



## **Barriers to the Actualization of Teaching French Language to Students with Hearing Impairment in Junior Secondary Schools of Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims at discussing barriers to the actualization of the teaching of French language to students with hearing impairment in junior secondary schools in Nigeria. In Nigeria's basic education level, students are required to study and pass all the subject of the school before they can enter senior secondary level. Experience and studies have shown that language is a big hurdle for persons with hearing impairment. Language barrier has been one of the major problems that has caused many students with hearing impairment to drop out of school. Some of them are either out of school or are in the school where their needs are not met. Few are in schools where they may be put into one class all in the name of integration without much attention. As French language is one the school subjects that are made compulsory in junior secondary schools in Nigeria, the students are on the crossroad how to cross the barrier they have with language acquisition to learn it. If some things are put in place, learning French can be made easier for the hearing impaired. The authors looked at those barriers that can hinder the hearing impaired from benefiting more from the education for all goal especially in French language. To do this, the authors looked at: Lack of proper understanding of problems faced by the hearing impaired in language acquisition, lack of early intervention, insufficient government involvement in issues facing the hearing impaired, attitudes of the society, non-availability of quality human and material resources, inadequate confidence-building programmes for beneficiary students, none availability of qualitative advocacy, role models not available or insufficient, the absence of enabling legislation and inadequate number of schools that can take care of the hearing impaired.

**Keywords:** Barriers, French Language, Students, Hearing Impairment, Junior Secondary Schools.

**Citation of article:** Umeh, C. C & Umeh, C. A (2024). Barriers to the Actualization of Teaching French Language to Students with Hearing Impairment in Junior Secondary Schools of Nigeria, *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies, AJPAS*, 17(2):27-43

**Date submitted:** 07/08/2024 **Date Accepted:** 27/09/2024 **Date Published:** December, 2024



## Introduction

Hearing impairment is an umbrella name which portrays one who has problem with hearing either completely (deafness) or partially (hard of hearing). It occurs when there is disturbance or damage in one or two ears. The damage may limit an individual from hearing conversation, normal or loud speech, with or without amplification. The problems of hearing impairment can adversely affect language acquisition of any child that shows signs of it. This is because acquisition of language is through a process and these processes are through the hearing organ.

Okoedion (2019) opined that language can be seen as the primary mode of human expression. That language delineates humans from other animals. The authour went on to say that with the use of language in its oral and written form, humans are able to communicate and express their feelings within the cultural norms. Also, language is a mean or process of understanding the experience, ideas, and emotions. Then since French is a language, it performs all functions that human languages perform such as communicative, interactive, diplomatic and informative functions. Therefore, the hearing impaired should not be left out from all these good benefits of language. The acquisition of any language and literacy skills probably represents the most formidable challenge confronting educators of children with hearing impairment. The primary language for many children with hearing impairment is sign language which can be American Sign Language (ASL) or any other. Other languages are learned as a second or third language, and they learn it via the written form. This creates a formidable, dual learning task--learning to read a phonetically-based writing system while simultaneously learning a second language. The lack or loss of hearing can affect a child's learning progress, particularly in the understanding and production of spoken language (Karchmer & Mitchell, 2003).

Deaf culture (2011) said that one of the greatest challenges faced by people with hearing impairment is the acquisition of language skills. People who are born with hearing problems or develop them very early do not learn spoken language the way hearing people do. French language is one of the many languages of the world and in Nigerian system of education, the



hearing impaired are required to learn it as a school subject in their junior secondary classes. Since written French language is based on spoken language, students with hearing impairment have difficulty learning it and expanding their vocabularies over time. Children who first learn to communicate using sign language or no language at all will have a harder time learning French language. This is because American Sign Language they can use is not based on spoken or written French structure. Children with hearing impairment who started with sign language must learn any other language including French language as a second or third language with difficulties and yet they are expected in Nigeria to learn it and write examinations in the Junior secondary schools.

