

FOREIGN LANGUAGES ACQUISITION FOR BETTER RELATIONSHIP AND EMPLOYABILITY: FRENCH LANGUAGE IN FOCUS.

Dr. Balogun, Thomas Akanbi
Emmanuel Alyande University of Education, Oyo
Balogunta@eauedoyo.edu.ng

Abstract

The relationship between the acquisition of foreign languages and unemployment in Nigeria and in the world as a whole is a serious challenging subject that needs critical examination. It is to note that though, the technology has more or less turn the world into a global village and a compact family setting, human families with different cultures migrating and scattering all over the earth need to intercommunicate in different languages for better understanding, civilization, accomplishments and in enhancing job opportunities for those who are able to express themselves in different languages. It is in this view that this paper sets to look into the impact foreign languages, with special reference to French in the areas of equipping its users with employment opportunities within and outside Nigeria.

Key words: foreign languages, acquisition, employment, unemployment

Résumé

La relation entre l'acquisition de langues étrangères et le chômage au Nigéria et dans le monde entier est un sujet difficile qui nécessite un examen critique. Il est à noter que la technologie a plus ou moins transformé le monde en un village global et un environnement familial compact. Les familles humaines ayant des cultures différentes migrant et se dispersant partout dans le monde doivent être capables de communiquer entre eux dans différentes langues pour une meilleure compréhension, une meilleure civilisation, les réalisations et améliorer des possibilités d'emploi pour ceux qui sont capables de s'exprimer dans différentes langues. C'est dans cette perspective que la présente communication se penche sur l'impact des langues étrangères, avec une référence particulière au français dans le domaine de la fourniture à ses utilisateurs de possibilités d'emploi au Nigéria et ailleurs.

Mots-clés: langues étrangères, acquisition, emploi, chômage

Introduction

As attested by the Biblical history, human race from all over the world originated from one source and were living together then in harmony as a family with the same linguistic affinity and enjoyed

free flow of communication (Genesis 11:1). However in the legend of the Tower of Babel, it is presumed that the solely language in existence for human communication then was thwarted by the Most High to fulfill the Divine decree. The account of Genesis chapter 11 verses 8 and 9 summed it up this way: “Therefore was its name called Babel; because Jehovah there confounded the language of the whole earth. And Jehovah scattered them thence over the surface of the whole earth” (Derby Bible Translation)

As the human families were dispersed and migrate, they scattered all over the earth and those that understand one another formed different linguistic and cultural groups for better living. These linguistic groups and cultural assemblage gave birth today to over 6000 languages the world over. This begins the chagrin of mankind on the issue of human free communication among themselves because of the birth of different unreachable languages. The ethnologic catalogue of the world languages, which is the best linguistic resources, currently lists 6909 living languages in the world (www.education.rec.ri.cmu.edu). As numerous living languages today, if people are to share common goals in life and be interdependent, needing one another for progressive in many fields of life, then there is a need for inter-comprehension amongst people in the world. The undeniable fact is that globalization as we perceive it is the outcome of the increased trade, increased human mobility, sophistication in information revolution and capital flow (Oyenuga, 2015: 37). Hence, as a result of this adventure arise the need to want to learn another language for better welfare and mutual understanding with our neighbours and associates in business, in education, in politics and the likes.

There is no gainsaying that language, as a means of communication is the soul/life on which all kinds of human activities hang. Without language, the world would be in total darkness, total quietness like a stagnant water that cannot move. So knowledge of a language, two or multiple, opens a large door of opportunities for those who can speak them to explore the treasures of this world. Out of this multitude of languages, some can be classified as foreign language needing to be studied for personal and /or national development while some others could be classified into the categories of mother tongues or second language.

Lawal (2010) views language as the closest phenomenon to humankind and without it, full human development and fulfillment is inconceivable. This assumption underscores the importance of human language as a tool for harmony and development among people that speak such language.

