



Education For Today

Journal of Faculty of Education
University of Calabar

Volume 3, No. 1, March, 2001 ISSN 1596-0773

Cognitive preferences of Science Students - EFFIONG & ENUKOHA	1
Information Communication Technology - MOHAMMED	13
Science, Technology & Mathematics in the Era of Globalization - ANI	24
Performance, Science, Technology and Mathematics - BESSONG and OBO	37
The concept of properties of Air, Heat and Electricity - ASIM	51
Financing University Education - EBOH	51
Realistic Budgeting in Higher Education - OKURE	71
Professional Growth and Job Effectiveness - NTUKIDEM and ETUDOR	83
School Principals' Administrative effectiveness - BASSEY, MBIPOM and AKUEGWU	91
Globalization on Curriculum Development - EGBE	103
Attitude toward Mathematics and Mathematics instruction - BASSEY, ISAAC and JOSHUA	109
Language Policy and the Teaching of French - OKON	117
Community Education and Educational Curriculum - ANAAGUDO-AGU	127
Counseling the Student in Tertiary Institutions - UDOKANG	141
Gender Disparity in Access to Education - AGBAKWURA	149
Gender Issues and Women Education - ETUK	157
Transformative Research for Participation in Democracy - BIAO	169
Conflict and Panacea for Harmony and Cooperation - ASSIBONG	179

NIGERIA'S LANGUAGE POLICY AND THE TEACHING OF FRENCH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CALABAR URBAN: AN APPRAISAL

MARGARET M. OKON
UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR, CALABAR.

ABSTRACT

As reported in the **Daily Champion** of Friday 6th November, 1998, the Federal Government formally declared French a compulsory core subject in all secondary schools in Nigeria, from the 1998/99 academic session. This is, indeed, a welcome development. But, how prepared are the secondary schools to take up this responsibility (with regard to manpower, equipment, etc)? This study set out on a sample survey of the present state of French teaching in secondary schools in Calabar Urban, about two years after the declaration, in order to find out the state of readiness of secondary schools to make French compulsory in line with Federal government directives, and to make suggestions that would enhance the survival of the new policy on French language teaching in our secondary schools. Twenty secondary schools were used for the study. It was discovered that inadequate staffing, students' attitude towards French and the inadequate time allocated to the subject on the school timetable constituted major drawbacks to the effective teaching of French in the schools under study.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the teaching of the French language in Nigeria dates back to 1859 (Ugbe, 1998), when it was introduced at King's College Lagos. St. Ann's School, Lagos, followed suit in 1894, but before then, in 1881, the teaching of French had started in Methodist Boys' School and Girls' High School, both also in Lagos. It was only after independence, in the 60s and 70s, that "French knew its moment of glory in Nigeria" (Okwudishu, 1998:3). The teaching of French as a compulsory foreign language then spread to many secondary schools across the country. French also became a subject of specialization in Nigerian universities and Colleges of Education.

In spite of the long-standing history of French language teaching in Nigeria, French had continued to be relegated to the background. The National Policy on Education (1977, revised 1981) does not accord French a pride of place, as it is listed under "Non-Vocational Electives" (p.17) in the Junior Secondary School curriculum, and under "Elective" (p.18) in the Senior Secondary School curriculum. Yet, French is a language of international repute and can in some way foster the growth and development of the nation in the areas of politics, trade and commerce, science and technology, education, sports, tourism, etc. Besides, given Nigeria's geographical position, her membership of African and international organizations and her leadership role in Africa where many of the countries are French-speaking, a working knowledge of French in Nigeria is imperative, if the country is to establish a close relationship with her neighbours.

