

FRENCH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND PRODUCTIVITY ENHANCEMENT IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES.

Ogbonnaya Princess Onyekachi

Department of Languages

Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Unwana, Ebonyi State.

E-mail: princessogbonnaya1980@gmail.com

Abstract

Language teaching has been greatly considered in Nigeria as the basic tool of national integration towards productivity and development. The reason is that language teaching is seen as a great investment to high quality and competent human resources needed for productivity and development. But unfortunately, language teaching in Nigeria is besetted with myriads of problems. These includes: poor funding and thus poor facilities, inadequate teachers, inadequate teaching aids (projectors, computers, laboratories and libraries) etc. In this paper, we attempt to discuss the concept of language teaching and productivity in Nigeria. The paper examines French language teaching in Nigeria and the problem facing the language, bearing in mind the level of government's input to enhance its productivity. The study take a panoramic view of some of the factors bedeviling French Language teaching productivity in Nigeria and suggests a possible ways of improving on the level of its present output.

Keywords: French, language teaching, productivity enhancement, challenges.

Introduction

In Nigeria, the educational sector has received a good number of the annual budget of not only the Federal Government but also the State Government. This is simply because education is seen as a huge investment through which any nation can attain development. According to the World Bank (1999:25) "Successful development entails more than investing in physical capital, or closing the gaps in capital; it also entails acquiring and using knowledge". Education is all about knowledge and skills acquisition. Thus, to successfully confront the challenges of development, language education must be heavily invested into.

Similarly, Fafunwa (1979:20) defines education as "the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. That is to say, it is a process of disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both.

Odia and Omofonmwan (2007:81). Going by the definition of education, language education is thus the process by which a child develops the communicative attitude which is of positive value to his society. In other words' language education is the formal acquisition or learning of communicative skills. Productivity' according to *Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary* is defined as "efficiency especially in industry, measured by comparing the amount produced with the time taken or the resources used to produce it".

Technically speaking, productivity is the ratio of output to input. It is a measure of how efficiently and effectively a business or economy uses input such as labour and capital to produce output such as goods and services. Therefore, increase in productivity means that more goods and services are produced with the same amount of labour and capital. It is not about cutting costs but "doing things right" and "doing the right

things” to achieve maximum efficiency and value. Productivity is simply the amount of output you get per unit of input. It is a way to compare the cost of something to its benefits. So if you have an input of 5 and output of 5, your productivity is lower than something with an input of 5 and an output of 10. In this paper, we are going to look at productivity from the government perspective and then talk about educational productivity. In the Nigeria policy on Education (2004:10), the place of language education is not neglected. The policy states thus:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion, and preserving cultures. Thus’ every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every child be required to learn one of the three Nigeria languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. For smooth interaction with our neighbours it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigerian and it shall be compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools but non-vocational elective at the senior secondary school.

Going by this pronouncement as to the importance of language learning is, in relation to education and its process in the country today’ as well as the enormous contribution of government at all levels and of the private investors, one with keen interest will be compelled to ask such

question as why does there still exist negative or positive on the output considering the level of input of government for productivity in this area? Some linguists feel that the statuses of the languages taught in the Nigeria schools are unwieldy for proper implementation status for these languages in the National policy on Education for successful implementation and productivity. In this study, we shall discuss the languages taught in the Nigeria schools in theoretical terms while focusing on the status of French Language learning and government input as key factors to enhancing progressive productivity.

Languages Taught in Nigeria

Language policies in Nigeria theoretically provide for multiple language learning, not only because of the multilingual status of the country but also due to her geographical location in the African continent. Therefore’ it is not a surprise to find in the National policy on Education terms such as:

1. Mother tongue (MT)
2. Nigerian Languages (NL) (other than the mother tongue): Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.
3. Official Languages (OL): English and French, (FL); Arabic, German, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

These languages are theoretically open to Nigerian Students for learning except the foreign languages which are considered optional. But research revealed that in practice, the Nigerian student has not been able to offer all these languages at school most especially French Language which is now considered the country’s second official language. For the purpose of clarity and simplicity’ we shall classify these languages into three sub-headings as follow:

Mother tongue (MT) = (L1),
Second language (SL) = (L2) and
Foreign language (FL) = (L3)

Mother Tongue

“Mother tongue” is the first language of communication available to a child. The first language a child acquires irrespective of his/her geographical location and/or sociolinguistic origin.

