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The Challenges of Teaching Beginners French Language in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: A Case Study of Students of English and Library Studies, History and Diplomatic Relations, Library and Information Science, and Hospitality and Tourism Management in Federal University Wukari, Taraba State

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Abstract

Teaching is a very interesting profession and one of the oldest in the world but teaching French Language in Nigerian tertiary institutions can be very frustrating because of several factors like the problem of the students finding the French letters/words very difficult to pronounce, due to the fact that it is different from the way the English letters they are used to are pronounced, the challenge of the French sound system is also there, the absence of modern learning equipments like projectors for watching films, tape recorders and C.D plates containing French lessons for beginners, language laboratories for the enhancement of better pronunciations and clearer sounds (phonetics). The lack of enough time for the teaching of the language, the problem of having too many students in the class which does not promote proper and effective learning sessions, the absence of language immersion programmes and excursions to strengthen the learning process and give the students the privilege to live with the native speakers and improve their spoken and writing abilities and other factors. The paper also talks about the methodology which is the repetition method to enhance better pronunciations and participation of the students while the cognitive learning theory of language is applied. A theory that states that language skills develop in four stages which are gradual, progressive, tied to age and environmental factors.

Keywords: Teaching, Learning, Alphabets, Challenges, French language, modern equipments, motivation, students, teacher/lecturers.

Introduction

Teaching is one of the world's oldest professions. It is equally one of the most noble professions the world over even though the Nigerian Government has never taken the teaching profession seriously neither has the Federal Government ever taken the welfare of Teachers seriously from the Primary level to the university. As a teacher, teaching becomes very interesting when the children or students you are teaching are not only excited and interested, but are fully committed and positively responding, that gives the teacher plenty of satisfaction and encouragement: But Teaching French Language in the tertiary institutions, in Nigeria particularly in Federal University, Wukari has been quite a very difficult task I must confess, even though the language is very romantic, musical and one of the world's economically most viable language that must not be ignored.

According to Ojo, Ade 2012;

The French Language is widely acknowledged as an important world language. It does not only enjoy an exemplary international reputation, recognition and attention but it is also distinguished by a proud and robust history as a result of the vital and decisive roles that it has played and that it continues to play in major political decisions in world history and in the direction in which international politics and world politico-economic order has taken and that it should take, therefore from the global perspective of political reckoning, economic relevance and diplomacy, French is a major world language to reckon with.

Based on the above citation, the importance and relevance of French Language in the scheme of things economically and politically across the globe cannot and should not be taken for granted that is why the teaching and learning of the language should get better attention from the relevant authorities concerned.

DEFINITION OF TEACHING:

www.google.com says teaching is the process of facilitating learning through imparting knowledge, skills, and values to learners. While Wikipedia defines teaching as the practice implemented by a teacher aimed at transmitting skills, knowledge, know-how and inter-personal skills to a learners.

DEFINITION OF LANGUAGE:

According to Collins English Dictionary on line defines language as a structured system of communication that consists of grammar and vocabulary. It is the Primary means by which humans convey meaning, both in spoken and signed forms and may also be conveyed through writing while [Britannica](#) says language is a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings as members of a social group and participates in. Language can also be defined as a system of organised sounds and words for human communication designed by God almighty for man's existence.

ORIGIN OF FRENCH LANGUAGE:

(Français or langue Française) is a Romance Language of the indo-European family like all other Romance Language, it descended from the Vulgar Latin of the Roman Empire. French evolved from Northern old Gallo –

Romance, a descendant of the Latin spoken in Northern Gaul. Its closest relatives are the other langues d'oïl – languages historically spoken in northern France and in southern Belgium which French (Francien) largely supplanted. It was also influenced by native Celtic language of Northern Roman Gaul and by the Germanic Frankish language of the post Roman Frankish invaders. As a result of French and Belgian, colonialism from the 16th century onward it was introduced to new territories in the Americas, Africa and Asia, and numerous French – based Creole languages most notably Haitian create were developed. A French speaking person or nation may be referred to as Francophone in both English and French. French language is native to France, Belgium, Switzerland, Monaco, Francophone Africa, Canada and others in the Francophonie.

