# French Language teaching across Disciplines: A Curse or a Blessing?

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## Abstract

Language is the pivot of communication. It is an instrument of instructions, which direct human behaviors or actions. Language indeed makes man distinct from other animals. This paper examines the teaching of French language across disciplines at the Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria where FRN 221, Basic French and FRN 222, French for Specific Purposes, are designed for General Studies. They are   must pass courses before any student graduates from the said university. The paper states the rationale behind the program and gives some insights into the technical know-how of achieving the instructional objectives of the project. The aim of the paper is to promote the teaching, learning and the use of foreign languages, particularly French in Nigeria. Premised on the theory of Motivation and related theories, the paper concludes that the aims of teaching a second foreign language are desirable and achievable, although tasking humanly and financially.

**Keywords:** Language, disciplines, teaching, French, motivation, learners.

## 1.   Introduction

French is a modern European language. It is both spoken and written. It is the 11th most spoken world language. It is spoken by about 128 million people around the world either as a mother tongue or as an administrative language. Organizations like European Union, United Nations, Universal Postal Union, European parliament, Economic Communities of West Africa States and Africa Union use French as an official or an administrative language. Before the 20th century, particularly in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, French language dominated the international language sphere over other languages including English language (Emordi, 2013: 3). French, having been spoken by different peoples of the world for many centuries, retains its capacity to cope with the contemporary needs of communication all over the world.

French teaching was not new in Nigeria. As far back as 1859, Nigeria had introduced formal French teaching in schools (Abiri cited by Omolewa, 1971: 395). However, the learning and use of French were not imposed like the learning and use of the English because Nigeria was a British colony. Since, independence, French had been one of the subjects taught at both secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In December 14, 1996 at the Annual Patron Dinner of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Abuja, Abacha remarks thus: "We can rightly assert that French has continued to maintain the position of the second most widely used foreign language in Nigeria, which earned it the status of Nigeria's second official foreign language". At present, French is a core subject at the Junior Secondary School level and the establishment of the Nigeria French Language Village, Badagry consolidates the fact that the Nigeria government is aware of the benefits the Nigerians can enjoy from the learning and use of French language.

With regard to the negative feeling that foreign languages will affect the learning of native languages, Emordi (2013: 25) argues thus: "I have also tried to prove that learning these foreign languages does not bring back colonialism or bring about the rejection of our indigenous languages."

At the Osun State University, Nigeria, where students are to offer 4 units of compulsory French courses in their second year; FRN 221 – *Basic French*, an Harmattan semester course is expected to initiate learners into the rudiments of French grammar such as parts of speech, usage of articles, conjugation of verbs in different tenses, basic rules of grammatical concord, sentence constructions and reading and comprehension. In the Rain semester, FRN 222 – *French for Specific Purposes* is taught to equip the students with the specific registers, diction or terminologies which can make them have working knowledge of French language in their different chosen careers.

## 2.   Theoretical Framework

Behavior is the main issue of psychology. It concerns all that we do and feel with our perception and our awareness; with our personalities and our motives, with our interactions in groups and with our development as individuals. By extension, it deals with the biological facts of existence and the relationships between biology and behavior.

The behavioral theories are concerned with observables such as stimuli and responses while cognitive theories explain mental processes which are involved in thinking, problem solving, decision making, perception and attribution.

Motive is the root cause of any behavior. Motivation is the major spring of behavior. Psychologists see

motivation as "all the processes involved in arousing, directing and sustaining a behavior directed towards the achievement of a goal". It energizes and regulates behavior towards the satisfaction of needs.   According to Maslow, human actions may be classified into two major systems of needs; namely, the basic needs and the Meta needs. The basic needs consist of psychological needs (security, love and self-esteem) and physiological needs. Meta needs on the other hand, are higher level needs and they are concerned with cognitive needs, aesthetic needs and the need for self-fulfillment.

