

Curriculum Research and Development: French Language in Nigeria Since 1859

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Abstract

In the write-up, we can see that the concept of curriculum embraces all learning experiences, their planning, execution and evaluation under the supervision of a school system. This means that curriculum is an umbrella term that connects teaching, learning objectives, content, methods, evaluation, the equipment and personnel required to carry out the curriculum in action. The implication is that adequate planning and analysis of a curriculum are carried out in order to ensure that goals and objectives of a curriculum are realized in an effective manner, adopting appropriate content organization and designs. Also, we have observed that the development of the French Language curriculum needs a continuous updating in the face of emerging technological innovations in the area of language development across the globe.

Keywords: Curriculum, Research, Development, French Language, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Despite disagreements on the definition of curriculum, various definitions exist which agree that curriculum is concerned with the process of teaching and learning as aspects of education which in turn aims at harnessing long-term development and change of ideas, ideals and accomplishments of man in his environment. The work of curriculum theorists such as Saylor and Alexander (1974) reveal that the field of curriculum practice may be regarded as possessing several sides which present themselves to the various curriculum theorists. Such a position explains the differences which are found among the definitions of curriculum in textbooks (Iroegbu, 1999: 141). Let us examine just two definitions of curriculum as a matter of illustration. Saylor and Alexander (1974) regard curriculum as “a plan for providing sets of learning opportunities to achieve broad educational goals and related specific objectives for an identifiable population served by a single school centre”. On the other hand, Iroegbu (op. Cit) regards curriculum as “a logically connected set of conceptually and pedagogically analysed knowledge and value claims”

This brief introduction deals with curriculum research and development generally. Writing on this aspect of advanced research in curriculum development, Stenhouse (1980: 6-7) raised issues that ought to be addressed as guidelines for those researchers interested in case studies project of specific subject areas. He writes that some of the following questions should be addressed touching on any project concerning French Language:

Did the project have a pre-history? Did the project have aims (as opposed to teaching aims)? Did it spell all these out? Was it reform, research, development, experiment? Did the project deal in teaching aims? If so, how did it deal with them? Was there any discernable ‘design’ –experimental design or development models? Was it expressed or implicit or even unconscious? Did the project produce materials? Did the project produce research report, books, articles, etc if so, what are they like? Was there an evaluation? Was it in any sense independent of the project? What did it evaluate? Did it publish its reports? How were they received? Was there a consultative or steering committee? Who was on it? Was it influential-through discussion, constraints or support? Was there any plan of dissemination? If so, what was its aim, what was its pattern of organization? Did the project arouse criticism or hostility? If so, what were the grounds? Did the project react to such criticisms? What was its defense against them? Was the project given credit or praise by teachers or press? If so, on what grounds? How do these grounds relate to what the project says about itself? What is the situation at present? What do you regard as the main strength and weakness?

In his contribution, a Fletcher (1980:65) lists three (3) primary school French language projects undertaken in the UK with the support of the Ministry of Education, Nuffield Foundation and the National Foundation for Educational Research. The projects include the following under the omnibus title: Primary French Project: Basic Information: (i) The Primary French Pilot Scheme (19963): Functioned in 1974-75 (ii) The Primary French Materials Project (1963) as part of the Foreign Languages Teaching Materials Project (iii) The primary French Evaluation Project (1964-74).

The importance of the above information is to emphasize the need for policy formulators in education to realize that the sooner curriculum planning for foreign languages is started the better. Experts have concluded

that the years before the age of ten are the time when the human brain can most readily acquire new speech (Penfield et al, 1980 quoted by Fletcher in Stenhouse 1980, Ibid).

FRENCH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM PRACTICE IN NIGERIA SINCE 1859

French and German Languages were among the earliest subjects introduced into Nigerian Secondary schools as from 1859 when the first secondary school was founded in Lagos colony (Omolewa, 1971: 379). In fact Nigeria happened to be the first Anglophone country in Africa to teach French in Schools. Yet, according to Soyoye and Mojola (1998: 42) inspite of this early beginning, not much has been achieved with respect to the teaching of French since the colonial era. In effect, in 1882, the British colonial administration enacted an edict which made English the only non-Nigerian language to be taught in secondary schools. The axe fell on the teaching of French and German although the colonial government allowed students who so desired to sit for French at some British examinations such as the Junior and Senior Cambridge. The status quo remained almost the same until Nigeria became independent in 1960 (Soyoye, 1998). Also, the then Organisation Of African Unity in 1961 felt the need to foster unity among the newly independent nations of the continent, formulated a policy for linguistic integration of Africa. Therefore, it was agreed that English and French should be taught in schools of member countries-at both secondary and tertiary levels. Therefore, French language bounced back into Nigeria's educational curriculum as an optional subject. German language lost out because it did not appear relevant to the actualization of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives in Africa.