Moore (2001) opined that significant academic progress is more likely to occur in settings where the curriculum and instruction are communicatively accessible, uniquely designed, and delivered by individuals who have highly specialized skills to address the needs of children with hearing impairment. In support of this assertion, Buckle & Bird (2011) is of the opinion that inclusion into mainstream education results in very significant gains in speech, language development, and literacy skills for children with hearing impairment. This is because mental and social development of children is influenced by the social world in which they are growing up. Anyone who has attempted to learn French will agree that it is a difficult language to master. One must learn a number of grammar rules as well as other important aspects of the language. Pronunciation, listening, and vocabulary will undoubtedly be difficult for a hearing person before we talk of the hearing impaired. In any case, French language was proclaimed as the second official language in Nigeria by the late former Head of State, General Sani Abacha in 1996 and so made compulsory by Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria.

Languages with vastly different sentence structures and grammar rules can be challenging especially to the hearing impaired. French, with its gendered nouns and complex verb conjugations, does present some hurdles more so when French is a phonetic language (Elinor, 2023). Again, Languages with unique sounds and phonetic intricacies can be tough. French pronunciation can be a stumbling block due to its nasalized vowels and subtle differences in



consonant sounds which the hearing impaired cannot hear, perceive or lip read. The problems of acquiring French language for the hearing impairment has the following perceived barriers that will be discussed in this paper: Lack of proper understanding of problems faced by the hearing impaired in language acquisition, lack of early intervention, insufficient government involvement in issues facing the hearing impaired, attitudes of the society, non-availability of quality human and material resources, inadequate confidence-building programmes for beneficiary students, none availability of qualitative advocacy, the absence of enabling legislation, role models not available or insufficient and in adequate number of schools that can take care of the hearing impaired.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The study is anchored on Social Cognition and Theory of Mind propounded by Brenda Schick and was amplified by Astington J. W. (1993). The major assumptions of social cognition and theory of mind are that humans are social animals that spend a great deal in social relationships. The protagonists opinionate that as children develop, they gain a better understanding of peers and adults around them, and become aware that people can differ on what they believe, know and want. Their values and goals can be different from others and this is what the proponents called “mindreading other people’s mind”.

The basic argument of this theory is that the content of our minds is not a visible thing. We can only figure out what others know or believe from their behaviour, such as their facial expression, what they do, and from what they say. Our communication contains a lot of information about what we think and believe. Evidence abounds that language provides a great deal of raw material for development of social cognition and theory of mind. Thus, when a parent walks about the house with a puzzled expression and says, “I thought I put my keys in the Kitchen but they are not there”, the child gets explicit information about what the parent is thinking.

Essentially, for children who are hard of hearing, language skills are highly correlated with social understanding and theory of mind. Children with more age-appropriate language skills are more likely to have age-appropriate language skills in social cognition especially children learning



spoken English as well as those using various forms of sign language. The relevance of this theory in this study is that there are many academic areas where skills in social cognition are essential to learning, hence, its application in this study. This is because accessing education through an interpreter may be complex, but it is very easy for the teacher and the classroom teacher to view the interpreter's job as conveying the teacher's talk to the students. But this limited view of the interpreter's role may leave a student even more isolated from his or her hearing peers. The educational team therefore need to work with the interpreters so that interaction with peers is facilitated. The interpreter may need to work with the hearing peers on how to use an interpreter. In point of fact, there should be an understanding that social communication with the deaf or hard-of-hearing students is doable and desirable with an interpreter.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted descriptive survey design. Data for the study were largely sourced through secondary sources such as journals, textbooks, newspapers, internet and other documented materials. The analysis of the data was undertaken qualitatively where the researcher analytically discussed the content validity of the barriers to the actualization of teaching French language to students with hearing impairment in junior secondary schools in Nigeria and its implication on the students.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The discussion of findings of this study is hinged on the identified barriers to the actualization of teaching French Language to students with hearing impairment in junior secondary schools in Nigeria. The barriers are systematically discussed hereunder thus;

#### **Lack of Proper Understanding of Problems Faced by the Hearing Impaired in Language Acquisition**

Many factors contribute to language deprivation for young deaf children which is always hidden. We know that language access is a fundamental human right, the reality is more sobering for the



hearing impaired. Jannusch (2023) pointed out that research shows 70% of Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, and Hard of Hearing children don't have sufficient language access. And that statistics are even worse among Blacks. Language deprivation is real and dire. In fact, 98% of deaf children have no access to language says the author. This assertion may even be worst in Nigeria where the statistics are not available.