Irrespective of their status, all languages are in effects used for the same common purpose, which is communication.

Though in a theoretical sense, all world languages and cultures are viewed as equal, but when we closely and critically consider them in a practical sense, we realize that some of these languages in question “are superior to other by virtue of their economic, political and technological power” (Adekoya, 2010:4). De Mejía (2002)’s view on languages generally is different. To him, all languages are not equal in the world level; some are widely spoken than others, enjoying and benefiting from social prestige. For that very reason, we need to extend the horizon of our ability to gainfully communicate in real sense with others around the world in such widely spoken languages. It will be therefore a great privilege to exert oneself to be recognized with the speakers of such prestigious languages as this could open a large and wide door of opportunities to those who are able to speak at least any of the so termed languages of economic, political and technological superpowers.

Rationales for learning a foreign Language

Although, the approach of various people in learning/studying languages (be it foreign, second language or mother tongue) differ from one person to another. Some learn language for pleasure and some others do so for the reason that it will bring a gain or a fortune for them after graduation. It is not an easy task learning a foreign language with a perseverant effort and with a high sense of efficacy. Successfully accomplishing this could be difficult and strenuous at times as the costs for doing this may involve one’s time, effort, and expendable resources (Bandura, 1994:8). Of course, it could be understood that learning a language has dual purpose. In the first instance, learning especially a foreign language provides a personal fulfillment to a person who learns and can speak two, three or more languages. Aside from this, being able to communicate in various languages can equally provide financial reward(s) to one.

When talking about globalization in every sector and endeavour of human life, it is equally necessary to be thinking of “communicatization” because nothing can be achieved in life without a meaningful communication. Oyenuga (2015:35) citing Kellner describes globalization as an attempt to specify fields that open rooms to “interconnections and interdependencies between different levels such as the economic, political, cultural and psychological as well as between

different flows of product, ideas, information, people and technology”. He further goes on to define globalization as “the increasing unification of the world economic order through reduction of barriers to trade, technology and transference of ideas”, p.36. These days, some individuals and/or nations face many linguistic challenges that can help them breakthrough (enabling them tap from the enormous wealth of ideas, concepts, values, transnational business ... and technological facilities that can be easily shared across nations) due to inability to freely intercommunicate among themselves. Furthermore, globalization encourages breaking totally linguistic and cultural barriers that cause any obstacles in achieving these noble ambitions. Nigeria as an Anglophone country, surrounded by her francophone neighbours needs to intensify the acquisition of more foreign languages especially, French to be able to freely communicate with these countries and other great francophone nations in the world.

As the world itself becomes more global, the demand for people to understand themselves effectively for better living becomes high. As the world population increases hourly and many people spread all over the surface of the earth, finding a job becomes difficult and those available cannot even saturate the whole population. For that very reason many find themselves among the odds, looking for suitable employment for survival. Paper qualification(s) no longer qualify individuals for their desirous and satisfying job they seek to get despite their earlier struggles for many years in the quest to obtain those certificates. This situation gives rise to looking inward, professionalizing themselves in additional fields for gaining opportunities. Hence, an enormous amount of energy has been dissipated by so many on the mastery of one or more foreign language(s).

It becomes now a challenge for a nation and/or individuals to learn how to speak one or several other languages which can help in gaining access to employment and in transforming such to gain recognition in the world over in this time of globalization. Ogunsiji (2010:18) posits that “the world new order compels free flow of ideas, people and goods” and indeed this would be unachievable without a good understanding of one another’s language. This is where the acquisition of the foreign language(s) becomes a panorama that could propel an uninterrupted communication devoid of any language barrier among the concerned group