The recent policy shift in favour of the French language should be seen as an innovation from the perspective which sees this development as an improvement of the earlier versions as expressed in the *National Policy on Education* (1977, 1981, 1998). The recent policy of bilingual education as indicated in the National policy on education (2004:5, 10) has its roots in the recommendation made at the international conference in Yaounde (1961). All African Ministers of Education South of the Sahara were advised to introduce French/English in their school systems in support of the then nascent bilingual pan-Africanism (Brann, 1970). According to Okwudishu (2002:47) quoting David (1975) this move was followed up during the meeting of experts in Yaounde in November 1963 and culminated in the official approval of the bilingual education policy for all Africa by the OAU in Adisa- Abbaba in 1963. Hitherto in Nigeria, French was grouped with Arabic as optional vocational electives, this was the case until 2003. In 2004, French language was elevated to the status of a second official language in Nigeria. The NPE (2004:6) prescribed French language for the period of the Universal Basic Education covering primary schools and junior secondary schools The NPE says inter alia:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion and preserving cultures...For smooth interaction with out neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria, and it shall be compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools but non-vocational elective at the senior secondary school (p.10)

Hence, conceptually and legally too, Nigeria has become a bi-lingual nation even if the policy has not taken off effectively as only few schools (mainly private) are implementing the new bilingual education. According to Okwudishu (2002:48), the "raison d'être" for the new policy on French as a second national language shares similar justification which can be broadly classified as political, economic and social. The policy has been signed by the French Embassy and the federal and state Governments. In terms of content, the policy has been broken up into three stages for the purpose of facilitating its implementation as indicated below:

STAGE	DURATION	REGULATION
First	September 1998 to October 2000	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. French to be made compulsory from primary 5-6. 2. French must be taken at common entrance before one is accepted into JSS. 3. A pass in French as a criterion for acquiring JSS 3 certificates.
Second	September 2001 to October 2004	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. French to be made a compulsory core subject from JSS 1 to SSS3. 2. A pass in French as a criterion for promotion from JSS3 to SSS1. 3. Credit/pass in French as requirement for admission into the University.
Third	2004- October 2008	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Basic Knowledge of French required for recruitment. 2. Basic knowledge of French required for promotion of civil servants.

Source: IORTIF. (Personal Communication). In *A journal of Studies in Curriculum. Abuja (2002): WCI, Nigeria Chapter.*

Iortie is the French Coordinator for the secondary Schools in Abuja.

According to this schedule, the French government will supply the required equipment, literature, technical assistance, teaching materials and scholarships for teachers and students. On its part, Nigerian government is to

provide infrastructure, local French teachers, and other logistic requirements. Some primary and secondary schools, colleges of education and Universities have been selected as pilot schools in several states of Nigeria. We are also informed in this regard that a group of French teachers has been recruited from the West African-French-Speaking countries and posted to the pilot schools.

GOALS AND UTILITY OF FRENCH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM AND TEACHING IN NIGERIA.

Since 1859, the goals of French language learning in Nigeria have continued to assume new dimensions. Usually, there are motives for learning foreign languages. Broughton et al (1988:5-6) have isolated two categories of this motivation, namely instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. According to them:

- Instrumental motivation occurs when a foreign language is learnt for operations purposes, that is: (a) to be able to read books in the target language (b) to be able to communicate with other speakers of that language.
- Integrative motivation occurs when a language is learnt in order: (a) to identify much more closely with a speech community which uses that language (b) to feel at home in that language and (c) to understand the attitudes and the world view of the community.