One may ask what language deprivation is. Language deprivation may be defined as the chronic lack of full access to a natural language during a child's critical period of language acquisition. Research has shown that if the students with hearing impaired do not have full language access, they may experience language deprivation. This excludes a fully accessible visual language such as French language. Wyatt (2018) estimated that less than 10% of all deaf children in America are getting early access to language. This author explains that after the critical period, it will be complicated to go back and fill in the gaps in their language functioning skills. Imagine a deaf child entering school at the age of five having only 50-100 words when, at that age, they should be able to have thousands of words in the vocabulary base. This is what language deprivation looks like.

Deaf Children Australia (2012) observed that the input the deaf child receives in language acquisition will be much less than what a hearing child will receive and which may lead to problems with communication and learning in school. For example, they may have heard a particular word only once or twice and only in one context, while the hearing child may have heard it hundreds of times in many contexts and have repeated and used the word around other context. It is of interest to note that deaf children most of the time are still learning basic language skills when they enter at school. While hearing children get to school with a sophisticated language base and they use this language as the beginning into literacy. Also, they have an internalized language system which forms the foundation for their development of literacy skills. Deaf children are therefore at a disadvantage because they have to deal with learning both language and literacy at the same. This is before they start learning additional language which is French.



There is growing evidence that lack of language access has negative implications. This includes cognitive delays, mental health difficulties, lower quality of life, higher trauma, and limited health literacy. Priorities of deaf child development should focus on healthy growth of all developmental domains through a fully-accessible first language foundation such as sign language, rather than auditory deprivation and speech skills.

Looking at the situation, learning of French for the hearing impaired may be second or even third language which is a difficult task. Adigwe and Anukwu (2015) noted that people must expend greater effort in order to learn a second language and that they often achieve lower levels of competence in that language as compared to the first. Theories of second language acquisition have claimed that language input has a consistent positive effect in improving proficiency. These theories maintain that the input has to be comprehensible to the learner and modified through interactions. These theories have not favoured the hearing impaired especially in Nigeria.

It is critical to recognize that any hearing loss a child has impacted on both the child's language and speech development, but language development is more important than speech development which French language is mainly for. This is because almost all learning depends on language. The better language a child has, the broader the range of their mental concepts and the more they will be able to learn in school. The child that is hearing impaired may not have in their vocabulary many of the words they are trying to read so they will find it very difficult to build an internal picture of what the French language is all about. This causes a lot of confusion for them. If the instructors of the hearing impaired recognise all this problems, they will be able to find better ways of assisting them learn French and do better in their examinations.

### **Lack of Early Intervention**

Parents of small children with hearing impairment need guidance on constructing home and school environments that affect normal language acquisition. The parents first of all go into denial, then turn to physicians and spiritual leaders and, increasingly, the internet for solutions. These sources can be under informed about crucial issues, such as matters of brain plasticity connected to the risk of linguistic deprivation, and delay or disruption in the development of



cognitive skills interwoven with linguistic ability. Deaf Children Australia (2012) pointed out that research has shown that enrolment as an effective early intervention program is very important for a child's language development, providing options, language models and communication skills. Ideally, access to intervention by the age of six months gives deaf children the best opportunities for learning. From experience, medical school education does not address language development for hearing impaired children.

Observe that group conversations, such as at the family dinner table or classrooms are particularly hard for the child with a hearing loss. Parents and instructors that have contact with the child in their early life should try and make sure only one person speaks at a time and cue the child into the changing topics of conversation to help them acquire language properly. It is only when they get the fundamentals of acquiring language that learning of French can be a little easier.