Simply put, these two broad types of needs are regrouped as deficiency needs and growth needs. Basic physiological and psychological needs are named deficiency needs because when they are not satisfied, individuals may engage in behaviors designed to get those needs satisfied. The Meta needs are described as growth needs since activities relating to them do not result from deficiencies or lack of such needs. For example, someone who is starving will pay little or no attention to self-esteem. He/she can stoop so low by stealing from his/her neighbors.

In Maslow's theory, which he called his hierarchy of needs, he determined that when one level of a person's needs is satisfied, then the next level has the greatest influence on that person's behavior (Riddle, 2001: 32).

## 3.  Explanation

To Nigeria and her citizens, the significance of French language cannot be overemphasized.  The geographical location of Nigeria, a country surrounded by French speaking countries needs to facilitate the teaching, learning and the use of French language. The Republic of Benin, Cameroun, Chad and Niger, which are Francophone countries share borders with Nigeria.

Hence, it is not a mistake for making the French Language, the second foreign language in Nigeria. Some of such benefits are:

a.  The expressive function of every language as a means of communication helps whoever learns a given language to overcome linguistic barriers, which makes it possible for such an individual to live in any Anglophone or francophone country around the world.

b.  It has socio-cultural and political values. For instance, it can promote regional integration through cultural exchange, inter-marriages and international relations and co-operation.

c.  It has economic benefits, which include international job opportunities and mobility of labor.

d.  Its academic gains include opportunity to travel abroad to study in French speaking countries, faster opportunities of getting scholarship awards and ability to carry out research works with greater ease than those who understand only English. They will be able to access and collect information in both English and French.

e.  Ability to speak a second foreign language boosts personal ego.

f.  For the purpose of tourism, sports and entertainment, a second foreign language is a welcome idea.

It is against this background that the authorities of the Osun State University, Nigeria make the teaching of French language across disciplines compulsory with a view to making the products of the institution a world-class product that can compete favorably in the labor market anywhere in the world. "Second language such as French would give the potential students an edge over their counterparts and make them open and eligible for diverse international opportunities" (Dinakin, 2014: 47).

First, there is a serious need for a teacher to know his/her students' entry behavior. Entry behavior is the basic idea a student has about a learning task before he/she is exposed to new ideas about that same learning task. "By entry behavior, we mean the totality of all the responses a learner can now make to various stimulus situations about a learning task. It means all he knows and he can say about the task in front of him" (Ayeni, 1991: 47- 48). The knowledge a student has about what is to be done, dictates the responses he/she can make to a particular situation before him/her in a learning environment.

Also, for an effective application of Maslow's Theory, we need some insights into the S – R Associationists Theory and the Gestalt-Field theory of learning.

Learning in itself, can be defined as "all changes in behavior that result from experience…" (Adediran, 1987: 94).  To us, Learning is all permanent changes in behavior which result from experience but are not as a result of disease, drug, tiredness, injury or maturation.

The S – R Theory holds that motivation arises directly from  organic drives such as hunger, thirst, sexual urge, shelter; basic emotions, which include fear, love, annoyance, joy or previous experiences to conditioning which provide the basis for individual to respond/or not to respond to drives and emotions. This line of thought believes that those drives and emotions are built into organism and that makes it impossible for organism to resist them. Conditioning produces a series of learned behaviors which lead to action whenever relevant stimuli appear. Through conditioning, the body has been coded or shaped to behave in a predictable manner not as a result of instinct but as a result of previous experiences. Behavior is therefore, stimulus-directed.

The main implications of S – R Theory include:

i.   That anybody is capable of learning anything if he/she is willing to submit or allow him/herself to be put through the sequence of activities needed for conditioning to take place. This theory holds that no subject is too difficult to learn provided a learner is prepare to take instructions in such a subject.

ii.  That learning activities joined with reinforcements will bring about successful learning. In other words, provided learners are exposed to several activities and they are equally given plenty of assignments to practice with and every successful attempt rewarded, learning will easily take place.

iii. That a learner without initial interest in a particular subject may be persuaded, convinced, flattered, begged or even threatened to learn it. Remarks such as telling the students that a particular subject is nice, good, useful or rewarding can do the magic.

