

THE ROLE OF FRENCH IN ACHIEVING THE NATIONAL OBJECTIVES OF VISION 2020 IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Language as it is known is the vehicle by which the world moves and individuals or humans communicate and relate. In fact, without language no human activity, i.e. humanly speaking, can ever take place. It is in this light that one intends to consider and discuss the role of language (with special reference to French) in the art of profit-making in order to achieve the national objectives of Vision 2020 in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper looks at whether French as a means of communication could enhance the achievement of the national objectives of vision 2020 in Nigeria.

Introduction

It is a discovery made many years ago by scholars that animals communicate. Based on this fact man who is far higher than animals (though also a social animal) must as a matter of necessity communicate.

This buttresses the fact that the significance of language can never be over-flogged. Many people, both learned and unlearned have tried to give their meanings of language.

However, one intends to give some definitions of language as defined by the learned. According to *Chambers 21st century dictionary*, language is “any formalized system of communication, especially one that uses sounds or written symbols which the majority of a particular community would readily understand.” *Longman dictionary of contemporary English* also has almost a similar definition. Hence, it says that language “is a system of communication by written or spoken words which is used by the people of a particular country or area.” Based on these definitions, language is an important asset to any nation or community. Also, for language to be effective, one has to be found in a milieu where this particular language is needed to achieve one’s objective both individually and collectively.

In Nigeria, we have a language (or languages) used as the official means of communication and that is English (Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, etc). The question is, is another language needed for us to communicate especially when it concerns our entrepreneurial capabilities and needs both locally and internationally? If yes, which language will be relevant to us as a nation to achieve our needed developmental growth when it concerns the economy? What role(s) will this language (or languages) play in the achievement of the national objectives outlined by the government of the day? It is in line with this that a proposition is made that French language is that language which will help us in achieving our national objectives of vision 2020 in Nigeria. The reason is that it is a fact which can not be disputed that Nigeria is bounded by French speaking countries namely: Cameroon found in the South, Benin located in the West, Niger and Chad in the North. These countries use French both in the classrooms, in offices, in businesses [which is our main focus],(just as we use English in these places). In brief, it is their official language.

As a matter of fact, being surrounded by four countries that speak French (countries mentioned above) Nigeria cannot afford to overlook the fact that she needs French in order that she achieves her national objectives of vision20-2020. Also, the fact that Nigeria belongs to the world now known as a global village makes it even a more pressing need to have French as another

language of communication in Nigeria in order to have easy access to the benefits of the other countries of the world especially economic-wise. Therefore, there is a conviction on one's part that French, as another means of communication in Nigeria, has a lot of roles to play in the entrepreneurial enhancement of Nigerian economy in order to achieve the national objectives of vision 2020 in Nigeria.

Several interest groups and stakeholders of Nigerian polity and economy have had meetings and discussions on the need to create a new vision for Nigeria. Vision 2020 is a comprehensively designed program aimed at triggering political and economic development in Nigeria. This ideology, launched in 2008 is therefore in line with the goals of the Millennium development plan in Nigeria (i.e. MDGs).

The late president, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, mapped out a seven point agenda which pledged 100% support for the goals of the envisaged vision 2020. The seven point agenda comprise of the following: polity, macro-economy, infrastructure, education, health, agriculture and manufacturing. The federal government's expectations are among others, macro-economy- a sound, stable and globally competitive economy with a GDP of not less than \$900 billion and a per capita of not less than \$4000 per annum. These laudable dreams can only be achieved if Nigerians are able to communicate effectively both locally and internationally in order to attract other people who will help in making the country achieve these objectives ; and French language (for that matter) is the answer.

French, a language of France, is a colonial language in Africa (though not in Nigeria). The advent of French in Nigeria started in the late 19th century in missionary cum public schools where the children of the Europeans went. As time went on, it was agreed that all African Ministries of Education should introduce a second European language (at a conference in Yaoundé in 1961) in schools. For that reason, French was introduced in many schools in Nigeria (in the four provinces as it was known then). Today, French is learnt in almost all the schools in Nigeria (primary, secondary and tertiary institutions). It is worthy to note that in 1997, the country, under the administration of the then head of state, late General Sani Abacha adopted French as Nigeria's second official language showing that he realized the role of French language in the political and economic development of Nigeria.

The Roles of French in Achieving the National Objectives of Vision 2020 in Nigeria

The roles languages play generally can not be exhaustively put in one masterpiece. Therefore this paper does not intend to be an exception. This explains why though many papers have been written on the sociological/economic importance of French as a foreign language, second for enterprise in Nigeria, it is still pertinent to have them reiterated since the country clamors for development based on the national objectives of vision 2020.