METHODOLOGY:

The repetition method is used, a method where the teacher writes the words/letters on the board, clearly enough for the students to see and repeat the words severally after him for them to hear him clearly starting with the Alphabets. e. g. A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H,.

LANGUAGE THEORY:

The cognitive learning theory of language development is applied. A theory from Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget which states that language skills develop in four stages, which are gradual, progressive, tied to age and also environmental factors.

CHALLENGES OF TEACHING FRENCH LANGUAGE TO BEGINNERS (DÉBUTANT)

People without any knowledge of French language before can be very challenging for so many reasons.

Starting with the French alphabet: The French alphabets which are Latin letters contain 26 letters (5 vowels and 21 consonants), these letters are used for the composition of French words. The French letters are very similar to the English letters and are sequentially arranged in an identical order from A – Z but the pronunciations are very different.

a	-	{a}	p	-	{pe}
b	-	{be}	q	-	{ky}
c	-	{se}	r	-	{er}
d	-	{de}	s	-	{es}
e	-	{œ}	t	-	{te}
f	-	{f}	u	-	{y}
g	-	{je}	v	-	{ve}
h	-	{as}	w	-	{dubve}
i	-	{i}	x	-	{iks}
j	-	{ʒi}	y	-	{igrɛk}
k	-	{ka}	z	-	{zɛd}

l	-	{ɛl}
m	-	{ɛm}
n	-	{ɛn}
o	-	{o}

from the written Alphabets, we can see very clearly that their pronunciations are very different from that of English Language that the students are used to from their very early stages of learning English since childhood so they find the pronunciation very different, and this is slowing the speed of their learning the language.

FRENCH SOUND SYSTEM

French language has 37 units of sounds also referred to as phoniness, used when reading aloud or speaking. They are 16 vowels (12 oral vowels and 4 nasal vowels) and 21 consonants. The latter is made up of 17 consonants. 3 semi – consonants also called semi – vowels and a velar nasal [ŋ] which is associated with English loan words ending in – ing. French language does not have diphthong. Compared with English with 44 sounds, French has 37 sounds. While French has 21 consonants, English has 24 consonants while there are 16 oral vowels in French, English has 20 oral vowels of which 8 are diphthongs. English does not have any nasal sound while French has four (4) in addition to a palatal nasal.

What all these means is that Nigeria learning French language must be careful to take note of the differences existing in both languages and give adequate time and very serious attention to the French pronunciation which is different from what they are used to in English.

ANOTHER SERIOUS CHALLENGE FACED IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF FRENCH LANGUAGE BY THE STUDENTS IS THE ABSENCE OF MODERN LEARNING EQUIPMENT LIKE PROJECTORS:

Projectors are used for the watching of films. These are films which contains grammar lessons showing where the native speakers of French language are communicating with one another, as the students watch these films they will be exposed to and privileged to hear how the French words are correctly pronounced, and spoken. This will greatly stimulate their interest in the language, facilitate their speed of understanding and make them to develop interest in the language.

INSUFFICIENT TIME: This is a very serious challenge in the course of learning French language: The insufficient period of two (2) hours allocated for the studying of French; As beginners, two hours is grossly insufficient considering the fact that the students are starters; this means that the language is very new to them, so they need adequate time to learn the language instead of just two hours in a week for a language they have no knowledge at all. I very strongly believe that if the students are given a longer period, a lot of them will certainly do better and will also develop more interest for the language.

THE ISSUE OF HAVING VERY MANY STUDENTS IN A LANGUAGE CLASS IS ALSO ANOTHER CHALLENGING FACTOR: imagine teaching French language in a class of four hundred students, this is not only un – imaginable but makes the teaching very frustrating, extremely difficult and certainly un interesting, in this situation, the teacher/lecturer finds it difficult to give personal attention to the students, no matter how hard the tries, particularly in a situation where several students need the teacher’s attention. Also because of the large number of students, it becomes very difficult to effectively control the class, which can lead to the class becoming very noisy and uncondueive for effective learning. This factor has made a lot of the students to be discouraged in the learning of French language.