From these observations, French language teaching and learning in Nigeria has been learnt for instrumental and integrative purposes. According to Okwudishu (2002:51) quoting other scholars in French language studies, these are the following goals of French language teaching/learning in Nigeria since 1859 (which we are extending here):

PERIOD	GOAL OF FRENCH LANGUAGE TEACHING
1859-1969	To inculcate French cultural and artistic worldview (Simire, 1998).
1970-1980	To Produce People Who Can Speak The Language And Then Help To Establish More Contact Between English Speaking And French Speaking In African countries (Cookey, 1970).
1985-1995	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To help the country to maintain international relationship with French speaking countries outside Africa. (Gleaned from the overall objectives states schools in 1985). 2. To facilitate overall cognitive, social and psychological development of the Nigerian students (Akudolu, 1995).
1997-2003	to enhance interregional trade between Nigerian businessmen and francophone west African countries (Okeke, 1998).
2004-present	To make every Nigerian able to speak French for a smooth interaction with out Francophone neighbours (NPE, 2004).

These statements of the goals of teaching and learning French in Nigeria schools make a great demand on the implementers of the French language curriculum especially with regard to the new status of French in Nigeria as a second official language.

INSTITUTIONS CONCERNED WITH FRENCH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

The issue of language curriculum development can hardly be thorough and effective if considered outside the context of national educational objectives. Hence, there is the need for a co-ordinated French language curriculum within the context of a Nation's Policy on Education. With this in mind, it is necessary for us to examine some of the key institutions charged with the French language curriculum development and implementation at the different levels. Three of such institutions shall be considered here. These institutions include:

- i. The Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC),
- ii. The Nigeria French Language Village (NFLV), Badagry, Lagos State and
- iii. The Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD), Ibadan Jos, Abuja

THE NERDC

The NERDC booklet (2003:3) says that the agency was a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Education, and was established in 1988 by an enabling decree 53 (Act No 53) which brought the merger of four existing educational research and development bodies into one organization. One of the former bodies was the Language Development Centre. In the specific area of language development, this same law outlines the functions, structure and activities of the Language Development Centre, this centre was constituted into two academic departments which are:

1. Department of Nigerian Languages and
2. Department of Foreign Languages, with each department being headed by a Deputy Director.

Functions of the Language Development Centre include the following (Op. Cit).

1. Advise on and implement policies relating to languages
2. Promote and develop Nigerian languages.
3. Co-ordinate language development projects throughout Nigeria and prepare an overall design for

language research needs both internally and through grants and subsidies to institutions, qualified agencies and organizations.

4. Carryout language extension services (including teacher training and linguistic courses).
5. Develop and encourage the core books in Nigerian languages in cooperation with other institutions.

To ensure effective implementation of these functions, the centre undertakes the following activities:

1. Language research, language development and documentation.
2. Applied linguistics activities: Language pedagogy and curriculum development matters, translation/interpretation activities.
3. Extension and consultancy services in language related matters.

Department of foreign languages of the NERDC

This department is concerned with activities which revolve around the research and development of English, French and Arabic languages. As for French, the department of foreign languages undertakes to conduct research into the study of French which was hitherto categorised as an optional elective at the JSS and SSS curricular levels. In this regard, the department has recorded some important achievements which include:

1. Publication of textbooks in French language at primary and secondary school levels.
2. Publication of teacher-education materials.
3. Development of the National French Language curriculum for primary and junior secondary schools.

No doubt, the Nigerian Education Research and Development Council has made a tremendous impact on the French language development aspect of Nigeria's overall national development objectives.

The Nigerian French Language Village, Badagry, Lagos.

This inter-university agency was set up primarily to play a key role in the development and research in French language studies in Nigeria, at the tertiary level. This agency has been complementing the efforts of the universities and the NERDC. Referring to this institution and others like it (Arabic Village, Ngala, Borno State and National Institute for Nigerian Languages at Ogbor Hill, Aba, Abia State), Emenanjoo (2001:22) says that "these three language institutions through their acculturation programmes, documentation and research activities, as well as teaching and training programmes have been implementing different aspects of the language policy". The Nigerian French Language Village (Badagry) is known mainly for organizing the one-year language immersion programme for 300 level students of French language in Universities and Colleges of Education, in addition to other non-formal programmes for adult workers.

