

**THE FRENCH TEACHER AND HIS PROFESSION; TOWARDS
IMPROVING HIS PROFESSIONALISM: CASE-STUDY OF SECONDARY
SCHOOL TEACHERS OF NASARAWA STATE**

**(LE PROFESSEUR DE FRANÇAIS, ET SA PROFESSION EN VUE
D'AVANCER SON PROFESSIONALISME : CAS D'ETUDE DES
ENSEIGNANTS AUX INSTITUTS SECONDAIRES DE L'ETAT DE
NASARAWA)**

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Abstract

The French teacher's virtue, dynamism, role, and influence are necessities that span diverse areas in relation to curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular expectations. Thus, with the help of a preliminary statistical table and a brief historical background into the advent of inculcating the French language into the Nigerian society, this research piece is geared towards enriching, sensitizing and upgrading the French language teacher's section of the Nigerian educational sector particularly the secondary school teachers of Nasarawa state. While using English and French simultaneously to address the challenges both public and private, external and peculiar, encountered by the French teacher, this work will in turn propose realistic, simple, modern day-to-day techniques and solutions to tackle some of such challenges thereby enhancing the value of the French teacher and promoting French language learning within and beyond the immediate environment of research.

Keywords: Profession, teacher, Professionalism, Contemporary Language skills, Curriculum

Introduction

Apprendre une langue c'est d'aller plus vers autrui. Apprendre une langue étrangère telque le Français c'est encore plus à l'heure de mondialisation dans la mesure où de nos jours, aucun pays ne peut vivre en autrui. Chaque pays du monde voudrait faire entendre

leur voix au niveau international sur le plan socio-politique, économique, etc. en étudiant une langue étrangère et le Nigeria n'est exclu."

Auteur anonyme

Avec l'adoption du Français comme langue seconde au Nigeria en 1996 par le régime militaire du feu président passé du Nigeria ; son Excellence Sani Abacha, il semblait évident que cette langue s'acheminait vers sa gloire dans le système éducatif du pays mais au contraire, le Français est considéré comme une matière facultative en sens que les cadres Nigériens n'arrivent à s'exprimer en Français avec leurs homologues francophones de la sous-région.

Aujourd'hui, on devient sage ; la volonté du gouvernement de faire de la langue Française, une deuxième langue officielle exige une approche réfléchie que mettront en œuvre ceux qui ont la lourde responsabilité de prôner l'importance d'une telle importance d'une telle décision si elle s'avérait fondée. L'armée, l'immigration, la douane, la police, les banquiers, les hommes et dames d'affaires, même les élèves des écoles secondaires et les étudiants universitaires respectifs. Ils ont tous besoin des diplômes en Français dans l'optique de régler un tant soit peu les problèmes qui se posent dans les diverses frontières de la société.

En ce cas, il serait propre de les trouver dans les universités et centres Français comme apprenants de cette langue, partout dans les états et villes respectifs du pays.

Donc, c'est certainement pour pallier au déficit constant chez ces apprenants ou étudiants en connaissance langagière de départ, bien s'intégrer aux pays-voisins, et mener sa vie socio-politique et économique que les autorités nigérianes ont employés et parfois entrainer les professeurs de Français pour bien achever ces rêves.

Introduction

With the adoption of French as second language in Nigeria in 1996 by the military government of Late President Sani Abacha, it may have seemed obvious that the language in question was going to be a huge success in the educative system of the country but it turned out to be quite the opposite because French was considered as an optional subject insomuch that Nigerian executives couldn't speak French with their foreign counterparts in the sub-region.

Today, the nation is becoming wiser. The government's desire to make the French language Nigeria's second lingua franca requires a thoughtful approach which includes primarily equipping those who have the heavy responsibility to advocate the importance of such a decision should it prove to be. The Nigerian Army, the Immigration service, Customs, Police Force, the banking system, international business men and women, all secondary schools and universities have need of at least a diploma or basic or background knowledge of the language in order to settle or handle competently problems or challenges that may arise from any of these sectors of the society. On this note, it won't be out of place to refer to all these cadres as French language learners since they find themselves in our secondary schools, French Centres, and French departments of our higher institutions all over the Nation in their quest to attain international relevance.