Children with hearing impairment are often left alone because of communication issues. This attitude of parent and others do not help them in the language development. The child can improve in language acquisition when the parents and those around them try to spend as much time as they can on talking or signing with the child. They should use every opportunity they can to extend the deaf child's language; play with the child, talk or sign with the child, read books with the child and work with the child's teacher to develop strategies and games together. Also, by visiting new places and providing the child with experiences to talk about later together. The child can draw pictures or write about what happened. Talk or sign about what will happen before the event, when it happens, and then after the event, talk or sign about it together, draw pictures and write stories. Photos are a wonderful way to discuss events with the child with hearing impairment, and include photos of specific people so that they can learn names of these people, what they do, what they like or don't like can be discussed. The limit to activities which can be done with the child with hearing impairment is your imagination. One thing learnt from experience is that when they grasp words, they retain them

### **Insufficient Government Involvement in Issues Facing the Hearing Impaired**





No doubt Nigeria is a signatory to the Salamanca Statement on inclusion and it is stated in the countries policy on education of 2004 but the issues remains full implementation of it. A lack of political will to implement policies where they exist, and to set up legal backing where they do not exist, is another key barrier. Though there are policies and strategies that can support quality inclusive education in Nigeria, enough work and commitment is not done by governments to ensure implementation. If this education for all is implemented, the child with hearing impairment will be enrolled in the school early to help build up language skills leading to to their learning of French language as they are required to do. There are sometimes insufficient financial resources to support programmes, leading governments to overly rely on None Governmental Organizations (NGO), making programmes unsustainable (Umeh, 2012). Nigeria National Policy on Education (2004), section 10 on special education number (96.c/ i) says “All necessary facilities that would ensure easy access to education shall be provided; e.g inclusive education or integration of special classes and units into ordinary/public schools under UBE scheme.” This is vague because lack of clear objective and definitions gives rise to dilemmas in efficiency and implementations of proper inclusive education for the hearing impaired and this is why Nigerian government can still not find her footing in full implementation of inclusive education.

Lack of political will is also evident in a lack of coordination and accountability. There are often lots of different programmes, taking different shapes in line with the different understanding and interests of various practitioners. Another dimension of fragmentation is the inability to capture learning and best practice which can then be used to expand initiatives and enhance quality in the issue of hearing impaired education. If the government will be fully involved in the issues of deaf education and be committed to it, it will work but when it is not, the goal of Eeducation For All (EFA) will be a dream for children with hearing impaired.

### **Attitudes of the Society**



Another significant barrier to education and language acquisition for children with hearing impairment is negative attitudes. This manifests itself among parents, professionals, government officials, and members of the community. Negative cultural or social attitudes towards hearing impairment result in some parents not wanting to be associated with a child with a disability because of the stigma. Special schools are often, therefore, considered an ideal place to ‘hide’ such children. Difficulties experienced by people with hearing impairment in society makes many people apprehensive of what could happen to a lone child who is deaf submerged in a large class of hearing children. The attitudes of both special and general teachers and the lack of adequate skills and confidence in the children with hearing impairment can generate lack of confidence in what schools or inclusive education has to offer.

Another issue of attitudes is around ownership. Mainstream administrators and practitioners often do not want to become fully engaged in supporting children with hearing impairment in their schools. Also of worry attitude is that of teachers and their administrators who are not willing to accept children with hearing impairment in their class. They are aware of the few special schools which may be too far from the child and think that this is where children with hearing impairment should learn. Some teachers, after orientation, do embrace the concept of including them in their class, but are often unable to move away from sympathy and pity towards them and not really respecting the children as learners requiring equal treatment and a good quality education. For example, some teachers mark a child’s work as correct, even when it is wrong, to make the child happy and to improve the report card (Fefoame, 2011). It is good to note that sometimes, Parents of regular children threatened to pick their children away if the hearing impaired are allowed to continue to study alongside their children.

### **Non-Availability of Quality Human and Material Resources**

Lack of quality human resources is a common and extensive barrier to quality education for children with hearing impairment. Regular teachers receive insufficient information about deaf education during their training.



According to Oluranti (2012), most of the teachers available in Nigeria secondary schools for the subject are not trained to teach the French language even to the hearing students before we talk of the hearing impaired. Since teachers are very vital to the implementation of any curriculum, their preparation should be considered essential in any meaningful educational implementation strategy. It is the teacher who interprets the objectives and contents in the curriculum plans and manages the learning situation; hence, their quality, quantity, willingness, self-motivation, interest, commitment and use of methodology are very essential for the success of the programme.