The Nigerian government therefore took a right step in the right direction to have formally adopted French as the second official language of the nation and declared it a compulsory core subject in all secondary schools in Nigeria from the 1998/99 academic session. In the light of this declaration, the main purpose of this study was to assess the current state of the teaching of French in Calabar Urban. This involved the determination of (i) The adequacy of French teachers in the area (ii) Involvement of students in French language learning. (iii) Adequacy of time allocation for French teaching.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire, a kind of checklist, was administered in 20 secondary schools (both government-owned and private) randomly sampled from the nearly 30 secondary schools in Calabar Urban, comprising Calabar South and Calabar Municipality Local Government Areas.

The questionnaire sought to elicit information relating to:

- Number of students in the schools and number taking French; Staff strength;
- Number of teachers in the schools and number teaching French and other languages, and their qualification.
- Importance accorded French in terms of number of periods allocated to it weekly.
- Texts used in teaching
- The existence of a French club in the school.
- State of preparedness of the schools to teach French as a compulsory core subject, etc.

In addition, information such as the year the school was founded, was sought. Useful information was also elicited through personal interaction and discussion with teachers and principals of the schools visited. Heads of French Departments in the schools completed the questionnaire. The schools were categorized in terms of government-and private-owned. Data collected were analyzed using common percentages.

RESULT

The findings of the study are summarized in the tables below

Table I: Subjects arranged by school type and number of French language teachers and teachers of other languages.

S/N	School type	No. of Schools	No. of Teachers	No. of French teachers	No. of Teachers of other languages	% age of French teachers	% age of Teachers of other languages
1.	Govt. Owned	14	1289	27	112	2.09	8.69
2.	Private	6	156	7	18	4.49	11.54
	Total	20	1445	34	130	2.35	9.00

Table II: Table showing number of students studying French s per entire student population

S/N	School type	No. of Students in the Schools	No. of Students studying French	No. of Students not studying French	% age of students studying French	% age of students not studying French
1.	Govt. Owned	26671	8839	17832	33.14	66.86
2.	Private	2537	1088	1449	32.89	57.11

Table III: Periods allocated to French as per other languages (per week)

S/N	School type	Periods allocated to French	Periods allocated to other languages	% of period allocated to French
1.	Govt. Owned	25	60	41.67
2.	Private	12	26	46.15
	Total	37	86	43.02

Table IV: Summary of findings

SN	SCHOOL	NO. OF TEACHERS IN SCHOOL				NO. OF STUDENTS IN THE SCHOOL	NO. OF STUDENTS TAKING FRENCH						TOTAL NO. OF STUDENTS STUDYING FRENCH	WEEKLY PERIODS ALLOCATED		FRENCH TEACHER/STUDENT RATIO
		TOTAL NO. OF TEACHERS	NO. TEACHING OTHER LANGUAGES	NO. TEACHING FRENCH	NO. TEACHING OTHER LANGUAGES		JSS I	JSS II	JSS III	SS I	SS II	SS III		FRENCH	ENGLISH	
1.	SCHOOL A	120	10	23.5%	3500	400	600	700	-	-	-	-	-	3	4	1:1567
2.	SCHOOL B	100	8	3(3%)	4000	420	420	420	1	-	-	-	-	2	4	1:420
3.	SCHOOL C	114	10	-(0%)	1860	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	-
4.	SCHOOL D	90	9	2(2.22%)	180	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	5	1:215
5.	SCHOOL E	62	8	1(1.61%)	735	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-
6.	SCHOOL F	100	12	3(3%)	2000	250	150	300	-	-	-	-	-	3	5	1:267
7.	SCHOOL G	72	4	-(0%)	1500	665	580	600	15	-	-	-	-	2	4	-
8.	SCHOOL H	130	10	3(2.31%)	3092	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-
9.	SCHOOL I	45	6	-(0%)	1200	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-
10.	SCHOOL J	100	8	5(5%)	2000	170	160	230	16	14	18	-	-	4	5	1:250
11.	SCHOOL K	55	6	2(3.64%)	1237	250	-	173	-	-	-	-	-	2	5	1:212
12.	SCHOOL L	80	10	2(2.5%)	1300	300	300	300	-	-	-	-	-	2	5	1:450
13.	SCHOOL M	66	6	1(1.52%)	1100	202	200	230	-	-	-	-	-	2	5	1:632
14.	SCHOOL N	150	5	1(2%)	1150	106	227	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	5	1:333
15.	SCHOOL O	18	3	1(5.56%)	301	156	60	45	-	-	-	-	-	2	5	1:261
16.	SCHOOL P	30	3	2(6.67)	194	45	40	38	2	-	-	-	-	3	5	1:63
17.	SCHOOL Q	40	3	2(5%)	650	160	160	160	8	-	-	-	-	3	4	1:244
18.	SCHOOL R	16	2	1(6.25%)	72	14	12	16	16	6	-	-	-	3	4	1:64
19.	SCHOOL S	7	1	1(14.29%)	150	60	70	20	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	1:150
20.	SCHOOL T	50	6	1(2%)	1396	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	TOTAL	1345	34	2(2.33%)	27,546	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10,027

