities to include the supervised and obligatory production by students of a bankable Feasibility Reports on the enterprises they want to establish after graduation. Such Reports, if viable, should attract funding from specialised Federal or State government credit agencies with low interest rates.

Conclusion

The apprenticeship of French language is going through some trying times in Nigerian schools. This is in spite of the fact that the Nigerian government has declared it the second official national language. In the course this article, we adduced many reasons for the decline of interest of Nigerians in the language. The most critical one we paid particular attention to is its labour market potentials. We consequently discussed many untapped employment opportunities, in both public and private sectors, as well as in the informal sector of the economy, that are open to graduates who possess foreign language skills. Graduates of French language are therefore not left in the lurch within the employment market. Contrariwise, they are advantageously positioned in front of fruitful openings to the employment market both nationally and internationally. This realisation should serve as an incentive to increase the interest of Nigerians in the apprenticeship of the language.

For Nigeria and Nigerians to reap the dividends of our revised National Policy on Education, with particular reference to the heightened status of French language in our national life, we need to develop a new strategic vision, a repositioning of the mind and psyche concerning French language. French as a second official language should be seen to be a tool for personal, corporate and national development. French, as an international language, should

be strategically viewed through the prism of value addition to the totality of professional life and the actualization of the total self. There is no professional that cannot do with extra international languages for a more fruitful interaction and growth in this era of globalization.

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