Gestalt – Field Theory presents behavior as the function of a total situation. In other words, motivation is believed to come from a dynamic psychological situation determined by an individual's desire and commitment to do something. The implications of this theory are:

i.   That learning is less cumbersome when the learner sees why he/she should learn. A learner feels committed and cultivates the desire to learn when the reason behind the action is known. He/she is motivated by knowing why he/she should learn.

ii.  That when goals are set for a learning experience, learning takes place more easily because every learner does all he/she can do to overcome any obstacle between him/her and success.

The first among Abraham Maslow's Theory of the Hierarchy of Needs is the physiological needs which include the provision of food, water and shelter. There is the need to provide a cafeteria, safe water and shelter particularly in a residential institution.

Protection from physical harm and from fear of deprivation which is described as safety needs comes next to physiological needs. The school authorities must make sure there are no cases of violence. A peaceful environment will promote learning.

It is also important to provide special times when the students can socialize. There is the need to meet the social needs of the learners. All work without play makes Jack a dull boy. Friendship, affection and acceptance should be expressed.

Learners should be treated with some degrees of respect.  Let them know when they have done well and reward them for their achievements. This is what Maslow's theory of Hierarchy of Needs called Esteem needs.

Self-actualization needs which deal with people's realization of their own individual potentials and creative talents is the last and the highest level among the Hierarchy of Needs as propounded by Maslow. This will help in attaining personal future fulfillment. At this level, a teacher needs to investigate the particular interest of his/her students in order to give them good advice. Interest helps in bringing out the best conceptual skills in every individual.

From Maslow's Theory, these three implications can be deduced:

i.   Learning can be promoted when the lower level needs of learners are fully met. It is only when the basic needs are satisfied that they can think of higher level needs.

ii.  Physical comfort, feeling of safety and relaxation are necessary for learning. Each of these determinants can motivate learners to learn as well as making learning to take place.

iii. The more a teacher helps his/her students in learning, choosing from existing alternatives or solving problems, that much he/she is motivating them towards achieving the growth needs.

From all that we have said, it is obvious that individuals are motivated by goals and purposes which are meaningful to them. Therefore, to motivate learners, the content of learning materials should be meaningful and be of interest to the learners.

It is expected of teachers to arrange and present learning experiences in a way that every learner can gain at least a degree of self-esteem. Only teachers who use appropriate teaching methods, re-learning techniques and encourage self-competition without making use of derogatory comparisons can accomplish effective teaching, which will naturally motivate students to learn better.

Love and happiness are positive emotions. Love is described in terms of caring, attachment and intimacy. In other words, there are a quality of absorption and selflessness, a desire to be together and to share intimately. Hence, teachers should demonstrate to their students that they are interested in them and in their work. The students should be given a sense of belonging. This will enhance attraction and reduce the dangers of growth needs. Do-or-die situations should be avoided. Point out the benefits of learning and the disadvantages of not learning instead of imposing conditions on assignments.

As we have pointed out earlier, natural interest is very important. Take advantage of this natural interest and try harder to create new ones and encourage learning for its own sake. Teachers should make their lessons to be learners-centered. Let the students take part in the lessons/lectures. Direct learning experiences towards feelings of success. To build positive self-concept and development of their own goals, invite comments

from students. Also, encourage students to learn from one another.

Since it is believed that behavior can be shaped by the use of reinforcement, teachers should consider the advantages and disadvantages of symbolic and material rewards. The role of incentives in motivating students for learning purposes is therefore, very important. Teachers are expected to perform certain incentive functions apart from arousal, expectancy and disciplinary functions.

Incentive function implies all the activities of the teacher in rewarding the efforts of his/her students so as to promote further positive efforts. Incentive is defined as "a condition in the external environment defined and controlled by an outside agent in order to intensify effort and increase performance" (Ayeni, 1991: 60). In the classroom situations, incentives are used to promote interest for topics or subjects that are not really interesting or fascinating as a result of certain underlying factors such as educational policies or environmental factors. Incentive, therefore, is a goal object or symbol which teachers often use to produce or enhance increased vigor. In learning situations, incentive is used as an encouragement for learning that is deemed essential but not always intrinsically appealing; hence, it is used to get learners motivated to learn.