According to Soyoye (2001:61)’ acquisition is opposed to “learning” in Psycholinguistic term. While making reference to Corder (1982:107) he asserts that:

Language acquisition takes place in the infant and young child at a time when he is acquiring many other skills and much more other knowledge about the world. Language learning, i.e learning a second language normally starts at a later stage, when language-performance has already become established and when many other physical and mental processes of maturation are completed or nearing completion.

The summary of this is that mother tongue acquisition begins at a very tender age-between 12 months and 24 months. A mother tongue is the first language a child has contact with as he begins to recognize the world around him. In the National policy on Education (2004: 16), a child is expected to be taught in the mother tongue in the first three years of primary education and as core subject up to the junior secondary level. According Awobuluyi (1991)’ Nigeria has over four hundred distinct indigenous languages by definition of mother tongue and by definition of mother tongue and by theory qualifies to be caught in pre-primary school, primary school and junior secondary schools. However, what seems very clear till now is that a good number of mother tongues in the country are being inadequately taught due to some factors like:

- i. Lack of standard orthographic representation for the languages.
- ii. Infidelity towards the teaching of these languages.
- iii. Inadequate materials to sustain their teaching.
- iv. Lack of competent teachers to teach the languages.

In the light of the above, only the three major Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba which we believe actually lay claim of satisfying the above implied criteria for mother tongue. But we want to mention here that the policy is not working accordingly in the three locations. Yoruba is mainly used in the south-west, Hausa is mainly used in the north and in the east.

Second language

As it has been rightly observed earlier in the National policy on Education, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are treated as second language’ (L2). In applied linguistic term, a "second language" is the language a child learns outside his immediate environment which is used for administrative or official purpose. A "second language" is a language outside the sociolinguistic origin of a child. According to Soyoye (2001:61) second language functions include "all communications in the country, business, legal procedures, print and electronic media, education and politics". Going by this explanation, English language is the only language that practically qualifies as a second language. Moreover, the three major Nigerian languages as rightly observed by Awobuluyi (1966: pp. 17-18, 979: p. 19, 1991b,) Bamgbose (1977: p. 23) and Ajiboye (2004: p. 3) are considered as the second language by a portion of the policy which reads:

In selecting two Nigerian languages, students study the language of their area in addition to the three main

Nigeria languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The question one may ask is that how could Nigerian languages occupy the status of a mother tongue and second language?

Ajiboye (2004) for example, explains that a language that is a mother tongue to a child could be a language of the immediate environment of wider community to another. In other words, for an Igbo in Yoruba speaking community, Igbo language tends to be his LI and Yoruba language his L2. The policy therefore expects a child to learn two languages as "second language"; English language and any of the three major Nigerian languages. Meanwhile, the transition of French language to the second official language of the country is yet a mirage. Some experts are of the opinion that for the language to take its rightful position in the policy, government must be ready to back it up financially.

Foreign language

According to Soyoye (2001:64) "a foreign language is one that is not the mother tongue of any group in the country where it is taught". In other words, a foreign language is an exogenous language, with which a child does not share any socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic affinity. Going by this definition, English, French, Arabic, German, Portuguese, Spanish and Russian could be said to have successfully qualified for the status in the Nigerian system of education.

Meanwhile, French and Arabic are major foreign languages that are considered in the National policy on Education for the status. French and Arabic languages are taught in public schools. Arabic is taught at the primary and secondary schools in the Northern part of Nigeria, but French is

taught in some other parts of the country. The teaching of these two languages is facing a lot of setback ranging from lack of material, insufficient teachers, lack of fund, etc.

Government Input Towards French Language Productivity

With the government declaration in the National Policy on Education on the importance of French language, its teaching and learning witnessed another dimension. Some school Principals, administrators, Provosts, Rectors and Vice Chancellors in the country are already aware to the development. Some of these developments are:

- The language curriculum has been reorganized in the interest of teaching and learning of the language at the various levels.
- French language features in the following sectors: University, Polytechnic, College of education and secondary school as well as primary school.
- The higher institutions have been able to produce teachers to teach the language at the primary school, secondary school, colleges of education and other tertiary institutions.
- At the colleges of education and university levels, department of French and European studies carry out research on the way to enhance the teaching and learning of the language.
- Government has been able to establish a French language village which serves as an immersion center for effective learning of the language.
- At the junior secondary school level, the language is taught as a core-subject. Unfortunately, it is a non-

vocational elective at the senior secondary school level.

- Private organizations also contribute to this development as French language learning centres continue to spring up.
- The teaching and learning of the language now features in television and radio programs in the country. For example "parlons Francais" on Gateway television Abeokuta on Thursdays. In spite of these numerous testimonies, the teaching and learning of the language is bedeviled.