Importance of foreign language education

Methodically, to educate is to guide, to train someone to do something worthwhile, developing him or her mentally, morally or esthetically especially by instruction, that is to lead someone out of confinement, captivity, narrowness, darkness and from ignorance. Learning a foreign language therefore is simply part of a very elementary and progressive education. This makes one not to be less prejudiced but to develop more positive attitudes towards people who are not from one's culture. As one learns a new language (a foreign language of course), one expands better his or her horizon, his or her view of the world either culturally, psychologically, ideologically or even scientifically. This makes one's experiences to be liberal and makes one to be more flexible and tolerant to others who are of different tribes, culture, race or background thereby making one to have close relationship that can break any barriers which could cause distrust and fear. Speaking to someone in his or her own language makes things easier. It allows everyone to feel at home, more comfortable, confident and secure. In other way round, when one knows foreign language(s) and able to be acquainted with other people's cultures and values, this will of course enable such person to gain a more profound understanding and appreciation of one's own culture as he contrast the two. This in turn paves ways for such a person to be more creative naturally.

Impacts of foreign language acquisition on income and unemployment

In the world today, foreign languages hold possession of an important position in many countries' curricula (Donado, 2014: 1). The reason is that these countries view foreign language acquisition and skills in them as a human capital that can be rewarded in different sectors of human endeavours. This reward can be at the national, communal and/or individual level(s) which needs to be cherished. Moore (2006:20), considering the importance of languages in the world, explains that learning foreign languages opens opportunities for more investments in different ways. The increase in the international trade and commerce, diplomatic ties, technological advancements, tourism, sharing cultural heritage and also some international foreign direct and indirect investments can all attribute largely to the country's or the nation's growth/development socially and economically, and when this happens there will be open doors of employment for the young ones aspiring for jobs. This can only be achieved successfully if the nation considers employing the avenue of the acquisition of the foreign language as an important subject that can open ways to these opportunities for her and the citizens. Nigerian neighbouring countries are francophone;

besides Nigeria has direct or / and indirect investments with and from different countries speaking other languages withal English. Already, a wide range of sectors from France are represented in the business mission. They include oil and gas, health, transportation, aerospace, banking and finance, energy, security, agriculture and engineering (Adeosun, 2017). Besides, Nigeria too has different tourism centres, international trade centres etc. that people from world over visit and it requires advanced linguistic skills to be able to have smooth relationship with these people. Di Paolo and Tansel (2013:8) buttress this and explain further that

The increasing internationalization of economic and Research and Development activities, the growing relevance of tourism, the growing exposure to international trade and globalization stimulated the demand of foreign languages

Hence, when the nation as an entity embarks on foreign language acquisition campaign and encourage the learning and “the widespread of foreign language knowledge of the population” will eventually increase foreign investments in the country as this could outline the country’s stepping stone for economic development and productivity in this globalized world. This in turn will open many job opportunities to countless young adult graduates seeking for employments.

On the other hand, individual can increase his chance of job opportunities by trying to learn one or two additional foreign languages. In his study on young people learning foreign language at school or University, Donado (2014) found out that 73% of the respondents from a survey conducted in twenty nine (29) European countries while asking them why they learn foreign language gave “to improve their job opportunities” as one reason why they learn foreign languages. Of course, knowing one or more foreign languages gives one an edge over those who don’t acquire the knowledge of foreign language at all. In Nigeria, the next modern language popularly recognized after English is French for the reason of Nigeria’s location (being surrounded by francophone countries) besides French is both a working and an official language of the United Nations, the European Union (E.U), African Nations (A.U), UNESCO, NATO, FIFA, the international Olympic Committee, the International Red Cross and International Courts to mention just a few.

Every nation of the world is concerned at promoting her trade and /or her economy. To sell one's products externally or abroad needs having a good communication with his / her customers within and externally. To be successful of course in this scheme, needs that there should be improved linguistic skills by citizens of that country for smooth interaction. Obviously, individuals that have acquired those linguistic skills would first reap the dividends for their skills and be most privileged to gain employment over their counterparts who are lacking ability in such.