In Nigeria today, many students are not really enthusiastic about French language. Yet this subject is highly essential for both personal and national developments. Hence, there is the need to stimulate, inspire, persuade and at times cajole students to learn something that is important for everyday living or subsequent learning. Teachers should reward both achievements and efforts on the part of the students. "The classroom is a complex environment because it is a contact between two distinct participants. The teacher and his/her student(s) belong to different generations and, or world views.

The mixture of variant backgrounds, beliefs, emotions, tastes and purposes among other things makes the classroom even more cumbersome. However, adequate planning and technical know-how in terms of teaching methods/strategies, on the part of a teacher or a lecturer does the magic of turning learning to a productive experience. A good teacher is known not by the degree of his vocabulary; "the –sms" and "the –tys" but by the quality of his/her products, who turn out to positively impact on their immediate and remote environments through functional knowledge they have acquired via qualitative teaching" (Ogundokun, 2014: 42).

The following incentives can be used in learning situations:

i.   Grades: The use of grades has both incentive and motivating values for learners. For instance, many students work with increased ability mainly to improve their previous grades. Terms and symbols used to identify grades may vary from one school to another but what all schools have in mind is either pass or fail. Each of these may be classified in any way. E.g. Excellent pass, Very good pass, Good pass, Just pass or fail. The use of grades as incentive is seriously commended because hard work can be encouraged through it. Hence, it is a means of discouraging laziness.

ii.  Praise and blame: Teachers should note that praise is a better incentive than blame because the effects of praise last longer. Children that are often blamed may stop trying because their efforts are never rewarded. One of the most basic ways to motivate students is to praise them. But, we should know that excessive or faulty use of praise may threaten students, cause them to feel separated from the teacher or other members of the class or it may lead to feelings of inferiority. However, a correct use of praise is preferred to blame because sharp criticism may induce feeling of panic.

iii. Feedback of test results: Teachers should provide feedback of test results to enable students to confirm their expectancies, whether met or not. Expectancies that are not confirmed leave the students ignorant of their successful efforts and deny them the satisfaction of accomplishment. Withholding feedback can discourage students in their efforts to learn.

iv.  The use of group work:  As a means of promoting team work and healthy rivalry, a group of students can be asked to work together on a particular problem or a subject-matter. The individual efforts of students are thus contributed for a common goal.

As a matter of fact, a very good language teacher should try as much as possible to initiate his/her students into the four language skills. "Teaching and learning are indeed a serious business. The classroom is a complex situation because effective teaching and learning do not just occur. They are carefully planned and worked out. In any language learning situation, four skills are required. Listening, speaking, reading and writing have been widely received as the basic four language skills in the order we have listed them" (Ogundokun, 2013: 13).

It is expected that teachers at different levels of education should help in providing a motive for their students to have interest in learning and to put in their best in the process of acquiring the best of knowledge needed to successfully navigate the modern world. We have demonstrated in this paper that although Maslow's Theory of the Hierarchy of Needs is often used by business managers to have a better understanding of their workers' behavior, it can be effectively used in teaching-learning situations too because learners are equally human beings.

It is clear, therefore, that many students fail to learn because they have not been presented with a

properly designed sequence of stimuli or a satisfactory chain of reinforcements.

## 4.    Conclusion

From the paper, it is evident that tertiary institutions have roles to play in facilitating the employment opportunities for their graduates through the teaching of a second foreign language because such a project has positive contributions to make in the individual's and the nation's developmental processes.

Also, it is established in the paper that incentives have motivational effects on performance of students. Therefore, teachers should provide them in the pursuit of instructional objectives. Under favorable conditions, any incentive promotes activity and this should be the aim and purpose of any good teacher.

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