

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF FRENCH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Human development, a widely used term in psychology, and more recently, in Economics, is a subject of global concern in recent years. It denotes among other things the development of people's abilities and creation of enabling environment for people to make use of these opportunities. The United Nations annual report on the issue ranks Nigeria amongst the least in the area of human development and this, obviously, follows the despondent economic condition of many of its citizens. This paper proposes to highlight the need for proper placement of values, putting the acquisition of French as a fertile ground for the improvement of the human persons in Nigeria. We argue that a lot of potentialities await French graduates both within and outside the country as bilingualism is highly fostered for a fuller development of the human person. This study is based on Maslow's theory of human needs and Mahbub's human development theory. Consequently, for a better development of the human person via French language, we propose an action-based method of teaching and proper implementation of the National Policy on Education. The approach is historical and descriptive in nature.

Key words: human development, foreign language, French

Introduction

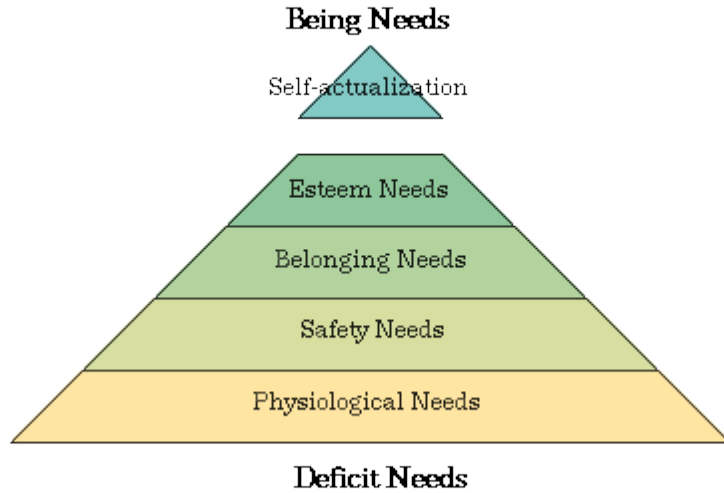
This all- important discussion calls for an explication of the key terms – development, human development and foreign languages. Development depicts a progressive process at the different planes of the human society. Oxford Advanced Learners' dictionary defines it as "the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced, stronger, etc." (400). In this case, it involves the gradual growth of human beings in the society. Onyemelukwe observes that "development in human society is a pluri-dimensional process. It may be at the level of the individual or group, village, community or the entire nation, hence the concept of "national development" (1). The terms growth and development are often used to describe the changes that take place in human beings. However, the two terms are not synonymous as Mahmud Jafar distinguishes between them as follows "growth denotes quantitative changes; it shows an increase in the size and structure of the body and organs. Development refers to the changes which are qualitative and directional. The changes are improvement and move forward rather than backward"(8). These improved changes in the society can be political, socio-economic, personal etc. The more encompassing term, 'national development' refers to the overall

development in the society. This, according to Onyemelukwe subsumes ‘personal development’ as Hutchinson Encyclopedia defines development as "The acquisition of a society of industrial techniques and technology; hence the common classification of developed nations of the first and second worlds and the poorer, developing or underdeveloped nations of the third world." (311)

Thus, human development can be viewed as the improvement of the human person in the society. Onyemelukwe explains development at the level of individuals as “the attainment of greater skills and ability, (physical, mental), greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility, material, spiritual and physiological well-being”. Human development Reports 2015 focuses on improving the lives people lead rather than assuming that economic growth will lead automatically to greater well-being for all. Income growth is seen as a means to development rather than an end in itself. It implies centrally the development of the human being in the society. One of the main ideas of human development is development of opportunities, giving people more freedom and opportunities to live lives they value. This means developing people’s abilities and giving them a chance to use them. On this note, Mahmud Jafar observes that the overall goal or objective of individual development is self-actualisation which is defined as the motive to achieve one’s potential (7).

