

French language and the new technologies in the current education reform in Nigeria

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Abstract

Gone are the days when materials used for the teaching and learning of a foreign language like French consists only of books on grammar, dictionary and chalkboard. Today with the dawn of new technologies we have a vast array of audio visual maintenance such as audio tapes, video tapes, radio, etc. Moreover, the advent of computer technology these days introduces a further potentially inexhaustible domain of providing essential support to the teaching and learning of French which of course no more remains static as a foreign language but now has gained a status of a second official language in the country. In modern language teaching and learning, the implementation of ultra modern equipment becomes a major enterprise, which encourages classroom practice and realities of what the students experience in real life. Here, ways by which the new technologies or multimedia gadgets could be assets of great benefits to the teaching and learning of a language like French have been outlined.

Key words: *new technologies, education reform, multimedia, teaching/learning*

Introduction

Denotatively, reform is to make a person, institution or procedure to become better by removal or abandonment of imperfections, faults, or errors. This meaning is evident in Hornby (2010), 'a change that is made to a social system, an organization, etc in order to improve or correct it'. Upon this premise, it could be equally seen as a way by which a system or an organization is improved by making changes to it. In other words, reform could mean 'reshaping' or 'redesigning a system to conform to contemporary or desired need. A need may arise from the reason of dynamism, technological advancements, academic, social and individual challenges that come with time. Educational reforms in Nigeria as introduced by Obasanjo administration is an attempt to repair and renew the falling standard of education in Nigeria by putting some odds aside and bringing new methods of quality of education where academic achievements of all students can be improved. This desperate move had to be made by this administration because of the fast dwindling standard of education, and the fact that there had not been any major reform in the educational system of the country after the country's independence in 1960. However, the damage caused in this fall of education is not beyond repair if the implementations of the reform ideologies and activities are well put in place and actualized.

One of the laudable efforts put up by new reform is the Teacher's Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), a body that regulates teaching at all levels of education in the country. The body is set up to professionalize the teaching profession. This may be considered appropriate because teachers are at the center as the executors of this education reform. Fafunwa (1974) submits that a qualitative education requires curriculum review, updates and where necessary reforms from time to time. Other provisions of the reform include privatization of some federal secondary schools, encouraging public and private sectors to invest in educational system, and a self-sustaining educational system, out of many others.

This reform provides for standardization of teaching and teacher education, and to achieve this, teachers in Nigeria must adopt the use of up to date equipments in teaching. Teachers in classrooms are faced with new challenges to how to use modern instructional materials and gadgets. The digital cum computer technology is fast taking new trends in classroom teaching. As professionals, teachers are now to face the challenge of developing new teaching skills via new technologies and continue to improve these skills from time to time in order to catch up with the radical developments in teaching. To diagnose and modernize the fallen and obsolete standard of education, it is required that government, education prostates, colleges and universities be involved in financing the provision of some modern facilities to enhance teaching and learning process. Njoku (2007) corroborates this fact when he states that teachers should be provided with all ICT infrastructures which could be used in the classroom or language laboratory. He goes further that "colleges must prepare their lecturers and staffs for interactive on-line education in appropriate courses" This could include ability to teach interactively on-line, using computer or any other multimedia gadgets (in addition to the traditional face-to-face mode) to teach and bring about an improvement on teaching and learning especially of a foreign language such as French in the country.

The paper is particularly interested in how modern equipment could be adapted to the teaching and learning of French language in Nigeria. It is also concerned with how such equipment can be updated from time-to-time. To meet up with what operates in advanced countries of the world, the adoption of this new technology, it is hoped will enhance the teaching and learning of French, especially in a country like Nigeria, where French is a foreign language. Although given the status of second official language of this country, French is also viewed as a foreign language because apart from being a European language like English, it is yet to be acquired by the majority in the country. Ajiboye (1993) defines foreign language as a means of direct communication in Nigeria presently, this means intensified efforts should be made by French teacher to make the language attain a status of second official language in Nigeria. Of course, acquiring French, as the second official language of this country is not only cognitively challenging, it also has emotional, social commercial and political implications. In the new Nigeria democratic dispensation and with the current education reform, French language will now be taught at all levels of education in Nigeria including primary schools. So, learning French language today is no

more a luxury but a necessity because the world has become a global village. If Nigeria is to exercise a meaningful role in the world affairs then, it is mandatory that she takes up the project of learning French language to make communication easier with her neighbours and her other big sister nations in the world because French is the second most used/spoken language next to English in the United Nations together with other affiliated Organizations' transactions. Ajiboye (2001) agrees that "the French language and the contemporary society are hardly separable as the modern world appears to see it and one of the major languages upon which civilization and technological forward-march depend". Hence, to forward-march scientifically, diplomatically, technologically and economically, knowledge of the second foreign language (French in Nigeria) is a must for the future development of the country. Nigeria is bordered by francophone countries in all the cardinal points: in the West by the Republic of Benin, in the North by Niger Republic and in the East by the Republics of Tchad and Cameroun except in the South where we find the Atlantic ocean. This is an undisputable fact. Nigeria needs therefore to solidify ties with these countries. Of course, to interact freely with these neighbouring countries, a free flow of French language for communication is highly required. Though, inferior to her in population and economical strength, Nigeria needs a good cooperation from these nations for some achievements.