However, Kuju (2009) quoted Brann (1970) and Eke (2004) summed up the roles of French in Nigeria as follows: Nigeria as a country is bordered by French speaking countries in all its four parts (East, West, North, and South as mentioned earlier). The knowledge of French in Nigeria by Nigerians will put in place, freer interactions and closer links with these neighboring countries by eliminating inter-comprehensibility barriers which have often characterized the nation's togetherness with them. Eliminating this barrier will serve as an impetus to step up the establishment of bilateral and multilateral relationships with them and other francophone countries so that most of the west African countries are francophone.

In addition, the knowledge of the language of our neighbours will bring about an increase in cross-cultural fertilization. This is so as pan-africanism can only be achieved if there is an appreciable and steady increase in cross-cultural fertilization.

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Nevertheless, for the national objectives of the vision 2020 in Nigeria to be achieved, the knowledge of French by the citizens forms part of the answers. This is so because its knowledge brings about a reduction of bottlenecks even at the international scene. These bottlenecks have in one way or the other, hitherto caused Nigeria enormous economic waste. For instance, Nigeria has often had to hire paid translators/interpreters during international meetings, conferences, football/sports outings etc. These funds will be put into better use when we have a good knowledge of French. Isn't it good news that about 85% of French investments in Africa are situated in Nigeria? But the sad news is that the management of these investments rests solely in the hands of French expatriates for the simple reason that we are not French speaking. In addition to this, almost 90% of the personnel in these enterprises are French nationals and more than 60% of the economic benefits accruing from them go back to French coffers. This paper is of the view that with the knowledge of French, there will be equity in the management and sharing of economic dividends of these establishments in Nigeria.

Increased involvement of Nigeria in these enterprises will without doubt lead to to a reasonable reduction of the unemployment problem in the country. The economic advantage of such a development is better imagined than said since one envisages that in no distant time, Nigeria would be able to compete favorably with other developed nations like United States, France, Germany, Japan, etc.

Moreover, Nigeria's involvement in the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) program for technical assistance in various fields of learning is as a result of the call from some of the francophone African countries that are not yet developed. The effectiveness of the country's participation in this program depends largely on the citizens' ability to communicate effectively in French, their official language. The engagement of Nigeria in this program, so far, has elevated its socio-economic prestige far above that of other countries. This tells why Nigeria as a country needs French most now in order to achieve the cardinal goals of vision 2020.

Aside these points, being bilingual at the international level makes Nigeria not only the giant of Africa as it is popularly sung about Japan and if possible, the Russia of Africa. The office of the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN) has undoubtedly become the most coveted office in the world today. This office demands therefore, as requirement for development, one's ability to speak English and French aside their qualifications. One of the weaknesses of our ex-military and civilian president Olusagun Obasanjo who lost to Butros Ghali some years back.

From the French adage which says 'une langue de plus, un ami de plus', (The more you understand someone's language, the more you become the person's friend) the intention for French investments in Nigeria can be gingered by their awareness of our competence in French. This will boost the achievements of the national objectives of vision 2020 as it smoothens cross-cultural fertilization earlier mentioned in this paper.

In the past, tourists particularly from France hardly visited Nigeria due to language barriers. But it is a known fact that the more the number of French speakers in Nigeria, the more the tourism sector of the country receives a mega boost.

Notwithstanding, this singular question (of whether Nigerians have not been trying to improve in their knowledge of French,) will help us to know how useful write-ups by scholars alike have helped boost the economy of Nigeria. Thus, is there any improvement on the roles given by the previous writers/scholars as earlier mentioned in the paper? Based on the recent curriculum review done by the Nigeria French Language Village (NFLV) to improve on the teaching and learning of

French, it shows that the National objectives of vision 2020 is on the underway to be achieved or will certainly be achieved.

Similarly, for us to achieve the national objectives of vision 2020, the country must not forget that the citizens must be well informed particularly in the area of French, as the 2nd foreign language in Nigeria. This is so because the newer the French language curriculum, the better the national objectives of vision 2020, and of course the better the economy of a country that aspires to compete favorably with other giant developed countries of the world come 2020. This then justifies the fact that education and economy can not be separated when striving to achieve any meaningful developmental objectives.

Conclusion

With these points, suffice is to say that, given the roles of French language in achieving the national objectives of vision 2020, any government that wants to excel should give attention to French language for proper tackling of national and international issues so that Nigeria would not be left out in the wind of dramatic global change; we would then be like the proverbial five maidens who forgot to buy kerosene for their lanterns awaiting the master's arrival.

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