Theoretical framework

Having seen the concept of human development, we can now look at some approaches to the issue. We will present an interdisciplinary overview of human development. In his humanistic approach to human development, Maslow identifies those needs that must be satisfied if personal goals are to be achieved. This he elaborated in what is called Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. John Dacey and Travers John, in their book on human development across the life span, analyzed Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. In the hierarchy, those needs at the base are assumed to be fundamental, relative to the needs above them in hierarchy. The five levels of human needs as proposed by Maslow in order of hierarchy include- physiological needs, safety needs, love and belongingness needs, esteem needs and needs for self-actualisation. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology proposed by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation"



Physiological needs are those needs such as hunger and sleep and they are the basis of motivation. Unless they are satisfied, everything else recedes. Safety needs represent the importance of security, protection, stability, freedom from fear and anxiety and need for structure and limits. Love and belongingness refers to the needs for family and friends. According to Maslow, healthy motivated people wish to avoid feelings of loneliness and isolation. People who feel lonely, not part of the group or who lack any sense of belongingness usually have poor relationships with others which can affect their achievement in life.

Esteem needs refers to the reactions of others to us as individuals and also to our opinion of us. We want a favorable judgment from others, which should be based on honest achievements. By self actualization, Maslow was referring to that tendency, in spite of the lower needs being satisfied, to feel restless unless we are doing what we think we are capable of doing. The concept 'human development' was developed by the economist who argued that the existing measure of human failed to account for the true purpose of development which is to improve the well being of people. He published the first Human Development report commissioned by United Nations Organisation in 1990. This he did in collaboration with AmartyaSen and some other economists. Dr Haq argued that the existing measures of human progress failed to account for the true purpose of development-to improve people's lives. In particular, he believed that the commonly used measure of Gross Domestic Product failed to adequately measure well-being. Human development approach is about expanding the richness of the human life. It is an approach that is focused on people and their opportunities and choices. It is about developing people's abilities, creating an enabling environment for people to make use of these opportunities.

Reflections on Language

Language is as old as man. The debate as to the origin of language is still unresolved as there are still so many acceptations. Many scholars have reflected on it from different perspectives: philosophical, sociological, economic, political points of view. Robert M. Krauss and Chi-Yue Chiu describe language as the principal vehicle for the transmission of cultural knowledge, and the primary means by which we gain access to the contents of other minds.

Matthew sees language from a linguistic perspective as ‘a symbolic system of communication which in spoken form utilizes basic elements called phonemes and morphemes, (374). According to Websters Dictionary, language is any means of conveying or communicating ideas; specifically human speech, the expression of ideas by the voice, sounds expressive of thought, articulated by the organs of the throat and mouth.[definitions.net]

Problem of the study

The main objective of human development lies on the freedom of its citizens as well as developing peoples’ potentials and enlarging their choices. Nigeria is far from meeting up with the idea of human development as proposed by its initiators of the idea. On this note, Nwafor-Orizu Princess Ginikachukwu remarks “Most Nigerians are still struggling to meet their physiological needs. Safety and security; the second cadre is still a luxury to many Nigerians ... the lack of physiological needs; security and social belongingness will definitely obstruct esteem and image (197).

Human development approach

In the early 1980s emerged theorists like AmartyaSen , Paul Streeten and Mahbub Al Haq. These economists believed that increased incomes should be a means to improve human welfare, not as an end in itself. According to them, development is all about people, their well-being, their needs, choices and aspirations. This new thinking on development with people as the focus of concern has come to be known as the human development approach.[www..preservearticles.com/...the-dimensions-of-human-development-html] The human development concept was developed by Mahbub Al Haq.

A Cursory Look at French Language in Nigeria

We need, at this juncture, to give a historical and descriptive analysis of French language in Nigeria, tracing it back to its debut. Worthy of note is the fact that Franco-Nigerian cooperation stems at different levels - linguistic, political, economic, technological, military, scientific etc. We intend to examine first the evolution of the language in the country and then the impact of French studies on human development. Our approach is descriptive and this is backed by valuable data part of which is adapted from Onyemelukwe’s study. Nigerian encounter with the French dates back to the 19th century. Onyemelukwe, quoting Walter Rodney, remarks that by the middle of the 19th century, French merchants, among others, benefitted immensely from trading with Nigeria on slaves (3). Witnesses to the civil war testified that France was giving moral and financial support to Biafra. This, among others, shows that Franco-Nigerian cooperation dates back to so many decades.