Multimedia technology in teaching/Learning of French as a foreign language

Language teachers have been using multimedia technological aids in Nigeria, presumably, for more than thirty or more years. These technological materials range from audio tape recorder, radio and videocassette recorder among others. These gadgets have become old fashioned today because of the advent of new technologies. We cannot however neglect the significant impacts that tape recorder and videocassettes recorder have had and still have on the lives of learners. Moreover, we cannot put aside the roles these gadgets play in our language laboratories. However, as the world advance more and more technologically, there have been improvement and reforms of course on our language laboratories and classes for effective dissemination: delivery of teaching and learning processes.

Language laboratory and multimedia technologies

The quality of education of any country affects its social, economic, political and civil liberty, as such, every stakeholder in the society including Governments, both federal and states, institutions even individuals are very much concerned about reforms and improvements in education. It is indeed an ideal step. Much is however expected from teachers and learners who are directly involved in the raising of standard education. Language laboratories especially should be standardized, well equipped. For an effective and desired language teaching and learning to be carried out, every language laboratory should be upgraded to a language resource centre, well equipped with ultra modern multimedia gadgets for the use of both learners and teachers. This will assist the learners

acquire and retain some aspect in the target language. It is assumed and believed that people retain as much as 80% of what they see, hear and do simultaneously (Computer Technology Research, 1993). Going by this fact therefore, a language laboratory/ language resource centre should be equipped with recordings, reproducing, storing and distribution media and multimedia based materials such as audio, video and projectors so as to bring these gadgets to the ‘state of the arts’ level. Computers, internet facilities and satellite technology which could enable learners view broadcast of language lessons and instructions direct from the native speakers. For instance, online links like <http://tv5monde.com>; www.leplaisirdapprendre.com; <http://rfi.fr> etc serve creditably. What this means is that language laboratories should be equipped with the Internet facility that would enable learners use sites that serve in the capacity of providing instructions and lessons on the French language. Through this, their contact with the language would be intensified and learning of the various aspects of the language facilitated.

It is not an outrageous thing for government and institutions to sponsor or finance the equipping of language laboratories and language resource centres with enough computers and connect same to a cyber line. The provision of this services by the schools at a reduced or subsidized rate would enable learners and teachers carry out their work by gathering current information from the web. Provision of this multimedia network is a superb resource, which can make a big difference in the quality of teaching and learning of a foreign language like French (in Nigeria). Njoku (2007) is of the opinion that “the most important agencies dealing with students have all gone on-line, thereby forcing/ encouraging students to go on-line”. He further stated that “the students are also enjoying their on-line experiences and are getting more interested in the opportunities presented by the web”. If this is really true, then it could be easier for learners to explore and make research from the enormous information find in French language on the websites. This could have been more beneficial to students if they could visit and have free access to internet facilities to carry out their assignment without charge (for the reason of their financial constraints).

Music is one thing most if not all humans enjoy. Employing it in teaching and learning of the French language would work well. French teachers could expose the learners to wide range of French music or French songs with their authors and then ask them to listen and write the wordings/lyrics then compare their styles in choice of words. Engaging in this kind of activities will make them more inquisitive to invest their time to explore French language on web in a wider sense, using what they have learnt to communicate with others in the other side of the world on subjects of common interest. Moreover they will be able create chat groups and exchange ideas with friends, pen pals and peers in the world through e-mails, blogs and other electronic means. As they do this, they are consciously or unconsciously registering their membership with an international francophone cyberspace community and with this membership; learners of French are somehow fulfilling indirectly

the NUC and/ or NCCE requirement of language immersion programme for French students (popularly known as acculturation or a year abroad programme).

Significance of the multimedia in teaching/learning French

Gone are the days when teachers were totally restricted to old textbooks and memorizing in their teaching. In this twenty-first century, with the fast emergence of the new technologies especially the use of multimedia gadgets in teaching/ learning, many find it very important to the developing of some basic skills. Unlike the traditional practice in teaching/ learning, there is no need today to be a slave to the use of certain text book(s) in imparting some basic knowledge to learners. Teaching and learning have taken new dimensions, thanks to the advent of these new technologies out of which are the multimedia gadgets used to expand learners' knowledge better about a particular topic. These new tools open ways for the educators who can make good and dynamic use of use of them to become creative in their teaching. They can make further research and bring into their classroom authentic examples to animate the lesson thereby causing the learners the benefit of learning. When learners discover the significant difference there is between the presentation of the information (lesson) through the multimedia devices and that of the traditional ways of using old textbooks, they will certainly be more inclined to learn better.