Thus, it is certainly to overcome the constant deficit among learners of the said language, propagate her qualities and influence to neighboring francophone nations that the government saw the necessity or need of French teachers and in rare cases trained some to achieve these feats hence the advent of the French teacher's relevance and importance.

Définition des termes-clés

C'est bien nécessaire avant de plonger dans l'analyse thématique d'expliquer quelques termes, mots et notions liés à cette recherche.

Profession: Selon le *Dictionnaire de Français Larousse*(2001), c'est une activité rémunérée et régulière exercée pour gagner sa vie; une source de profit. C'est aussi un métier de caractère intellectuelle, artistique, etc. qui donne une position sociale plus ou moins prestigieuse.

Professionnalisme : Aussi, *Larousse* définit le terme comme l'état, ou statut de quelqu'un qui exerce une activité, un métier en tant que professionnel expérimente. C'est la qualité de quelqu'un qui exerce une activité avec une grande compétence.

Synonyme : Maître,

Professeur : Personne ne qui enseigne, une discipline qui dispense les connaissances relatives à une matière, à une discipline, en général dans le cadre d'une activité.

C'est aussi un titre donné dans l'enseignement supérieur aux membres de la catégorie la plus élevée en grade.

Synonyme: enseignant, instructeur, prof, précepteur.

Enseignant : C'est une personne chargé de transmettre des connaissances ou méthodes de raisonnement à autrui dans le cadre d'une formation générale ou spécifique à une matière, un domaine ou une discipline scolaire.

Profession: Like Larousse, *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* defines profession as an occupation especially one that requires specialist academic and practical training.

Teacher: Is one who teaches especially in a school. It is also a word used to identify and classify a person who helps others acquire knowledge, competence and virtue. According to the Merriam – Webster Dictionary, the word “teach” comes from the Middle English word, ‘techen’ meaning “to show or instruct.”

Contemporary Language skill: According to the IGI Global Publisher of Timely Knowledge, the ability to use today's computer application and information technology to teach as well as learn other languages; local or foreign can be termed as a contemporary language skill.

Curriculum: A curriculum can be seen as a list of subjects comprising a course of study in a school or college. The Oxford Languages Dictionary defines ‘curriculum as the subject comprising a course of study in a school or college.

Synonym: syllabus.

French Language, The French Teacher & The Nigerian Society

“We are limited to the world of whose language we can speak. Therefore, the more different international languages we learn, the wider our economic and political horizons. Being bilingual can equally make an individual have more executive control of whatever situation he or she finds herself by the simple ability to switch from one international language to the other.”

Omonigho, (2016)

It is common knowledge that French language was introduced to Nigeria as a foreign language but due to the fact that majority of its learners don't seem to have the opportunity of listening to the native language speakers before coming in contact with the language in the school (some even meeting it for the first time in the university), the language learners then see it as a heavenly language given to

those who speak it fluently as a gift of the Spirit (Tongues). Thus, with the advent of the curriculum, the teaching of French therefore begins (at whichever level encountered) with the rudimentary aspect of the language which seems to follow the exact process of learning one's mother tongue as well as English Language.

Stella Omonigho seemed to have mirrored the concept of Moruwawon (2003) who said:

Those who acquire more than one language find fascinating new and different vistas opening before them, not only of practical opportunity but for fulfilment of intellectual curiosity and fascination of looking at the world from a background and viewpoint of another culture. (25)

Brève histoire du Français au Nigeria

Il a commencé avec la Conférence de Berlin de 1884 – 1885 où les Pouvoirs Occidentaux ont décidé de partager le Continent Africain en petits morceaux. Cela amène la Grande-Bretagne à une partie de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (comme le Nigeria, le Ghana, etc.) et la France à l'autre partie de l'Afrique de l'ouest (comme au Togo, Sénégal, Côte d'Ivoire, Bénin, etc.) aussi que du Nord mais malgré le fait que le Nigeria n'avait jamais été une colonie de la France, c'est intéressant de reconnaître qu'il existe après quelques temps une relation ou coopération internationale entre eux.