Let us look closely at the French language study in the Nigerian curriculum since it is in the educational sector that human development will be fully manifested. Speaking about the introduction of French in the secondary school, Onyemelukwe notes that it was after her political independence that the subject was introduced in the secondary schools which were basically mission schools. She added that the meeting of specialists on the teaching of a second European language in Yaoundé adopted a policy for Anglophone and Francophone African countries. As part of their recommendations, cited by Onyemelukwe, they felt that ‘ second

European language should be considered not only as a means of communication between English speaking and French speaking countries of Africa , but also as an international language with a wider purpose which , together with the first European language, would enable Africa to communicate with other countries throughout the world.

Hence in the 60s and early 70s, French language was taught in our colleges and institutions of higher learning---French in some schools in the south was gradually replacing Latin. In the North, French was also competing with Arabic. Following the statistics recorded by Brann, 111 pupils took French in West African school certificate (WASC) and the London General Certificate of Education (GCE) in June 1962; in 1966, 2022 candidates took French in WASC GCE while in 1971, more than 4000 candidates took French in WASC/GCE examinations. Despite the challenges facing the teaching and learning of French at the era, the number of students increased.

Motivation to learn French in Nigeria was fuelled and sustained by the cooperation of the French Government by way of the French government scholarship given to French Language students in Universities and Advanced Teachers' Colleges. Amongst the first recipients of the French Government scholarship were Professor S. Ade Ojo, the former Director of the French Language Village in Badagry, Professor Abiola Irele, Professor E. P. Modum, Professor A. U. Ohaegbu and Professor Tunde Ajiboye. The French Language Immersion Programme tagged 'The Year Abroad Programme' was then spent in France by few best students while the majority of the FLSs went to a Francophone country such as Senegal, Togo or Niger. Such trips were usually done under the auspices of the French Government. Even those that went to a Francophone setting, in most cases, had the opportunity with the help of the French scholarship to go for a two-months 'stage' in France in addition to their stay in Francophone country. FLTs also benefitted from French Language scholarships in those days for post-graduate or postdoctoral researches in France.(Onyemelukwe 10)

A lot of French companies were established in Nigeria. These invariably created a lot of jobs for our young graduates as interpreters, translators, bilingual secretaries, etc. The period between 1980 and 1999 marked a decline in the enrolment figures which may be attributed to shortage of French Language teachers, low student motivation, lack of incentives to the teachers among others. Nevertheless, as remarked by Onyemelukwe, ministerial visits between France and Nigeria in 1984, 1985 and 1986 helped to improve Franco-Nigerian political relations and ushered in the signing of a cultural agreement between them. Furthermore, 1995 was greeted with the first direct agreement between the French embassy and the various state governments.(20). The state supplies teachers while the French government supplies the teaching materials - books, audio visual materials and other instructional materials. It was at the heat of this development that President Sani Abacha declared the imperative of Nigerians leaning French. With this declaration, French language was once more brought to the public interest. But the implementation of the policy as stated in the National policy on Education still remains a myth. At this point, we need to answer the following pertinent questions: What is the present state of affairs? What role does the language play? What are those jobs that await the French graduate which invariably leads to the attainment of self actualization? We believe that the response to these questions will finally crack the main nut of this topic.

French Language and Human Development: Imperative of Acquiring a Foreign Language

Obviously, French counts as the first foreign language in Nigeria. One of the main challenges of learning a foreign language is attaining the required proficiency and competence. Foreign language, when properly mastered, offers to citizens the tools that will enable them excel in different facets of life. David Kilgour, secretary of state (Latin America and Africa) in his remark explained

Since the adoption of bilingualism, we have been better able to provide to the younger generations the tools and knowledge for them to excel not only here at home but beyond our national borders. This has allowed them to reach for the dreams and succeed in areas they may not have otherwise.