DISCUSSION

Seventeen out of the twenty schools that came under study offer French, most of them at the Junior Secondary School level. Only six offer French up to the first year of Senior Secondary School, two do so up to the second year and just one up to the third year of SSS.

It is disheartening to note that even the long-standing schools (established before 1960) could not present students for the SSS French examination in the 1999/2000 school year and are not likely to present any in the 2000/2001 school year. Only one school has eighteen students taking French in SSS3 presently. This represents 0.04% of the entire student population under study.

What could be the problem? Why the unpopularity of the French language in secondary schools in Calabar Urban? The result of this study shows that there are still many factors militating against the effective teaching and learning of French in secondary schools, some of which are discussed below.

INADEQUATE STAFFING

Of all the problems identified in the schools, the one that raises the most serious concern to principals is that of inadequate staff. Table 1 reveals the enormous dearth of French teachers in the state. Only one school has as many as five French teachers. The older schools have three French teachers each, while others have less than three teachers each to cope with the large number of students who are expected to study French. French teachers represent only 2.35% of the total number of teachers in all the schools under study.

In view of the prevailing circumstances, the few French teachers available in the schools are compelled to teach the JSS classes since the students must take French in the JSS III examination. Even then, as shown in table IV, we find that the students are too many for the available teachers to handle and this does not enhance good student/teacher relationship. A situation where one teacher has to teach over 600 students does not allow for effective teaching and learning, as a good teacher should be accessible to his students both during and outside classes.

Investigation also revealed that in some schools where there are qualified French teachers, French is not taught because these teachers have had to take up administrative duties. In some cases, French teachers had left the school system in search of greener pastures

One wonders whether really French teachers are not available for employment or whether political and/or socio-economic factors have come into play in the selection and employment of teachers. Why not employ enough teachers for the benefit of the students and the educational system as a whole?

It is interesting to note that some schools have quite an impressive number of English language teachers (cf Table IV). In fact, some have as many as twelve, which makes the workload on the English teachers lighter compared to that of their colleagues who teach French. This situation can be explained by the importance accorded the English language in the National Policy on Education (1997, revised 1981)-a core subject at both junior and senior secondary school levels.

INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENTS IN FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNING

On their part, students complained that French is a difficult subject. This explains why they are only too happy to drop it as they move into the SSS classes, where they have the option to do so. The teachers themselves confirmed that lack of interest on the part of students was another factor militating against the teaching of French, and suggested that they (the students) be provided with incentives to motivate them. It is worth noting that the few students who offer French in the Senior School Certificate Examination do very well in the subject.

In our opinion, the greatest incentive would be adequate teachers. Because there are no French teachers, a good number of the students are denied the opportunity of learning French.

TIME ALLOCATION

The present survey indicated that French is allocated two to three periods (of 40 minutes each) a week on the average, while compulsory core subjects are allocated four to five periods a week (see Table IV).