Ifeoma Onyemelukwe dans son œuvre littéraire intitulé ; *"The French Language and Literary Creativity in Nigeria"* avait bien abordé cela montrant quatre décennies de l'histoire de l'apprentissage de la langue Française au Nigeria.

A travers sa recherche, Onyemelukwe dévoile l'existence de la langue Française ici au Nigeria même avant l'indépendance validant l'affirmation que Français a été parmi les premiers sujets introduits dans les écoles secondaires à partir de 1859, dès l'établissement du premier collège (c'est-à-dire la Lycée Wesleyan) à Lagos et Anglican Girls' Secondary School à Ogidi. Selon elle;

In the sixties and early seventies, French language was taught in our colleges and institutions of higher learning. In secondary schools at the time, it was not compulsory. All the same, in some schools like Anglican Secondary School, Ogidi, students were made to study French from classes 1 – 5. Students who were good in science were also made to offer French as a subject in the West African School

certificate Examination (WASCE). This was so because no limitation was imposed on the candidates as in pairing French with some other subjects. According to Brann, 111 students took French in WASC and the London General Certificate of Education (GCE) in June in 1962, 2,022 candidates in 1966 took French in WASC / GCE; while in 1971, more than 4000 candidates took WASC / GCE examinations. (30)

Dans les mots d'Ofor; "This was the golden age of the French language in Nigeria."³⁷

Pour Onyemelukwe, l'alliance entre la France et le Nigeria était bien articulé dans la coopération bilingue ci-dessous :

Le Gouvernement Militaire Fédérale du Nigeria, désigne ci-après sous le terme "les parties contractantes" désireux de renforcer les liens d'amitiés et de compréhension mutuelle entre les deux pays et de promouvoir et développer leurs relations dans les domaines culturels, éducatifs, scientifiques et techniques, sur la base du respect de l'indépendance et de la souveraineté de chacun d'eux. (38)

Onyemelukwe révèle que la période de la révolution langagière de la France au Nigeria a coïncidé avec la période de Boom pétrolier. Elle a cité Kwanashie qui avait dit:

French interest in Nigeria grew particularly during the Oil Boom period. French businessmen, out of step with their government, saw Nigeria as a market too good to ignore. By 1977 the value of French investment had risen to FF 775 million and by 1981 had reached FF 14488 million (N186.8m). (40)

Malgré le fait que l'enseignement de la langue Française a subi un déclin considérable dans les années 80, les années 90 amènent l'espoir à travers RANEUF/UFTAN.

En Décembre, le 14 et 31 respectivement, le feu président son Excellence Sani Abacha a renforcé la coopération linguistique et culturelle Franco-Nigeria. Onyemelukwe en citant le dernier dit:

We have seen that we are virtually surrounded by French speaking countries. And these French speaking countries are our kith and kin. But, because of the difference inherited in the languages of our

colonial masters, there has been a vacuum in communication with our neighbors. It is in our interest to learn French. (66)

Au fil des années, nous constatons que le Français au Nigeria a connu une croissance régulière et progressive en sens que les Nigériens bénéficiaires de cette langue développent des capacités intellectuelles, socio-économiques et socio-politiques dans leurs domaines respectifs en étudiant cette langue étrangère.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised;

1. Are French language teachers adequately available for the teaching of the French language in both junior and senior secondary schools across the state?
2. Are there adequate human resources available for the production of high quality French teachers in the tertiary institutions in the state?
3. Are the material resources and organizations available to upgrade the French language teachers in the state?
4. Is the French language laboratory, audio and visual libraries available in secondary and tertiary schools for staff development?
5. What is the level of effort being made by the state government to promote the study of French language in the state?

Employed Methodology

The work is a descriptive research of a survey type. It sampled the opinion of different people by selecting and organizing data from selected people who were meant to represent the entire population for the study. The population consisted of all the French teachers, lecturers and students of French language in the Junior Secondary Schools in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The sample consisted of 200 teachers. Four local government areas; Lafia central, Awe, Nasarawa Eggon and Doma were purposefully selected for the study. Stratified random sampling technique was

used to select 5 schools in each of the selected areas.

