

FRENCH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: THE GATEWAY TO EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR NIGERIAN GRADUATES

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Abstract

For some years now, accessing jobs after graduation has become a serious issue for Nigerian graduates, their parents and the nation at large. This trend is traceable to a number of factors which include poor curricula in use for many programmes, lack of facilities for teaching, lack of teaching personnel and lack of seriousness on the part of many undergraduates. For these reasons, the tag ‘unemployable’ has become the classification for Nigerian graduates. However, even when some students by dint of hard work manage to come out well groomed, the jobs remain in short supply due to the down-turn in the Nigerian economy. Under this situation, only those who have ‘something extra’ such as working knowledge of Foreign Languages especially ‘French’ can outsmart others vis-à-vis access to jobs locally and internationally. This paper therefore wishes to re-echo the need for the mounting of ‘French for Specific Purposes’ for students in Nigerian Universities to help improve upon their marketability. This could be achieved by making French a compulsory GST course where adequate curricula are developed to suit the working needs of graduates in the various disciplines where French could be an added advantage to the job seekers.

Introduction

Higher education from ages is one of the ways human development is carried out. Through it, an individual is expected to acquire both oral and practical ways of facing challenges in life and contributing meaningfully to the society. Such an individual is also expected to acquire such skills in specific areas for accessing employment to live a meaningful life within the society. For this reason, the national policy on education has always insisted on the use of proper tools especially languages to inculcate in the students such ideas and practices that would help them to achieve their goals in life. In concrete terms this policy considers the importance of language. Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion as well as preserving cultures. For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French.

A peep into French History and Civilisation shows that a lot of world class philosophers and writers helped to shape the minds of the French people through books and philosophical essays that help develop the mind. For Obinaju (2008:36) among such philosophers could be mentioned Descartes whose *Discours de la méthode* has remained one of the cardinal principles of research. Rabelais, whose book *Gargantua* counselled on the need for proper training of the child to make him a well-rounded individual not just ‘une tête bien pleine’ but ‘une tête bien faite’ (26). There are also others like Voltaire, Montesquieu, Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose works such as *Candide*, *Lettres Persanes*, *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* among many others, inculcated in French men and women and by extension through translations the world over, the need for decency in behaviour through tolerance both in Religion, Politics and in social life. By reading these works with a fair knowledge of French language, Nigerians could learn a lot of good things that can help mould Nigeria into a better country than it is now.

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At least, it is on record that the French Revolution of 1789 which ushered in ‘‘Freedom, Equality (before the law), and Brotherhood’’ are the gains of the sensitization efforts of the French Philosophers and writers.

The French language is one of the international languages used in marketing, conferences, in companies, diplomacy etc. It is next to the English language in the job market today. Technologically also, France is one of the leading countries in technology today and so many projects by companies which are French-based abound in Nigeria (Total, Elf-Chevron, Air Liquide, Ashakacem, Julius Berger, Michelin, Araromi Rubber Estates, Reynold Construction Company (RCC) etc) and countries around the world. If students learn this language, directed specifically to their areas of specialisation, be it Medicine, Engineering, Architecture, Law, Nursing, Communication, Tourism, Security etc, it will help them to be more marketable on graduation. This is why it is necessary to look at the possibility of adopting French as a General Studies Course in Nigerian universities to be developed according to Faculty needs.

The Nigerian Graduate and Employment Opportunities: The Missing Link

For some time now, the Nigerian graduates have been facing difficulties vis-à-vis employment after graduation. Among the reasons for this are inadequate curricula for the different areas of manpower development/ need, lack of adequate infrastructural facilities for proper hands-on practice in most of the areas that need such for better development of the students, the dwindling nature of the Nigerian economy which has seen institutions, companies and other employers of labour shut down because of insurmountable challenges they are facing notably power and dwindling value of the naira. Even as these pose challenges, lack of versatile skills in communication among Nigerian graduates also contributes to their inability to access jobs within and outside the country. The tools here are notably language tools, English and French basically.

As Awake (2002:3) observes, globalization, ‘‘the great economic event of our era...now bringing unprecedented opportunities to billions of people throughout the world’’ points to a serious need for all and sundry to strive to broaden their communicative channels by speaking more than one international language. Indeed, so diverse are the global challenges today in business, academic, social and political terrains that one can hardly actualize one’s dreams without venturing into broader language use. The Nigerian educational system promotes the teaching of foreign languages but this has been restricted as a programme for just a few that want to make a living through such means. These are mainly teachers and a few others in translation duties or diplomatic services. However, unknown to the authorities developing the curricula and guiding our education, many more doors could be opened for employment opportunities if the French language is taught for specific needs of our graduates especially graduates in the professional areas like Medicine, Engineering, Architecture, life and health sciences, communication, hotel and tourism, security etc. If students in these disciplines are made to gain working knowledge of the French language as it applies to their programmes, they will become much more marketable than otherwise because companies and other employers of labour who have links within and outside Nigeria, might want to use their services realising that they could function within a French-related environment. It would become possible for them to seek employment outside the country therefore reducing the number of unemployed youths roaming the streets and constituting additional burden for the government. It is therefore important that the system looks at the possibility of developing this aspect of training to add more value to the

certificates that the professionals mostly, obtain especially if they have to seek for jobs outside the country. According to Dickson (2002:6) Nigeria lost its bid to occupation of the Secretary seat in the United Nations because the candidate being fronted then was not bilingual and did not have a working knowledge of French.