On 12 February, 2016 the government has made French language a compulsory subjects at all levels of the country's education system, from primary to tertiary and students must offer courses in French language (Daily Trust, 2016). In their study on learning of French language in secondary schools in Adamawa state, Suleiman and Ibrahim (2017) retreated that observed that some schools do not teach French language at all because teachers are not available. That in some schools, where the language is taught, only one or two teachers are found handling the entire arms of junior secondary school and the senior secondary section in the case of those offering the subject at that level. In some cases, the teachers teaching French language are not well trained, probably; perhaps they are University graduates who do not possess professional qualities or skills to effectively teach the language. This situation affects the hearing impaired more.

Eleweke and Rhoda (2002) observed that adequate provision of materials and equipment necessary for quality educational programs for people with hearing impairment in schools in Nigeria are not available. Also, trained personnel are very limited. Lack of support services for effective inclusion of the hearing impaired suggests that many people with hearing impairment in Nigeria may never have opportunity to be educated there by have limited language.

Ozaji (2005) has this to say about expanding the schools resources to accommodate all children: that the essential marks of inclusive education are that its clients are not limited to exceptional



children in the traditional delineation of the term, but indeed all children having problems with learning and the normal children as well. Secondly, the physical and human resources of the school are re-engineered to accommodate and to respond to the learning needs of the learners and thirdly, there are networks of supports for all learners.

Eleweka (2000) sighting Amumonye 1991, and Kholi 1993 stated that evidence suggests that the lack of relevant facilities and materials is major obstacle to the implementation of effective integration in DCs. They investigated the problems of integration in the West African country of Nigeria and found out that data indicate that the required educational materials were not provided or were inadequate in regular schools where students with hearing impaired were being integrated. Further, the data indicates that there were no specialist teachers in most institutions to provide important advisory services that would assist the regular teachers with managing the learners with hearing impairment who were being integrated into public schools. In some school, Anumonye found that there was so little contact between the children with hearing impairment and their teachers and other pupils. It was observed that those children at the primary levels were socially isolated since they just sat in the classrooms and never participated in any activity outside the confines of the classroom.

### **Inadequate Confidence-building Programmes for Beneficiary Students**

One of the barriers evident is the lack of better performance of the hearing impaired in languages is lack of confidence. Their inability to acquire language early in their life makes them have low self esteem. Most marginalised children are not assertive and lack confidence. The counselling and awareness-raising exercises are often not sufficient to build the self-assertiveness of the children. Children with hearing impairment needs support to develop confidence especially when it comes to language to demand attention and develop different mechanisms to solving problems. They also need support to identify personal strengths and focus on developing those to overcome marginalisation. If this is not taken into consideration before the child is carried and thrown into an unknown and un-welcoming environment, it could be shattering for the child education, training and learning of any language.



### **None availability of qualitative advocacy**

History of special needs education and other services in many countries of the world accepts the important roles played by pressure groups of and for people with hearing impaired and other special needs in bringing about needed changes and improvements in services. Evidence suggests that activities of these group mounts pressure on the government which can lead to the provision of needed services (Rose & kiger, 1995), and to enact and enforce legislations guaranteeing that rights of the hearing impaired and other special needs people. Awareness creating is a good strategy that these groups could use in the struggle by using: mass media-television, radio, newspaper, and magazines; in Nigeria to create awareness among the people of Nigerian nation on the plight of the hearing impaired (Umeh, 2012).

### **Role models not available or insufficient**

All children need role models to provide mentoring and inspiration. The lack of involvement of such significant groups and individuals is a significant barrier to deaf education. Inclusive education targeting marginalised groups like the hearing impaired would require a broader involvement of such non-formula support. However, practice on the ground often focuses on the formal education aspects, with insufficient attention given to developing the roles of informal role models and mentors. Sometimes those who are hearing impaired themselves can be seen distancing themselves from the children with flimsy excuses of none performing or never do wells. Since it has been noted that these group are not assertive in nature, an encouragement and example of people like them or who share this faith with them can be a wonderful motivator. If every other thing geared towards proper education of the hearing impaired and they are not forthcoming to benefit from the programmes, then it will still be a failure.