Factors Affecting French Language Productivity

Policy deficiency: The sub-section of the policy on education that provides for French language as a non-vocational elective at senior secondary school level lacks the necessary encouragement needed. At this stage of child language learning which shapes the performance of the learner but he is cut off suddenly which automatically affects the language learning of the child.

Attitudinal problem: The attitude of many Nigerians, most especially parents towards French language learning is very low. Most parents and guardians see the learning of French language as not profitable, not leading to the one who studies it to a wider scope of career choice but only to the teaching profession. The attitude of the policy makers towards the implementation of the policy is equally discouraging. The insertion of a clause in a policy such as "French as Non-vocational Elective" is tantamount to unseriousness.

Insufficient funding: Another major factor is insufficient funding of the project. Most of the institutions where the language is taught are underfunded. As a result, the

necessary and most reliable aids for teaching the language are not available. The laboratories are under equipped. There is lack of access to uninterrupted power supply to watch French films and to French programs on the radio.

Curriculum problem: The course combination offered by many students in the Nigerian Colleges of Education is another evil that does French learning no good. For example' The combination of French/English, French/Yoruba, French/SOS, etc is not a healthy development. This kind of situation creates a divided attention in the learner and can degenerate into confusion. Most of the learners tend to concentrate more on the other subject combined with French for little or no reason.

Solutions/ Recommendations

- French language should be made compulsory up to senior secondary school level in order to sustain and perfect its learning progression. Also, it must feature at least 5 times in a week in the school time - table as against 1 or 2 times in a week as it has been observed that time input has great effects on the output.
- Policy makers and other stateholders in the education system should work out a working syllabus that will take care of immersion program for the primary and secondary education. We observed that French language learning at this level lacks the necessary exposure which is one of the vital processes in language acquisition.
- There should be proper education and reorientation of Nigerians on the need to encourage the learning of French at all levels and in fact across disciplines.
- Government should equip the language laboratories with modern learning aids

such as internet facilities, computers, audio-visual materials etc.

- Government should set up an independent monitoring committee "to monitor the implementation of the policy in the primary and secondary schools.
- More French language learning centres should be encouraged to provide access to other people who may be interested in learning the language outside the schools.
- Qualified and competent teachers of French should be employed and every qualification based on "paper qualification" or foreign identity should be discouraged.
- Seasonal training and retraining of teachers of French should be encouraged in order to attune to the very latest method of teaching the language.
- Teachers should be well remunerated for better output.

Conclusion

Language teaching as we have noted at the beginning of this paper is a *sine qua non* to national development. It therefore becomes not only imperative for government and corporate bodies to enhance its development for sufficient productivity. A comparison between the present state of French language teaching in the country and its output reveals that not much progress has been made. This paper then highlights some of the factors that are currently besetting its productivity and equally made some recommendations in order to improve on the output. There is, therefore the need to constantly re-evaluate the level of development in French language teaching for restructuring.

References

Abjiboye, T. (2004). Language Teaching in Nigeria Schools: Where the odds lie,

in Jimoh, Y. A. A. (ed.) *Volume 2*. Abeokuta, Oluses commercial press, pp.1-8.

Ajiboye, T. (1990). French in Nigeria's 6.3.3.4. Educational system: Its Status, Texture and Future. *Language Learning Journal*. Keele, England, 84-87.

Awobuluyi, O. (1979). *The New National Policy on Education in Linguistics Perspective*. Ilorin: The university of Ilorin press.

Bamgbose, A. (1977), Towards an implementation of Nigeria's language policy in Education", in Bamgbose (ed.) *Language in Education in Nigeria*. Vol. 1, Lagos, the National language center, Federal Ministry of Education,. 20-25.

Durosaro, D. O. 2003. Resource allocation and utilization for university Education in Nigeria: Trends and issues, in Fagbamiye E.G.& Durosaro D. O. (ed.) *Education and Productivity in Nigeria*.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National Policy on Education*. 4th Edition. Lagos: NERDC press.

Odia, L.O & Omofonmwan, S. I. (2007). Educational system in *Nigeria problems and prospects*, Benin city; Kamlaraj,.

Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary: (2000). OUP.

Soyoye, F. A. (2001). Teaching languages in a multilingual setting: the interplay of languages status, syllabus objectives and content" in Victoria, A. A. (ed) *Alore Ilorin journal of Humanities*. Ilorin: University of Ilorin press, Vol. 11, Pp 60-67.

World Bank (1994). *Higher Education: The lessons of Experience*. Washington DC: The world bank,