Benefits from French for Specific Purposes

According to Iheanacho (1986:3), many Nigerians and other African nations' intellectuals including those in sciences now realise that their presence in the academic, business or professional world could be better felt if they had notions of French and some are actually getting down to learning the language, either to enable them to read works published in it or make them feel at ease at multilingual learned conferences. In the same vein, Simire (2002:147-148) recognizes that since about nine (9) out of the fifteen (15) member states of ECOWAS speak French, and that Nigeria, the "Giant of Africa" is surrounded by French-speaking countries, it would be wise for French language teaching to be pursued vigorously so that Nigeria can play a leading role in the affair of the sub-region, especially in her economy. Besides, he argues:

s'intéresser au Français, de surcroît au français de spécialité, c'est élargir les perspectives d'avenir de nos apprenants dans la mesure où qui dit libre circulation des biens, des personnes et des capitaux dit promotion des échanges inter-états et ceci à tous les niveaux...

(Getting interested in French, especially in French for specific purposes means enlarging opportunities in future for our learners because he who accepts free circulation of goods, people and capital accepts inter-state exchanges and at all levels...) Our translation

In the light of the above, West African integration to date, has its success or failure seriously tied to the extent to which individual member states that make up the sub-region (Anglophone and Francophone) are able to put their citizens through specific training programmes where French or English serves useful purpose. The Late General Sani Abacha seemed mindful of the importance of French language for Nigeria when he declared it the second official language for Nigeria in May, 1996. According to Cookey (1990:20), "it is important to acquire the knowledge of Foreign Languages mainly because nations have to interact across national linguistic barriers...". For Nwokoye (1981:247),

Trade within the (West African) sub-region will be greatly facilitated not only by breaking down tariff barrier but also by improving infrastructures...and communication.

Among the many benefits derivable from the introduction of French for specific purposes feature the following:

- development of the human being through reading of books in French addressing diverse areas of human life
- development and acquisition of skills that would be harnessed from the study of books written in French in specific areas
- ability to compete side by side with Francophone graduates for jobs in the international market
- increased international relationships for the individual and for the country.

Suggested Ways for Actualization of the Programme: French for Specific Purposes (FSP)

To actualize the programme “French for Specific Purposes (FSP) avenues should be provided for French departments around the country to develop specific programmes relevant to the different professional areas that exist in our universities, polytechnics and other tertiary institutions. Such programmes should be housed within the General Studies Unit as part of the entrepreneurial skills students should be made to acquire before leaving schools.

- The Nigerian French Language Village, Badagry is already working on this and should be empowered to co-ordinate action nation-wide.
- Appropriate teaching equipment, language laboratories, audio-visual materials, should be provided in properly developed French language centres within the universities for this purpose. This will quicken the duration of study for the students and would help increase proficiency.
- French language teachers within the universities should be further trained to specialise in the relevant areas that French would add value to the certificates issued to graduates at the end of their studies. On this need, Akase (2014:7) has this to say;

By according French language the status of a second official language in Nigeria, by making it mandatory for the JSS level of all post primary schools and by declaring it a compulsory elective course in the universities especially in GST courses, its propagation has been made a worthwhile undertaking whose pursuance has to be approached methodically. This is because the status conditions so imposed are good and commendable developments. But they create on the other side of the coin, problems that may hamper the smooth execution of the task ahead. Applying the principle of the adage (“what is worth doing is worth doing well” is necessary) to consider the measures we should adopt to attain proficiency in the teaching and learning of French together with our indigenous languages. The measures can be classified in three spheres which are manpower, resources and the management of those resources.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to look at the Nigerian graduates and the job market situation which has not been very forthcoming with solutions on how to accommodate the quantum of graduates turned out yearly from our tertiary institutions. Many factors were highlighted as causes for this and they include poor curricula, lack of facilities for teaching, lack of teaching personnel and the nonchalant attitude of some students in schools. A case was made for introducing “French for Specific Purposes” to help increase the marketability of these graduates within and outside the country. The paper went on to suggest ways this project could be actualized. Already few Nigerian graduates who have been able to acquire good knowledge of French for their specific job areas, have found their ways across our borders and are making returns to their families in hard currencies. This contribution is therefore with the conviction that French for Specific Purposes (FSP) is the gateway to the needed pep-up for most of our roaming graduates to settle in gainful employments in companies that are business oriented using English and French as tools, and other outfits that are in need of bilingual personnel such as International Hotels, Tourist centres, Airlines, Security outfits among others.

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