Career Benefits of foreign Language acquisition

Learning a language, especially a foreign language is not devoid of some benefits. Most if not all, people learn a foreign language today because they want it to earn them something in term of employment. Foreign language skills, in this globalised world, are in high demand and can be of benefit in almost any career, particularly in businesses that trade internationally.

There are a lot of jobs competition today that are excruciating and difficult to get. However, when you are unique in your linguistic skills, being able to make use of two or several languages, can distinguish you among countless others competing with you for the same job. This unique talent of linguistic skills makes it easy to get that coveted job that many are contesting for.

Having linguistic skills in French as a foreign language will not only enrich one's life, it will also prepare one for careers where skills in foreign language like French are main requirements, or are at least considered a strong asset to have to get a certain position or a job in an international setting. There are lots of jobs recognized to be functional and directly could apply to those only having linguistic skills in foreign language. Out of the numerous jobs for the foreign language literates that can earn them a good living over their counterparts are in part the following:

- **School teacher:** The one having a degree in foreign language can be employed and work as foreign language teacher or instructor either in secondary school or a tertiary institution.
- **Translator / interpreter:** Now that interactional communication is a norm of the day, knowledge of foreign language can earn one a job of mediator between people, communities etc. of different language background as interpreter for them
- **Work as a company representative or in a customer service care:** As a foreign language proficient one can be privileged to earn a prestigious job in a lucrative company such as

GLO, MTN, Insurance Company etc. as a representative of the Company abroad or as a customer service role to care for the immigrant demanding the company's service

- **Government Programme Agent:** There are a lot of government programmes that involve an extension to foreign arms, a position that can only be occupied by those who have proficiency in foreign language.
- **International Broadcast Journalist or Reporter:** world over, journalists or reporters who are bilingual or multilingual are appreciated as these have privileges to information in different languages without any stress and this information could be pennyworth.
- **Airline Customer Service Agent:** it is obvious that different nationals are customers to airline services, travelling from one place to another. Therefore a bilingual or multilingual person would be at advantage over a monolingual to take up the job to serve in this capacity.

Beside these just highlighted job opportunities for those who are proficient in foreign language(s), they can also gain employment as a Bilingual Tour Consultant/ Tour Manager, a diplomatic service officer or can work as international military/ immigration intelligence, as spies, as marketers and advertisers for multinational companies or hotels etc. So, when one has made efforts to be skillful and proficient in foreign language(s), this of course could enrich his or her career opportunities.

Conclusion

Language, a unique gift God that makes us thinking human, is a useful tool for human accomplishments in various endeavours that have to do with communication. It is a means of entrance on different cultures, molding minds and addressing issues. Hence, the world being divided culturally and linguistically calls for a reunion via studying one another's language for proper and mutual understanding of matters gainfully. In this jet age, foreign language proficiency has received considerable attention all over the world as migration, tourism, business, international trade etc. continue to increase. Being able to speak one or more foreign language(s) increases one's chance of gaining a job thereby reducing the probability of being unemployed. Proficiency in foreign language therefore provide for one unlimited opportunities one may not think of. Foreign language skills characterize a form of human asset that can be rewarded in the labor market. In Nigeria for example, with neighbouring francophone countries, the knowledge of English and French languages would be very helpful in finding job opportunities within and outside the

country. In fact, numerous studies (Hutchinson, 2005; Melitz, 2008; Ku and Zussmann, 2010 and Fidrmuc and Fidrmuc, 2009) and strong evidences show that language barriers represent an impediment to the expansion of international trade flows. Foreign investments bring about not only financial resources but also technological and managerial skills to the recipient country, thus contributing to her economic growth and opening opportunities of employment to her citizens (Di Paolo and Tansel, 2013:8). This is the time and the right time for Nigeria and individuals to consider developing one's ability to learn one or two modern foreign language(s) for increased opportunities especially in this job scarce time.