[www.david-kilgour.com/mp/Sahla.htm]

Further in his address, he stressed the fact that language is knowledge which in turn figures as one of the factors in competitiveness. He explains further:

Brains and knowledge are what create the prosperity and growth we tend to take for granted. In an advanced industrial society, the knowledge of other languages becomes indispensable. Just think of how the advent of the Internet has changed our lives. For the last few years, millions of people across the world who share common interests are able to communicate with each other and exchange ideas. Not only are they able to do this due to the various technological advances, but also because they share a common language. In our situation, knowledge of French has helped in developing the potentials of the human person.

We argue in this paper that knowledge and proficiency of Nigerians in a foreign language like French will enhance human development. Otherwise, human potentials can be achieved via this additional competence. With the variety of opportunities awaiting the French graduate with proficiency in the language, individuals can attain their economic goals. Jobs like interpreters, translators and bilingual secretaries are often advertised by highly reputed international organizations. Jobs in tourism, marketing, healthcare also await people with proficiency in a foreign language like French.

In addition, the knowledge of an additional language like French breaks barriers from which we access peoples' cultures. To know a language is to know their culture. This can help shape peoples' lifestyle. In the case of Nigerian businessmen travelling to Francophone countries like Togo and Benin for business with the knowledge of French Language they feel secured in the foreign land. On this note, Obinaju and Ntamarik cited in Ezeodili remark, "Bon nombre de nigériens; étudiants, enseignants, hommes d'affaires, touristes voyagent de nos jours sans beaucoup de problèmes car avec la langue officielle des francophones dans leurs poches, ils ne se sentent plus comme des étrangers dans le pays." This implies self-confidence which ultimately creates motivation and belongingness thereby promoting good relationship and more achievement. Learning a foreign language improves personality.

French is among the top ten languages in the Internet with up to 92.2 million users.

Source: Internet world stats-www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm. Estimate of 30th nov. 2015

The world of communication offers a new view of the world through communication as the world becomes a global village. Information gotten through French language international media like TV5MONDE, France 24, and Radio France International offers a new view of the world that can positively influence people and hence enhance human development.

Moreover, French is the language of great philosophers like Descartes, Rousseau. With a good knowledge of French, students can easily access the works of these great writers whose ideas they can apply to achieve their own potentials.

Action-Based Approach

For a good mastery of a foreign language especially French, a good and standard approach is needed. It is on this basis that pedagogues have concerned themselves with the best method and approach to foreign language teaching. At present, the action based approach prepared by the European Council and explained in the Common European Framework of Reference for languages has taken the scene. The main theme of the approach is defined in the linguistic competence of the learner who as a language user has both academic and social tasks to perform. Through tasks and problem solving, the learner performs real life activities as a social actor.

Challenges Facing the Teaching and Learning of a Foreign Language

Method: Teaching and learning of French as a foreign language is continuously faced with the problem of teaching methods. A lot of language teachers still use the traditional method of teaching which does not favour language proficiency. Presently, the communicative method and action-based methods of language learning occupy the scene but a lot of language teachers are not yet acquainted with the approach.

Lack of materials: Another challenge hindering French language learning in Nigeria is the lack of language materials like textbooks, internet access, audio and video materials, projectors, white interactive board (this goes with the internet). All these facilitate foreign language learning.

Lack of qualified manpower equally hinders French language learning in Nigeria.

Suggestions and Conclusion

Having seen what human development is all about; principally human being oriented - developing his potentials, giving him opportunity to make choices; we can now conclude that the knowledge of a foreign language like French deserves a wider promotion in the country. On this note, we make the following recommendations:

1. That the issue of French language as the second official language in Nigeria be fully implemented. This will enable learners have an early exposure to the language which will in turn promote wider choice and opportunities for them.
2. That the use of a modern approach of teaching French as proposed by *CECRL* be adopted in schools. This implies proper funding by the federal ministry of education for the provision of the needed equipment like the interactive white board.
3. That lectures and teachers of French as a foreign language be educated on the current methods and approaches of language teaching by way of regular seminars and conferences.
4. Since proficiency is needed for competence in the different professions, we advocate the introduction of French for special purpose in our universities. Learners can then choose from a wide range of areas.

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