Summarized Data Analysis and Results

“Before one expects a qualitative output, the input must also of necessity be qualitative. One cannot expect a qualitative output when the input is not adequate.”

Felicia Olufemi

Olaseinde

The results of the study based on the analyzed data and discussion are presented summarily below:

S/ N	Items	Available		Not Available	
		Frequen cy	%	Frequen cy	
Q1	Availability of Qualified French teachers in secondary schools in the state	10	5	190	95
Q2	Availability and awareness of French institutions, organizations and human resources for staff trainings, seminars, curriculum development, etc.	176	88	24	12
Q3	Availability and accessibility of material resources e.g. textbooks, CDs, etc.	33	16.5	167	83.5
Q4	Availability of French language laboratories, audio and visual libraries for use in secondary and tertiary institutions in the state	5	2.5	195	97.5
Q5	Financial supports / contributions of the state government in promoting the	5	2.5	195	97.5

	development of French language teachers professional advancement in the state				
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From the table, Q1 generally shows 10 (5%) teachers agreed that French language teachers with required qualification were available while 190 (95%) held a contrary view. For Q2, 176 (88%) teachers agreed that there were adequate and suitable organizations and institutions available for personal and career development while 24 (12%) did not agree. For Q3, 5 (2.5%) teachers agreed that material resources such as French texts, books, CDs, etc. were available while 195 (97.5%) did not agree that such were available nor accessible. 5 (2.5%) teachers accepted that French language laboratories, and libraries were available while 195 (97.5%) did not accept. Lastly, 5 (2.5%) teachers agreed that the state government contributed to French language teachers’ development and professional advancement while 195 (97.5%) strongly disagreed.

Findings in this Study

The findings of the study showed that the teacher’s qualification plays a vital role in achieving the curriculum goals and objectives of teaching the French language. It even affects the students’ achievement. The skills in the method of teaching; aural comprehension and oral expression assist the teacher in imparting the knowledge of French language.

Propositions: The Way Forward

Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important.

Bill Gates

These statistics show that the language teaching profession in Nasarawa state still has a long way to go in its quest for professionalism. Added to the fact that French language wasn’t only made compulsory for all students in the junior secondary schools across the federation but also now compulsory for all departments in the Faculty of Arts in our universities as well worsening the already plaguing issue of

lack of sufficient, qualified and competent French language teachers which has remained a challenge amongst many others spiraling from the following factors;

- i. Improvement in French Language Teachers' Development
- ii. Provision of Modern Teaching Aids, Facilities and Resource Materials
- iii. Annual Evaluation and Promotion of French Language Teachers

Improvement in French Language Teachers' Development: Quality education is not only linked with curriculum development, evaluation and implementation but also closely linked with the staff development through scholarships for higher degrees and specialization, conferences, workshops and seminars.

Provision of Modern Teaching Aids, Facilities and Materials: The French language teacher is not just bereft of intellectual development but also of material resources. Just as a farmer is helpless without his necessary farming tools or equipment, so is a teacher who is poorly furnished with the necessary gadgets needed to effectively execute his assignment and the Nigerian French teacher is worst hit owing to the fact that his needed tools are exceptional and rare. Materials such as textbooks, laptops, smart phones audio & visual aids, etc., are 'gold' or 'blood diamonds' to the Nigerian French language teacher. Hence the use of obsolete teaching methods and materials. If these facilities are provided and the government goes the extra mile of training the French language teacher for their efficient use, this can in turn transform him into a pro in his field.

Annual Evaluation and Promotion of French Language Teachers: Like religion, the most persecuted, overlooked, relegated, manipulated and intimidated career men and women were and still are the French language students, teachers and lecturers as the case may be. Felicia Olufemi Olaseinde bewails this more explicitly:

...hardly does any school, particularly the public ones have enough teachers since no new teachers are employed. The ones employed for French are most often diverted to other subjects that are considered by the school authority as more vital to the future of the students... Most of the teachers currently teaching French in our secondary schools are N.C.E. Holders who prefer to teach the subject which they combined with French when they were in school. Most of them use French to get a teaching appointment and after teaching French for a year or two, they will change to the other subject which they

combined with French... parents seem to discourage their children from having anything to do with French.