The time allocated for French in the secondary schools is grossly inadequate. Just as the industrialist needs enough time to produce his finished products, so also the French teacher requires a requisite number of teaching hours per week if he is to utilize to advantage his skill as a trained teacher and the materials put at his disposal. Language learners, especially beginners, need a large number of contact hours with the language they are learning.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the whole, the present survey indicated that the teaching of French in secondary schools in Calabar Urban leaves much to be desired, and that

most secondary schools are least prepared to implement the new policy on education as it affects French, the major setback being lack of manpower, inadequate teaching hours and lack of interest on the part of the students.

It is one thing to declare French a compulsory core subject in all secondary schools in the federation, it is yet another to actualize the declaration. The decision to make French Nigeria's second official language is a good one. It reflects the socio-political, socio-economic and socio-linguistic realities of our time, as the world is becoming a global village. However, care must be taken to ensure proper implementation of the declaration and its application to the Nigerian society. It behoves those concerned to translate the policy to a practicable reality. We do not expect a sudden change in the situation as regards French teaching and usage in our society.

The adoption of French as a second official language, and its compulsory teaching in the secondary school must be gradual, and actualized by future generations. But the foundation for the actualization must be laid now, and yet, two years after the declaration, nothing positive seems to be happening.

To enhance the teaching and learning of French in secondary schools, the government should adequately fund the Nigeria French language project and train and motivate more French teachers. Effective, formal learning cannot take place without good teachers. So, even the already existing French teachers should be retrained through refresher courses. Departments of French in Nigerian Universities should introduce some elements of language teaching and learning into their curriculum or encourage their students to take elective courses in the Faculties and/or Institutes of Education. This would expose them to good techniques of teaching, for a good teacher should be a sort of "compere" to be able to arouse and sustain the interest of the students. Through good teaching techniques, they would be able to exploit the prescribed textbooks more effectively.

The new status of French in Nigeria is likely to increase awareness of its importance, but students should be encouraged by being provided with incentives by way of teaching aids to arouse their interest in French. If French becomes a compulsory subject, then the number of periods allocated to it would have to be increased. This may entail making slight adjustments in the school timetable (e.g increasing the hours spent at school).

At the end of its 3rd annual conference and annual general meeting in November 2000, the Nigerian University French Teachers' Association (NUFTA) resolved, among other things, to appeal to the National Universities Commission to make French a part of the General Studies programme in

tertiary institutions. The present researcher agrees with this resolution and adds that French should constitute an entry requirement into the University. This will greatly encourage the teaching and learning of French at the secondary school level.

French teaching should begin at the nursery/primary school level. This is because age plays an important role in second language learning. Applied linguists have long claimed that there is an optimal age or a critical period for second language acquisition, which ends around the age of puberty (Politzer, 1965; Flege, 1981; Van Els et al, 1984). After puberty, languages have to be learnt through a conscious, laboured effort and foreign accents are difficult to overcome after that period. We find that little children are more excited about learning, more so when teaching at their level involves the use of visual aids and playlets. This paper is not however advocating the employment of French teachers in primary schools, but rather suggests making use of the existing primary school teachers. At the primary school level, the children need not be belaboured with too many details of the French language. French teaching at this level should be predominantly oral. It would suffice for them to know the rudiments of the language (for example the usual greetings, the verbs "avoir" and "etre" etc). Simulation, that is, demonstration and imitation of real life situations should form the predominant teaching method used. Textbooks used should be those that encourage conversation. Generally, the products of pre-primary and primary institutions where French is taught fare better in the subject in post-primary institutions than their counterparts who begin learning French in the secondary school because they had an early start. Besides, what they are taught in the secondary school may only be a revision of what they had already learnt in their pre-secondary school days.

