

EFFECTS OF COVID –19 ON FRENCH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This Paper explored the effect of COVID- 19 in the educational system in Nigeria, especially as it affects the teaching and learning of French Language. It is no longer news that there is a global pandemic ravaging the world today. COVID-19 is real and thousands of people have died as a result of this disease in Nigeria. In Europe and America, millions of people have lost their lives as well, due to COVID-19. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared it as a pandemic after it has spread across many countries of the world. The outbreak of Corona Virus caused almost all the Countries of the world to shut down the educational system at all levels i.e from the nursery, primary to the university. School calendar was disrupted. Reduction in the economic development of the country has also affected the financing of education. There is no doubt that the interference of the pandemic has caused some challenges to the teaching/learning of French language in Nigeria. This study therefore, recommends among others that the Government at all level should give French language education a priority by giving financial aid to encourage the teaching/learning of French in Nigeria. Provision should be made for digital language laboratories as against the obsolete language laboratories still in most schools. Training and retraining of French teachers as well as scholarships or subsidy should be provided for student's studying French.

Keywords: French language, Education, Effect, COVID- 19.

Introduction

The history of the world today cannot be complete without the mention of Covid-19 which has ravage the whole world and has become a dreaded monster to every living being due to its nature that can result to death. Corona virus is a menace that has bedeviled and ravaged the world in many ways. It has retarded economy, destroyed businesses, disorganized and distorted the educational systems, international, national and local examinations postponed or shifted, it has also ravaged the health system and disrupted socio-political interactions. This global pandemic today has affected so many things of which education,(teaching and learning) is inclusive. That is why this study is being undertaken to examine the effects of Covid-19 especially as it affects French Language teaching and learning.

The teaching and learning of French in Nigeria is not new. It is a language that has all the necessary ingredients which can bring development to any Nation, within the Country as well as the Sub-region. The full implementation of this language will also mean getting a deep understanding of the contemporary issues of the international community and also breaking the existing Anglophone linguistic barrier between the Francophone and Anglophone world.

The world has become a global village and the role of language is becoming more and more important especially a foreign such as French. Therefore, to be able to flow or move with the current social, economic, political and technological world challenges, one has to be abreast or be current with important world languages such as French. This has necessitated each country to look inward to see how it can fit in International matters.

Nigeria is a multilingual Country that accommodates both indigenous and foreign language learning both at the basic level and the tertiary level of education. This no doubt will make Nigeria stand the chance of reaping the benefits that are bound from the usage of these languages especially French Language. According to Obieze and Onyekpere (2012):

“French and English languages have been adopted as the official languages of deliberations for most international organizations in which Nigeria is a member, notably the ECOWAS. Foreign language thus ensures full participation in International and National matters whereby language barrier would have deterred this participation ushers in both unilateral and bilateral ideas that help in socio- political growth of the nation”.

This again buttresses the fact that French language is key to the socio- economic, political, technological and educational advancement and development of any nation. This is why this research is aimed at examining the effect of COVID-19 in the teaching and learning of French Language.

The Concept and History of COVID-19

The word COVID-19 is a code name for the deadly and contagious disease otherwise known and called Corona Virus. Therefore, the first two letters “CO” is an abbreviation FOR CORONA, and then the “VI” is an abbreviation for VIRUS while the “D” Stands for DISEASE the five letters put together stand for CORONA. The 19 which is figure is the short form of the year 2019, which is the year the disease broke out. All of these put together is COVID-19. For the purpose of the research work the disease will be referred to as COVID-19 which is the code name.

COVID-19 is a new disease caused by the SARS –COV-2 Virus, it is an infectious disease that is very deadly. In December 2019, WHO was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause in Wuhan City, China. A novel Corona virus was identified as the cause by Chinese authorities. It is a large family of Viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. It is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. The new virus was subsequently named the COVID-19 Virus. www.euro.who.int.