The philosophy of this project is to provide a programme that is practical in approach and familiar to the background of the learners. The programme was designed by scholars in French studies and the Federal Government to replace the former One-Year- Abroad programme which took place in France or West African countries. Since inception, the Nigeria French Language Village has been involved in teaching, research and documentation in the area of French Language Development.

The Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD)

This centre which has branches in Jos, Enugu, Ibadan, Abuja has become a national agency for the promotion of the study of French Language in Schools. According to Okwudishu (2002:49) the C.F.T.D. (Centre for French Teaching and Documentation) and the French Language Village in Badagry have been upgraded and given the status of national institutions charged with the training and retraining of teachers of French".

Okwudishu did not add that these two institutions working in tandem with the French embassy and the Alliance Francaise and French cultural centres have been making considerable input into the curriculum development for French language, in addition to spreading the gospel of bilingual education in Nigeria. In fact, there are several informal programmes designed by these agencies for workers, tourists and business people who need a working knowledge of the French language.

NEED FOR CURRICULUM INNOVATION FOR FRENCH IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

No one can successfully dispute the fact that because of poor conditions and/or inferior teaching techniques no benefit has accrued to Nigerian learners of French, but on the other hand there are several instances of good teaching that have proved that the teaching delivery can be better done, if certain innovative steps are taken at all levels of education. If such steps, as would be stated below, are taken we may be able to state as follows in the near future:

1. Nigerian students arrive from the preceding stage with attitudes to French language and France already shaped,
2. Despite some deficiencies in the earlier stages of learning French language, most secondary schools have extended the study of French to all levels (JSS1-SSS3)
3. Parents are beginning to understand the need or relevance of bilingual education (English and French) for their children.

The steps referred to are intended to enrich the French language curriculum in Nigerian schools, and they concern four key areas:

1. Content of syllabus,
2. Time-tabling,
3. Method of lesson delivery and
4. Mode of implementation.

These are issues of concern raised by French language teachers in the FCT (Abuja) at a seminar/workshop organized by the University of Abuja. The trend of discussions at that seminar forms the kernel of our discussion here.

Content of the French Language Syllabus: The bilingual policy of education requires that French be taught in stages:

Primary 5-6: Basic French.

Secondary Schools: JSS1-SS3: the current syllabuses are inadequate and require a re-appraisal in conformity with the objectives of the new bilingual policy as it relates to French.

Time Tabling: One major problem of French in Nigerian schools is the insufficient time allocated to it. There is need to increase the number of periods allocated to French from three to five per week. We cannot continue with the old order of putting French at a disadvantage.

Method of lesson Delivery: There is need to improve the method of teaching French in both primary and secondary schools. The teachers of French in Abuja have suggested: (a) setting up of French rooms in schools. (b) Organisation of seminars/workshops in order to assist teachers to improve their teaching skills, especially during holidays. (c) decongestion of classrooms because overpopulation in classrooms is not allowing effective teaching of French to take place especially at the JSS level where French is obligatory for all students. (d) The number of French teachers should be doubled for every school especially at the lower levels (primary, JSS 1-3).

Implementation strategies of the French curriculum

There is need for conformity in the implementation of the French curriculum; this is because at the moment some states are not encouraging the teaching/learning of French language in their schools. Even where French is supposed to be taught, some school heads discourage their trained French language teachers from teaching the subject. Instead, such teachers are compelled to teach other subjects such as English, Nigerian languages, etc. As a result, in such schools, French is not allowed on the time-table. Maybe inspectors need to be appointed and instructed to visit schools to enforce the teaching of French language in such schools. In the same vein, school owners should build more classrooms to decongest the overbloated number of students and recruit more teachers so that the aims of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) could be achieved.

CONCLUSION

From discussions so far, we observe that curriculum practice is a dynamic segment of human endeavour with regard to teaching and learning processes.

Every curriculum planning and development aims at guiding the teachers and learners in order to achieve the broad objectives of a given educational system. In this paper, we have attempted to examine the practice of curriculum practice at it relates to the teaching and learning of French language in Nigeria since 1859. Finally, we have reviewed the French language curriculum in Nigerian schools, and have also suggested that there is the overriding need to review all current practices relating to the teaching and learning of French in Nigerian schools, especially at the primary and secondary school levels in order to achieve what the current edition of the National Policy On Education (2004:6) calls “smooth communication with Nigeria’s francophone neighbors”, sooner than later.

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