Recommendations

On the basis of our discussion on the importance of language in the self and national development, we therefore recommend that

- Government should encourage bilingual education for our learners in this competitive world.
- Emphasis should be placed on the need to increase foreign language policy, especially French language among our young ones. This will evidently improve and increase their chances for employability and create avenues for self-subsistence in the labour mobility in today's globalized settings.
- Individuals can increase their chance of job opportunities by trying to learn one or more foreign languages most especially French in Nigeria because of its importance and role it plays as working language of international organizations.

References

- Adekoya, O. A. (2010) "Language, Literature and Transformative Education in the Twenty-first Century". A Key-note Address delivered at the Second National Conference of the School of Languages, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo between 3 and 6 August, 2010.
- Adeosun, Segun (2017, December). More French Companies to Invest in Nigeria - TELL. TELL Magazine, 14 December, 2017. Retrieved on 05/07/1018 from <https://tell.ng>Big Story>
- Balogun, T. A. (2013). « Le droit à l'acquisition de la langue: un véritable instrument pour la consolidation du lien global » . in C. Uzoho, S. Ezeodili & T. Okoye (Eds). *The Dignity of a French Teacher : Celebrating Prof. Julie Agbasiere*. (pp.71 – 76) Awka: AFAB Education Books.

- Bandura, A. (1994). "Self-efficacy"; in V. S. Ramachaudran (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of human behavior* (Vol. 4, pp. 71 – 81). New York: Academic Press. (Reprinted in H. Friedman [Ed.], *Encyclopedia of mental health*. San Diego: Academic Press, 1998).
- Darby, J. N. (1890). Darby Bible Translation. Assessed online on April 24, 2018 from <https://www.biblegateway.com>
- De Mejía A.-M. (2002): *Power, prestige, and bilingualism : international perspectives on elite bilingual education*, Buffalo, N.Y., Multilingual Matters.
- Di Paolo, Antonio & Tansel, Aysit (2013). « Returns to Foreign Language Skills in a Developing Country: The Case of Turkey”. Turkish Economic Association? Discussion Paper 2013/14. Available on <http://www.tek.org.tr> Assessed online on May 6, 2018
- Donado, Alejandro (2014). "Foreign Languages and their Impacts on Income and Unemployment" *Beiträge zur Jahrestagung des Vereins für Socialpolitik 2014: Evidenzbasierte Wirtschaftspolitik – Session: Norms and Culture*, No. F10-V3, pp. 1 – 54. This version is available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/100288> Assessed online on May 6, 2018
- Fidrmuc, J., Fidrmuc, J. (2009). Foreign languages and trade. Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR). Discussion Paper No: 7228, London.
- Hutchinson, William K. (2005). "Linguistic Distance as a Determinant of Bilateral Trade". *Southern Economic Journal*. 72(1), 1–15.
- Ku, H., Zussmann, A. (2010). "Lingua Franca: The role of English in international trade". *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*. 75, 250-260.
- Lawal, A. R. (2010). "The Role of Language and Literature in Balanced and Transformative Education" A Key-not Address delivered at the Second National Conference of the School of Languages, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo between 3 and 6 August, 2010
- Melitz, J. (2008). "Language and foreign trade". *European Economic Review*. 52, 667- 699.
- Moore, Danièle (2006). *Plurilinguismes et école. Langue et apprentissage des langues*. Editions Didier. Paris.
- Obodoeze, N. J. (2014). "German studies in Nigerian Educational system". *Journal of Modern European Languages and Literatures*. 2. pp 84 – 95.
- Ogunsiji, Ayo (2010). "Language, Literature and National Transformation in the Nigerian Context". A lead Paper presented at the School of Languages' Conference and Workshop, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo between 3 and 6 August, 2010.
- Oyenuga, O. F. (2015). "Culture and the problem of globalization in Nigeria". In S. Ade Ali and E. O. Akintona (Eds.) *Readings in Philosophy: Problems and Issues* (pp. 33 – 44). Lagos: Triumph Publishers.

www.education.rec;ri;cmu.edu assessed on May 2, 2018