The Virus spreads mostly through person to person. when an infected person coughs or breaths out, tiny droplets that contains the virus is transmitted. These droplets can enter the mouth or nose of someone without the virus, causing the spread of the infection to occur (Parry 2020). Droplets containing the virus can also land on nearby surfaces or objects and when other people touch such surfaces or pick up the objects and then touches their nose, mouth or eye, the virus spreads (Landry 2020). This Virus is ravaging the whole world as there is no nation that has not recorded cases. It was declared a global outbreak by the world health Organization (WHO). The WHO Director- General declared the novel Corona virus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. It was later characterized as a pandemic. The first cases of the global pandemic were reported in Wuhan, China and since then the disease has since spread across the world leading to several deaths. Symptoms of the disease are different but often

include fever, cough, headache, tiredness, difficulty in breathing as well as loss of smell and taste. The disease transmits when people breathe in air contaminated by droplets and particles containing the virus. The disease can also be transmitted if sprayed, splash, on one with contaminated fluids in the eyes, nose or mouth. People remain contagious and can spread the Virus even if they do not develop symptoms.

Today, COVID-19 Vaccines have been produced, approved and distributed in various Countries which have resulted to mass vaccination campaigns across the world. The disease has resulted to so many effects of which this study is going to examine some as it affects teaching and learning of French. Although, measures such as lockdown, social or physical distancing, self isolation as well as observing of simple hygiene such as regular washing of hands, wearing of face mask, covering of the mouth with handkerchief when sneezing or coughing. All of these have become the new normal in the world today in order to curtail the spread of the disease in our society.

The History and Development of French in Nigeria.

The history of the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria has been so well documented. It is known fact that French is the second official language in the world after English. It is rivalry to English; it is an international language with so much influence. According to Ameh (2018):

“French language is the legacy left behind by France after Colonization... French language is the First language of the people of France, a part of Switzerland and of Belgium and other Canadian province. It was brought to Africa through Colonization. It is worthy of note that after the scramble for and partition of Africa and West Africa in particular, some regions were allocated to France on one hand and to Britain on the other hand. Countries like Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Republic of Benin, Togo, Senegal, Cote d’Ivoire, Gabon, Algeria and Mauritius fell into the hands of France and so gradually adopted the language of the Colonial Masters”. French, thus, became the official administrative and commercial language of these West African Sub-regions”.

It is evident that Nigeria by her geographical location is obviously surrounded by French speaking Countries. Nigeria is boarded in the West by “Republic of Benin, while to the East is Cameroon and to the North is Niger and Chad. This is to say that all Nigeria’s neighbours are French speaking Countries. There is no doubt that Nigeria is embedded in the Francophone world. Ade-Ojo (2005) opined that:

“French language is either the mother tongue, the official language or one of the official languages for its day to day communication and transaction. French is the second most important language in the world in terms of geographical spread acceptability and use in international organizations; only English is more important than French as a transnational, intercontinental and universally acceptable language”.

French language found its roots into Nigeria educational system in the Colonial era. As stated by Emordi (2012):

“The teaching of French was introduced for the first time in some secondary schools in Lagos namely Church Missionary Society Grammar School (CMS) in 1859 and Wesleyan High School in 1878 and Nigeria was the first Country

to teach French in the whole of the Anglophone Africa... French was first taught during evening classes at the University College, Ibadan in 1959”.

It is interesting to note that over the years, since French was first introduced in the educational system in Nigeria, it has experienced some development even though it has not been fully implemented in Nigeria educational System. The greatest of all was when in 1996, the former Head of State, Late General Sani Abacha declared French language as the second, official language in Nigeria. This development led to the upgrade of the status of French in the National policy on Education (NPE) which accorded French a robust and high status. The National Policy on Education (2004) states that:

“For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for event Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be compulsory in Primary and Junior Secondary Schools but non-vocational elective at the Senior Secondary School”.

The status accorded to French no doubt made French to be more popular in Nigeria. French is being taught in Nigeria today in the Primary School, Secondary School as well as tertiary Institutions. Ekhafulude (2011) also affirms that:

“French is also learnt as part of the General Studies Course by undergraduates of different disciplines in the Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities french is equally taught in the Nigeria French language village Badagry, Lagos as well as some other centers across Nigeria where French is learnt. These include: Alliance Francaise, Centre for French Teaching & Documentation (CFTI) as well as other small private centres”.