THE ABSENCE OF PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM/MICROPHONE:

Teaching a foreign language like “French” in an Aglo phone country like Nigeria in a class of over four hundred students who are beginners without microphone paints a better picture of the very ugly situation and indeed the poor working condition the teacher is made to face and the challenges it poses to the learner of the language. The teacher / lecturer is compelled to shout and shout until his voice cracks! And what becomes the faith of those students who are not able to hear the teacher / lecturer clearly? And even the students with hearing problems, what becomes their faith? But this is the condition that both the students and lecturers face, year in and year out, how can students give their best in this kind of situation? And for the lecturers too, how can the lecturer be encouraged to put in his best in situations like these?

THE ABSENCE OF LANGUAGE LABORATORY:

The absence of language laboratories in the teaching of foreign languages like French makes the teaching process very difficult particularly when they are beginners. In the language laboratory, students are exposed to the proper phonetic sound of the language through the use of modern teaching equipment coordinated by the teacher/lecturers of the language while technician ensures that all equipment are fully functional to facilitate learning. Also in the laboratory, the students are exposed to the sound of the language and also privileged to hear better pronunciations from the original speakers of the language.

THE COMPLETE ABSENCE OF LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMMES:

Encouraging students to go for language immersion programmes will help them learn the language faster. This is an arrangement where the students are taken to any of the French countries around like Cameroon, Benin Republic, Togo, or to the Nigerian French language village: where they will be kept or made to live with the original speakers of the language for a month, two or three months as the case may be since they are not studying French language as a discipline. This programme will really help them learn the language very quickly because everybody that will be around them for the period of the immersion will be speaking French with them, they will therefore be compelled to speak the language because they will have no other language for communication but French. A lot of people have successfully learnt French

language through this process and it remains one of the best ways to help learners to learn and speak French languages faster without too much trouble.

INABILITY OF MANY OF THE STUDENTS TO READ AND WRITE EFFECTIVELY:

Many of the students find it very difficult to read and write effectively in English language. The reason may not be far from the fact that many of them usually engage in Examination malpractice and at the end of the day come out with very fantastic results they are not able to defend. This problem of examination malpractice in Nigeria is indeed posing a lot of challenges to many students in Nigeria tertiary institutions making teaching extremely difficult and very frustrating.

NON AVAILABILITY OF FANS:

Taraba state is located in Northern Nigeria with very hot weather particularly during the dry season. Teaching a class of over four hundred students without ceiling fans or properly ventilated classrooms, makes the students very restless, noisy and uncomfortable. This makes them to lose concentration and become totally uninterested in the lecture.

OBSERVATION:

Despite the challenges listed above, there are students who are still very keen about learning French language. This is due to their deep interest and willingness to learn the language, they are very ready to learn even when the situation is not comfortable or even when the basic facilities are not there, for these set of students, if they can be encouraged or motivated in any way, they will certainly do very well, this is where the Embassies of French speaking countries in Nigeria like Canada, Switzerland, France and other French speaking countries must collaborate with the Nigerian government to support and promote the teaching and learning of French language. This can be done through the provision of basic equipments needed like projectors, C.D plates containing basic French lesson for beginners, tape recorders (for phonetics) and also the provision of texts books since most of the students are from very poor backgrounds and are really not finding life easy at all.

The French governments can also support the students in the form of giving special grants to students who are willing to study French language as a course of study, this will motivate them a great deal and go a very long way in opening up their appetite for learning the language.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943 - 1954) stated that human motivation is based on people seeking fulfilment and change through personal growth. These fulfilments can be made possible or obtainable when people are motivated or strongly encouraged, the students in question will do much better when motivated; this will make them to be more committed to their studies which will lead to better performances both in writing and in speaking. The motivation will clearly buttress the theory of Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget which states that language skills develop in four stages, which are gradual, progressive, tied

to age and also environmental factors. As the students get motivated, they become more committed and their learning becomes more productive while they steadily and gradually make tremendous progress and as they get older, they get better with all the basic learning equipment at their disposal.

CONCLUSION:

Teaching French language can be made easier, and better if the bottle necks, mentioned above can be looked into and solutions provided. They will not only encourage the teacher who will be faced with less challenge in discharging his duties but also help the students learn better and faster. It will actually make teaching and learning easier, better, more enjoyable and indeed more interesting.

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