What has, throughout all time, been unique and special about competent and qualified French language teachers is their natural and learned tendencies to bond, nurture, encourage, impart knowledge, build interest, fascinate, show patience, compassion, self- motivate and tenderly correct.

While this work stands on its own in rekindling the passion almost quelled by a nonchalant government and educational systems, sensitizing the French teacher to rise above the debris and maximize his / her inherent and acquired special skills, potentials and training despite the multiple fibroid of discouragement and discrimination, it is also a response to the one too many questions plaguing the minds of French teachers across the federation;

- How do I raise my standards and skills so qualitatively and competently high that I remain relevant and indispensable in an economy that treats my 'products' as a disposable necessity?
- Also, how do I position myself and my language skills strategically to survive and thrive in a community where my linguistic skills and creativity are barely tolerated?

Evaluation: this spans into four areas namely; self-evaluation, discovery or study, self-improvement or development, self-esteem or confidence and self-marketing and promotion.

One core value of a French language teacher or lecturer as the case may be is his or her ability to know why he is one, followed by a personal knowledge of his area of interest cum specialization, his weakness or weaknesses and what he or she intends to do about it or them, his mastery level of the four competences of French language skills and how he intends to use all these to his profit and the world around him. One of the most glaring cause of the misuse of French language teachers is the latter's ignorance or inability to recognize his value as a language god cum intermediary. The currency of modern employment is not just language skill acquisition but also the ability to advertise and use this skill expertly for the wellbeing of all interested and necessitated to in exchange for life's necessities and luxuries.

According to Gbenedion (1996) "evaluation is a programme that involves a continuous process of assessment, feedback and decision making." It involves the

examination of all areas that might have effect on the final products of the system. In effect, learners, teachers, materials, methods and contents are subject to evaluation. Staff promotion means the advancement of an employee within a company position or job tasks. A job promotion may be the result of an employee's proactive pursuit of a higher ranking or as a reward by employers for good performance. Typically, this is also associated with a higher rate of pay or financial bonus. Staff development is a process whereby the teacher at any point in time is closely monitored and examined by a personnel conversant in the former's field for the sole purpose of taking cognizance of what changes, if any, will be introduced to it, the French teacher's development, evaluation and promotion is no exception to these rules. Because the society which the school serves is dynamic, the French language teacher must also be dynamic to meet the needs of the society but on the contrary, French teachers are neither trained nor promoted like their counterparts in other languages like English to implement the curriculum at respective levels of education and spearhead projects. Worse still, it has been observed through the learning outcomes planned in the Universal Basic French Language Curriculum, that French teachers are not influenced by the curriculum nor encouraged financially by their respective HR managements. Hence, the gross incompetence and lack of commitment.

Conclusion

One of the few ways a person (in this case the French language teacher) can achieve some degree of professionalism in his career and life endeavors is through becoming a beacon of applicable or practical knowledge owing to the fact that knowledge is power. Also, in a belly-conscious nation like Nigeria, the French teacher needs to believe in himself, improve his language skills with the seeming limited resources at his disposal, seize the high ground; innovate, propagate new ideas and better methods of doing things, indulge all abilities within and around him thereby securing an unbeatable advantage in the educational, economic and sometimes political sectors.

In odd moments of despair, abandonment, uncertainty and hopelessness, it is tempting to believe that those who survive and thrive are those who will resort to any means to do so even if it means sacrificing their dreams on the altar of another's myopism but this seeming reality can be awfully pathetic. It is expedient to know this that the world will never give the French teacher what he deserves but what he demands.

On a final note, the end goal of all career is professionalism. What matters is that the French teacher understands how irreplaceable in the intricate fabric design of education he is as he painstakingly contributes consistently to value creation and nation building as well as making sure that he is also paid accordingly. For no longer shall the teacher's reward be in heaven but where his profession and professionalism lie.

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