

Importance of foreign language competences in Nigeria: A nexus between sustainable development and employability

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Abstract

The role of language as a daily means of conveying information, in solving problems, in building better relationship with others, just to mention but a few cannot be overemphasized. It is obvious that language education, especially acquisition of foreign language which French language counts to be one in Nigeria, is an important factor that builds a capacity to empower the future generations. Sustainable employability in this new age of ours largely depends on increasing competencies by individuals in different aspects of human life of which language skills cannot be left out. This paper is set to give close examination to the importance of foreign language with special reference to French language in Nigeria on its contributions to various sustainable accomplishments to the nation and to its users in the areas of employment opportunities within and the world over.

Keywords: foreign language, sustainability, competence, employment

Introduction

In today's globalized world, ability to communicate effectively in a language other than one's native tongue is no longer just a tool for personal enrichment but has become a key factor for national development, international collaboration, and employability. The world of our time is interconnected. As a result, the pursuit of foreign language has increasingly become a necessity.

As global interaction and interconnectivity continue to expand, the value bestowed on the competency of foreign languages show its importance in (inter)personal, educational, diplomatic, technological...domain. For Nigeria, a country with a vast linguistic diversity and an expanding role in Africa's economic landscape, the role of foreign languages—particularly French—is very essential for multifaceted achievements. French is not only one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa but also serves as an official language in many international organizations, making it an invaluable skill for engaging in global affairs. This paper explores the significance of French language competence in Nigeria, focusing on its impact on sustainable development and employability especially to the Nigeria young generation.

The growing need for language education

Every nation, every community, and every individual are goal oriented. That was what happened in the ancient world in the Tower of Babel which involve the first human community lead by Nimrod who intended to build a tower which could reach the heavens (Genesis 11:1-9). However, this goal did not see the day because according to that legendary account, God “confused their unique language” giving birth to sudden appearance of multiple languages which in turn caused linguistic discordance among the builders of the city. This indicates how vital communication is to human operational activities and of course to human existence. One cannot achieve a goal without an adequate and meaningful communication which equally requires the use of language either verbal or through sign. In fact, without language, the world would be like a silent and inanimate ocean. In order to achieve their desired goal in that situation, these builders need an integration of diverse elements, relationships and values to conglomerate them together. Attaining this feat require a workable language that could make them comprehend and appreciate one another. However, this project stopped in a regrettable manner for lack of linguistic ability that could sustain them to work undisturbed. Of course, the hindrance of communication and their good collaboration ultimately led to the abandonment of the original Tower of Babel's construction. This illustrates the power of language in sustaining human existence.

Since Nigeria's independence, the English language occupied and continue to enjoy a very important position in the linguistic terrain of the country. Undoubtedly, English happened to be the country's official language and of course the language of education (the medium of instruction from the primary to the university levels of education). It is equally the language of

commerce, the language of the media and of the judiciary. In spite of that, foreign language education remains crucial (Philips, 2007; Hubackova, 2016) in today's globalized world because it offers numerous benefits to its users. There are powerful nations politically, economically, technologically just to mention only these that speak different languages. Powerful countries like Britain, France, America, Japan and the likes speak different languages. Some of these were colonial masters to some countries. In Africa, many countries were colonized by some of these above-mentioned countries. The colonized country makes use of the language of the colonial master in transacting official matters. In Nigeria, though English language, as a European language serves as the official language of the nation/country. This language alone is not sufficient for global integration of the country. There is a need for Nigeria to widen out her linguistic horizon by fittingly embracing foreign languages to facilitate some routine operations and integrate into the international community. To integrate global values, be it culturally, economically, technologically and socially for sustainable development, foreign language education must be encouraged in Nigeria. (It is not an overstatement that all Nigeria immediate neighbors are all francophone at either side of the cardinal points except in the south where she borders with the Atlantic Ocean.

Sustainable development and the Global Significance of Foreign Language Competence

In the context of global communication, foreign language skills are essential for effective diplomacy, trade, and international cooperation. In Nigeria, foreign languages, especially French, provide significant advantages in enhancing the country's participation in global initiatives. For instance, French language in Nigeria can facilitate international communication and collaboration on sustainability initiatives especially in West and central Africa where French language is widely spoken by citizens of the regions. It can facilitate easy communication and collaboration in terms of trade, combatting terrorism and the likes. As a key player in the West African region, Nigeria's involvement in regional integration, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), requires proficiency in French. Additionally, France is one of Nigeria's major trading partners, and the ability to communicate in French opens doors for better diplomatic and trade relations. When a large number of Nigeria citizens especially those holding some key posts including educators and researchers, French language can provide access to a wealth of information on transformation and sustainability, facilitate access to educational and research opportunities in sustainability-related field which can open doors of opportunities to gain access to eco-friendly technologies from powerful French speaking

countries and at large from the international organizations. Nigeria government should encourage people especially young ones to learn French in order to “meet the demands of communication with western world” (Ge, Wang and Li, 2023:2). French is also an official language of the United Nations, further emphasizing its relevance in international discussions and agreements (Adebayo, 2015).