Today, French language is still developing in Nigeria even though there are some hindrances militating against its teaching and learning. Nigeria and France have had a long time bilateral tie which has greatly enhance the economy of the Country. There are some presences of French in Nigeria. According to Ameh (2015):

“There is much French presence in Nigeria through the establishment of industries and other commercial enterprises that demand a working knowledge of French these include Oil Companies (Total, Elf etc). Commercial Companies (SCOA, CFAO, UBA etc) construction Companies (Bouygues, PAN, Fourgerolle etc) Transportation (Air Afrique, UTA etc) Education (Alliance Francaise, centre for French Teaching and Documentation CETI), Nigeria French language village NFLV etc).More bi-lateral relations will be established between the two Countries”.

From the above it is evident that there is progressive development of French in Nigeria.

The Effect of COVID -19 on French Language Education

The effect COVID- 19 has caused in the educational system is enormous and it will take some years to recover from it. The closure of Schools all over the world from March 2020 to October 2020 as a result of the total lockdown, while it lasted in Nigeria for about seven months. This did not only affect the educational system but almost everything in human life.

In the case of students studying French, the university undergraduate students at 300 level, had gone for the language immersion programme (LIP). This programme is compulsory for 300 level University Undergraduates and year 3 NCE Undergraduates. The year 2020 was like a set back to them. The University Undergraduates were undergoing the programme when

they were asked to go home due to the lockdown, while the NCE undergraduates were to go in September, but could not proceed for the programme due to COVID -19 pandemic.

In all, the disruption in the School calendar due to COVID-19 greatly affected the performance of the Students. They were now being rushed to finish up in order to catch up with a new session. French being a foreign language is greatly affected by this rush. Again, the students were unable to be taken for excursion in Benin Republic or other francophone countries due to closure of land borders. Usually this excursion gives the students an opportunity to interact with the francophone, thereby improving their spoken skills.

On the other hand some Students go for the LIP in neighbouring Francophone Countries such as Republic of Benin and Togo. Due to COVID -19 and the fear of the Virus as well as restriction and ban on travel by some Countries, Students who would have preferred to travel out for the LIP programme were unable to travel out. Again, the cost of foreign exchange and other items have so much increased all due to COVID-19. For Students studying French, this period has not been easy for them. There is also no doubt that COVID -19 has affected the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria. The Nigeria French language Village had to create an additional batch for the NCE undergraduates in April 2021 to be able to accommodate the students who could not go for the programme last year 2020 due to the lockdown.

The total lockdown resulting from the outbreak of the corona virus greatly affected the students especially the year one students of whom most of them are beginners of French language. They forgot almost all what they were taught before the lockdown. In the history of the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria students of French have never stayed away from the classroom for such a long period. On resumption after the lockdown students were battling to study the language. This greatly affected the students performance as the long stay away from school brought them a setback. French language education has never witnessed such disruption in a colossal manner.

Conclusion

In Conclusion this paper has been able to discuss to some extent the effect of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria. It has also examined the concept and history of COVID-19. It also went further to discuss the history of French as well as the development of French in Nigeria.

Education has a global impact on any nation technologically in terms of discovering and development therefore no nation should neglect education in anyway. The emergence of corona virus further exposed the underdevelopment of Nigeria's educational system as the arrival of the virus caught Nigeria and her leadership unprepared. Proper attention should be given to education in order to experience rapid development.

Recommendation

This study has made some recommendations which include the following:

- i. Government should allocate more funds to Education
- ii. Government should increase productivity of French teachers.
- iii. Government should encourage the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria
- iv. Government should implement the compulsory teaching of French as stated in the National Policy on Education.

- v. Government should provide a modern multi-media language laboratory for the teaching and learning of French in all tertiary institutions where French is taught.
- vi. Government through TETFUND should sponsor regular training and workshops for teachers of French language across Nigeria, and also sponsor or subsidize the language immersion programme for French students.
- vii. Government should ensure proper health care for the Citizenry to curtail COVID -19 pandemic.

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