Use of interactive white board for language teaching

The interactive board is an electronic device connected with the computer and used in the classroom or in the language laboratory for the purpose of illustrating lesson especially when dealing with demonstration or pronunciation of sound in French language. The board performed the same functions like that of the computer monitor as it is also connected with the computer system unit. However, the board is better than the monitor because of its size and its multiple functions. It is larger than the monitor and can be fixed on the wall or a stand which can allow the whole class to view all what is being operated by their teacher right from near or far distance. The teacher and the learners can as well explain or demonstrate a point of the lesson by means of the interactive pen. Here with this gadget, the teacher will have to operate the interactive board directly in front of the class without the use of the key board or mouse. However, these input devices are rather replaced with an interactive pen that comes with the board. The teacher stays at the side (either left or right to allow learners view the operations on the board) of the board in front of the class, with the interactive pen in his / her hand to scroll up, down or sideways in order to bring on the screen a desired clip or image to illustrate points or difficult areas of the lesson or lecture.

Outlook of the interactive white board and its financial implications

The rectangular board comes in various sizes but on the average, we have boards measuring 48 inches by 72 inches. The board of this size costs between ₦ 450,000 and ₦

500,000 depending on the prevailing exchange rates international market. There are boards larger than this size but the cost increases according to sizes. We have among many others boards such as: cm2PRO-Multi-Touch Interactive White board, cm2PRO-Multi-Touch Portable White board, cm2PRO-Dual Pens Smart Digital White board, New Inferred Interactive White board, etc.

How to make effective use of interactive white board

In practice, this education technology is a combination of sound, text, audio, animation and still image to support effective delivery of course material in order to improve teaching and learning process. The board is designed to facilitate presentation of lectures just like the computer with the projector combined. Shettima (2007) agrees that with this kind of technology, much will be introduced into the delivery of lecture(s). Of course, it will improve the quality of lecture presentation in our classes, the learners will benefit as well and they will equally be eager to participate. As such, a presentation programme must have been developed/ put in place to prepare the lecture before the class. For instance, to learners of French language most especially the yorubaphones, certain sounds are difficult to pronounce by them as a result of phonological interference. Sounds such as /ə/; /œ/; /œ̃/; /y/; /ʒ/; /z/ and /ɲ/, which are absent in their mother tongue, could be illustrated and presented through the interactive board for learners in the class in order to help them articulate those sounds properly. A professional in the line may be employed to pronounce the sounds while the video shots could be made of the manner these sounds are made to articulate and produce. Better still, a downloaded of clips of the autochthones' manner of articulations and production of these sounds could be made. These video clips will then be imported into the presentation of the lecture and make the learners articulate them the ways they are done on the screen. Learners will observe the lips' (and/ or any other organs') movements and how the tongue is manipulated to produce a giving sound and follow in doing the same. The teacher may then ask them to model or apply the articulated sounds in the following words:

déjeuner [dezœne]; jeuner [zœne] ; [zə]
sœur [sœR]; Coeur [kœR]; peur [pœR]; fleur [flœR]
parfum [paRf œ̃]; humble [œ̃bl]; opportun [opœRt œ̃]
signature [sijnatyR]; signaler [sijnale]; montagne [mœ̃taɲ]
université [ynivœRsite]; pureté [pyrœte]; sûre/sur [syR]
base [baz]; maison [mœzœ̃]; besoin [bœzwœ̃]

Akande (2006) suggests that compatible presentation programmes like “Microsoft Power Point” and “Adobe Presenter” may be employed in designing a particular lecture. However, the board itself comes with its own presentation software. In preparing, designing or creating a course material, video shots, clip Arts, line drawing, charts, flannel

graphs and other static and dynamic animations may be imported into the presentation to facilitate classes that may involve pronunciation and audio oriented lessons.

Conclusion

In Nigeria today, education has become an all-important symbol for progress, prestige and prosperity. This is the reason for which the country has undertaken at this time the reform of education to enhance better performance of learners in their various study programmes and encourage teachers as well to improve their teaching techniques for a quantitative and qualitative expansion of knowledge. With what the technologies offer both learners and teachers, it is hoped that this opportunity will be well utilized to gain a high level of knowledge, productivity and more income. It is hoped as well that the point made about the application of the technologies will improve the acquisition of the French language.

Pegrum (1998) submits that “a recent study conducted by the Georgia University of technology indicates that French is the second most frequently used language on the www”. Going by this, learners have access at all times to online dictionaries, reference grammar and verb conjugation tables in French and can chat with pals from other countries to share ideas in the language. This has implications for the teaching and learning of French as second official language in Nigeria. Learners, especially those in secondary and higher learning would be able to navigate through sites and for access to up-to-date information about different aspects of French grammar and styles that apply to the use of the language, including a profound understanding of contemporary French and francophone world.

Recommendations

In view of the above, it is hereby highly recommended that:

- All teachers should mandatorily acquire a good amount of the knowledge of the computer and the Internet applications that facilitate teaching and learning of French;
- All teachers especially those in higher institutions should adopt the new technologies to enhance the teaching and learning of the French language;
- Government and institutions of government should sponsor and finance the equipping of language laboratories/language resource centres with ultramodern technological gadgets and with enough computers and connects same to a cyber line.
- Government and institutions of government sponsor French teachers from time to time for in-service training and to attend conferences in order to update their knowledge on the use of the most recent Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to enhance the effective delivery of teaching in Nigeria

- French teachers should encourage their students to visit and explore web sites that have good materials for learning French to learn and apply their learning in the language in practical terms.

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