Furthermore, the global shift towards multilingualism underscores the importance of foreign language competence. As the world becomes more interconnected, the ability to speak multiple languages, including French, enhances one’s ability to engage in international business, cultural exchanges, and educational opportunities. This linguistic diversity facilitates access to global markets, allows for participation in multilateral negotiations, and promotes cross-cultural understanding (United Nations, 2015).

French Language and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Sustainable development is a topical issue of wide discussion by researchers in many fields (Schreiber and Siege, 201-; Ge, Wang and Le, 2023; Bride and Drelinga, 2020). The relationship between foreign language proficiency and sustainable development is clear in today’s world. We are living in the era of globalization and as a result of this; there is an increase demand for multilingual proficiency with many nations recognizing the strategic importance of foreign languages in fostering diplomacy, trade and workforce competitiveness (Likoko & Wu, 2025). Hence, French language competence is critical in fostering Nigeria’s integration into the global economy, as well as its role in regional development initiatives. Nigeria plays a pivotal role in global economy, particularly in Africa where a lot of countries prove to be francophone. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the importance of global partnerships and knowledge exchange in achieving sustainable growth. Improving French language skills by citizens, Nigeria can strengthen its partnerships with Francophone countries and better engage in international initiatives aimed at tackling issues such as poverty, education, insecurity, unemployment among others.

African countries, with reference to Nigeria, depends on their counterpart overseas (the European, American and Asian) countries for their growth. Nigeria should not continue to endlessly depend on these countries for her progressive and sustainable development. She has to initiate her own development and sustain it. This can be achieved through self-actualization by engaging in activities that would promote values and capabilities of the country and citizens

through self-development along with the transfer of technologies in order to compete with the rest of the world. With a view to meet the crucial demands of open, liberal and smooth communication with the western countries which could in turn contribute to the integration of the country into larger society and organization such as UNO, UNESCO, AU etc., foreign language especially French – the second working language of the international organization after English – should highly be encouraged in Nigeria.

From an economic perspective, proficiency in French allows Nigerians to access new markets in Francophone countries, including advanced French speaking nations such as France, Canada, and the likes, thus enhancing trade relations and promoting economic growth. France, as one of Nigeria's primary trading partners, facilitates exchanges in sectors such as oil, agriculture, and technology. Furthermore, French language skills contribute to the tourism sector, attracting Francophone tourists to Nigeria and enhancing the country's cultural exchange opportunities (Fadairo, 2018). Beside this, the knowledge of French language can also be of a great contribution in the process of technology transfer. Of course, when we talk of transfer of technology, we mean sharing and disseminating knowledge, skills, innovation with some other countries which of course has the potential to carry on positive change, improve and bring fortune to the citizens and the country at large.

Transferring technology required that one has the ability to interact in the language of the proprietor of the technology. Doing so necessitate the other party learn the language of the owner of the technology. Doing so, ne, necessitate the other party learn the language This is where language becomes imperative, as this can be highly valuable to individuals and the country in general especially in the field of brainstorming and even acquiring some “of fundamental concepts and terminologies” involved as technology transfer is concerned (Reisinger et al. 2022:201). Nowadays, Modern technology innovations have made the acquisition of foreign language education possible globally. Every nation is struggling to create new initiating.

In the political and diplomatic realm, Nigeria's ability to communicate in French strengthens its influence in international organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the United Nations, where French is one of the official languages. The ability to engage in multilingual dialogue promotes Nigeria's interests and fosters stronger bilateral and multilateral relationships (Kouadio, 2014).

French Language and Employability in Nigeria

The impact of French language skills on employability is a key consideration in the context of Nigeria's growing economy. As the job market becomes increasingly competitive, proficiency in foreign languages—particularly French—is seen as a significant asset. Multinational corporations, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Nigeria often require employees who can communicate in French. French-speaking professionals are in high demand in sectors such as telecommunications, business consultancy, international trade, tourism, and education. In addition, French language proficiency offers Nigerian graduates a competitive edge in securing positions that involve cross-border collaboration with French-speaking regions (Oyeleye, 2017).

Moreover, French language competence provides Nigerian students with access to numerous opportunities for academic advancement. Many universities in French-speaking countries offer scholarships and academic exchanges to students proficient in French. This opens up avenues for advanced studies and internships, enhancing the professional skills of Nigerian students. By offering students access to educational institutions in countries like France, Canada, and Belgium, French proficiency plays a critical role in expanding global opportunities (Dike, 2019). In addition, with the increasing number of global companies operating in Nigeria, demand for bilingual employees has risen. French-speaking employees are often preferred for positions that involve dealing with French-speaking partners or clients. This growing demand for bilingual professionals, coupled with the country's expanding international trade and cooperation, highlights the value of French as an essential tool for employability (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Challenges of French Language Acquisition in Nigeria

Despite the evident advantages of French language proficiency, several challenges hinder its widespread adoption in Nigeria. One of these significant barriers is the inconsistent quality of French language instruction across the country. While French is made a compulsory subject in secondary schools especially in most of the private schools, many students graduate with limited proficiency due to outdated teaching methods, insufficient resources, and a shortage of qualified French teachers (Bamgbose, 2000). The lack of immersion-based learning experiences also limits students' ability to communicate effectively in French. Apart of the above identified factors, learners themselves show a lack of confidence in themselves toward the acquisition of

the language. They need to have self-esteem in themselves, believing they will be able to surmount the challenges they face in the course of learning French.