### **The absence of enabling legislation**

Lack of protective legislation and policy hampers the development of inclusive education of children with hearing impairment in Nigeria. In fact it is the major obstacle to the inclusion of children with hearing impairment in the country. Eleweke & Rodda (2000) opined that



mandatory policies and laws support effective implementation of inclusive education programme in many countries. If this is done, it will ensure that the required services for the children with hearing impairment will be provided. They augured further and said that mandatory policies and laws are necessary in the implementation of inclusion for the children with hearing impairment because it will provide: protective safeguards which will guarantee the right of the children with hearing impairment to receive specific services that will be of benefit to them; there will be specific time of onset and phase plans for anything planed for them; there will be consequential effect meaning that if all who are to comply to any law fails, there will be legal effect; evaluation and monitoring procedures will be in existence and of course there will be financial backing and structure. It is as a result of absence of legislation that all the policies made in the National Police of education (2004) for special needs and inclusion is not being implemented. As long as there are no laws, the policy lack organization, not conclusive and lack backing. This is because the policies are open with nobody mandated to see to the implementation, if the policy and laws are there, it will be clear who does what (either the federal, state or a group).

### **Inadequate Number of Schools that can take care of the Hearing Impaired**

The issue of inclusion needs to be seen within the context of the wider international discussions around the United Nations organisations agenda of “Education for All” (EFA), stimulated by the 1990 Jomtien Declaration. In early documentation on EFA, there was a rather token mention of “special needs”. This has been gradually replaced by recognition that the inclusion agenda should be seen as an essential element of the whole EFA movement. Thus, instead of an emphasis on the idea of *integration*, (with its assumption that additional arrangements will be made to accommodate pupils and students seen as being special within a system of schooling that remains largely unchanged), we now see moves towards inclusive education, where the aim is to restructure schools in response to the needs of all pupils and students.

The problem now is that there are very few schools that accommodate students with hearing impairment. The schools there are that are called deaf school are few. The inclusive schools are very few. Some states in Nigeria do not have even one and most of the schools are either owned



by churches or individual. How many of the hearing impaired be accommodate in the few schools. They are mostly in the cities where the rural dwellers find it hard to bring their deaf children on time for early intervention. This makes education expensive for the children coming from far distances to school.

## **Conclusion**

The acquisition of any language including French and literacy skills probably represents the most formidable challenge confronting educators of children with hearing impairment. Salamanca Statement encourages us to look at educational difficulties in new ways. This new direction in thinking is based on the belief that changes in methodology and organisation which must be rooted in sound understanding of the range of difficulties experienced by students with hearing impairment, can under certain cautions benefit all children. In this way, hearing impaired student currently categorized as having special needs in learning languages will be seen as a stimulus for encouraging the development of richer learning environments for them. If the above mentioned barriers are not removed, the hearing impaired will continue to lag behind in their learning and excelling in French language class subject. French language is one of the very well recognized international languages in the world currently and Nigeria have it as the second language but some students may not benefit from the goodness especially the hearing impaired. The commitment of all stakeholders will do well to assist these students beneficiary this language offers.

## **Policy Alternatives**

It is good to note that in educating the hearing impaired, one has to have some sort of training to help equip the person for the job. Constant interaction with proper techniques will go a long way to help them learn language easily. The following points would be of help to those who teach French to the hearing impaired:



- ❖ The teacher is to ensure the student is paying attention before teaching. The teacher can get their attention by either touching them lightly or moving a hand or some other object within their visual field, but not too close to them.
- ❖ Keeping an eye contact with the student when talking is very important.
- ❖ Some students that wear hearing aids will have problem hearing if a distance is created between them and the teacher, so keep about one metre between yourself and the students.
- ❖ Teachers should try as much they can to keep their hands away from their face and trim their moustache or beard if they have any so it is not covering their mouth.
- ❖ A class where there is background noise and distractions can create difficulties for students with hearing impairment for those with a hearing loss in one ear. Also remember reverberation is a problem for hearing aid users. Be aware of the difficulties of listening in rooms where there is nothing to absorb the sound, Avoid shouting. Speak naturally and if the child does not understand, say the same thing in a different way which may be easier to lipread.
- ❖ Remember that facial expressions and natural gestures will aid understanding, but don't exaggerate expressions. When experiencing difficulties in communicating. Also, remember that patience will be rewarded.
- ❖ Make sure the classroom is well lighted. Communicating in the dark and when you stand far or backing the student is difficult as your face cannot be seen clearly.

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