The class teachers in the primary schools can teach French at this level if, from time to time, departments of French in the universities could organize short seminars for them. To do this, the departments have to be well funded by government. In fact, if well funded, the departments could also organize refresher courses/ workshops periodically for French teachers. (Primary) school teachers could also avail themselves of the Diploma in Language Studies Programme offered by the Department of Languages and Linguistics.

School principals should encourage the existence of the French Club in their schools, as the Club would create an enabling atmosphere for students to build up self-confidence in spoken French. The French Club provides an opportunity for students to have more contact with the language, since the time each school practically has at its disposal to enable it carry out effective teaching is inadequate.

CONCLUSION

This paper re-echoes the situation of French studies in other parts of Nigeria (cf. Mojola & Soyoye, 1996; Okwudishu, 1998). The present researcher had earlier carried out a study on French teaching in Secondary Schools in Cross River State several years ago (cf. Essien, 1984). It is rather sad to note that, 16 years after, the situation has not improved in individual schools. The only appreciable change that has occurred is that over the years, more secondary schools have been established in Calabar to cope with the rising desire for education. This has occasioned an increase in the number of teachers of French in Calabar Urban. The general trend of apathy for French seems to parade most secondary schools. It follows that there are problems that belabour French teaching in secondary schools in Calabar and beyond, and unless steps are taken to remedy the situation, the future of French as a subject and, indeed, as a second official language in Nigeria is hanging in the balance.

Now that French has been raised to the status of a second official language in Nigeria, and has also been declared a compulsory core subject in all secondary schools, we expect a marked improvement in French teaching (and learning) in Calabar Urban within the next few years. We hope that the French project will not die out like other projects, which, though well formulated, failed at the implementation stage (for example the Introductory Technology project which seems to have fizzled out due to lack of teachers).

The task force on the Nigerian French Language project and other related bodies must strive to ensure a sustainable French language teaching, not only in Calabar Urban (where the language is even more relevant because of its nearness to Cameroun) but throughout the country in order to ensure more effective communication and co-operation between Nigeria and the Francophone world at large.

REFERENCES

- Akindede, F & Adegbite W. (1992) The Sociology and Politics of English in Nigeria Ile-Ife: Debiyi – Iwa Publishers.
- Essien, M. M. (1984) The Problems of Learning French in Secondary Schools in Cross River State, M. Phil Thesis, University of Calabar.

- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981) National Policy on Education (Revised)
- Flege, J. E. (1981), "The Phonological Basis of Foreign Accent: A Hypothesis" in TESOL Quarterly 15 (4), 443-455.
- Mojola, I. & Soyeye, F. A. (1996) "L'enseignement du francais a Osun State une enquete statistique" Paper presented at CAPUA, Badagry-Lagos
- O' Grady, W. Dobrovolsky, M. & Aronoff M. (1989) Contemporary Linguistics. An Introduction. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Okwudishu, A. U. (1998) "French As A Second Official Language: Nigeria's Language Policy in a State of Flux" Paper Presented at the 16th Annual Conference of The Linguistic Association of Nigeria-National Institute for Nigerian Languages, Aba.
- Politzer, R. L. (1965) Foreign Language Learning, A Linguistic Introduction. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Simire, G. O. (1998) "Pour la refonte de l'enseignement du francais au niveau universitaire" Paper Presented at the Maiden Conference of The University French Teachers Association (NUFTA), University of Jos, Jos.
- Tourneux, H. (2000) "La traduction technique en langue africaine au profit du development agricole" Paper Presented at the 22nd West African Languages Congress, University of Ghana, Legon.
- Ugbe, L. A. (1998) L'apprentissage obligatoire du francais au Nigeria: les avantages et les inconvenients. B. A. Project, Department of Languages & Linguistics.
- Van Els, T., T. Bongaerts, G. Extra, C. Van Os; A.M.J. Van Dielen (1984) (English Translation by R.R. Van Oirsouw) Applied Linguistics and The Learning and Teaching of Foreign Languages. London: Edward Arnold Publishers.