Another challenge learner's face among others includes Nigeria's linguistic diversity – with English as the official language and numerous indigenous languages spoken across the country. The dominance of English and the prevalence of indigenous languages in everyday communication reduce the perceived relevance of French language for many Nigerians. Additionally, the absence of French in daily social interactions creates a barrier for students and some professionals who wish to become fluent and excel in French language and literacy.

Current trend of foreign language competence to employability

Employability can be viewed as a set of achievements – skills, understanding and personal attribute – that makes a graduate more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation, benefiting not only themselves but also, the workforce, the community and the economy (Gill, 2018). Globally and most especially in Nigeria, the unemployment rates have increased tremendously (Jisalo, Magaji and Ismail, 2025) and these have had many significant adverse effects on the young generation. However, it is widely believed that when one could be able to speak “more than one language”, (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2020:1) this ability could help such to communicate in a clear and concise manner with people around the world who come from different parts of the world for various purposes.

It is no doubt that the population of the world and the number of graduates continue to grow day by day. Every year, thousands of people graduate from different universities. The level of high unemployment rates equally continues to skyrocket and this attracts a high competition among the graduates for employment. It is clear that jobs or employments will not come by themselves, action needs to be taken by the seekers and these demands acquiring skills and competences especially communication skills in foreign language which could expand one's horizon that could contribute and benefit the establishment.

Most of the establishments need graduates who are skillful in communication for the reason of its importance in various aspects of life. For instance, a candidate with strong communication skills contributes to a good leadership and collaborative work for his clearly expressing ideas without barrier. Being able to communicate in foreign languages and especially French can underpin one's ability to build meaningful connections and achieve different goals which the

employers desired to have. French language is the second working language of the United Nations and many international organizations. Hence, being able to communicate in French language enhances and creates a good team work for better achievements. It can propel a project to success and equally foster a positive workplace culture.

Strategies for enhancing sufficient French Language skills

To unlock the full potential of French language competence for sustainable development and employability in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach as several strategies must be employed. The Nigerian populace needs to first the importance and its relevance in the world for the reasons of politic and building diplomatic relationship, encourage technology transfer, for economic and trading purposes to mention just these few. The Nigerian education system should adopt more interactive and immersive language teaching methods. The curriculum developers should revise the current curriculum with practical skills to include modern language learning tools such as multimedia resources, online platforms, and promote language exchange programmes. Furthermore, French language teachers should be provided with ongoing professional development to improve their teaching effectiveness and ensure students receive a high-quality education (Oduwole, 2016). They should be motivated by being sent from time to time out for in-service training programme.

The Nigerian government, in collaboration with French cultural institutions and private sector partners, can establish French language centers across the country apart from those already created by the French government such as the “Alliance Française” and “the Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (C.F.T.D). These centers can offer specialized courses, organize language proficiency programmes, and provide scholarships for advanced French language education. Encouraging private enterprises to sponsor French language learning initiatives could also play a crucial role in enhancing the country’s French-speaking workforce (Wang, 2018).

Public awareness campaigns should also be launched to highlight the long-term benefits of French language proficiency. By showcasing the potential career opportunities, economic benefits, and academic advantages of learning French, Nigeria can motivate students and professionals to embrace the language. Additionally, incentive programs such as language proficiency competitions, internships, and scholarships should be in place which could not only attract but also can encourage greater interest in learning French (Fadairo, 2018).

Conclusion

Foreign language competence—particularly in French—has a vital role to play in Nigeria's sustainable development and employability. In fact, foreign language proficiency is a very important asset that can enhance employability, career prospects, can lead to more roles and leadership opportunities, it can as well help in building trust and mutual rapport with international stakeholders to just mention these few. Proficiency in French enables Nigeria (and of course many other non-francophone nations) to engage more effectively in regional and global trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchanges with their francophone counterparts. It also provides Nigerians with access to a wide range of career opportunities in various sectors, enhancing their competitiveness in the global job market. So, having a good language skills and competences most especially French language in Nigeria increases the college and university graduates' competitiveness in the global job market. The ability to communicate in multiple foreign languages especially French in an Anglophone country like Nigeria makes one an attractive suitor for the roles in employment such as tourism, trade diplomacy, air hostess, international business because all of these firms require multilingual professionals. However, to fully capitalize on these benefits, Nigeria must address the challenges associated with French language instruction and cultural adoption. By implementing strategic educational reforms, fostering public-private partnerships, and encouraging language learning initiatives, Nigeria can ensure that its citizens are equipped with the necessary skills to thrive in an interconnected world. As the global economy and technology continues to evolve, French language competence will remain a key asset for sustainable development and employability in Nigeria.

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