

## **French Language: A Panacea For Technological Advancement In Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

French as a foreign language in Nigeria needs to be given a serious attention. Without doubt, Nigeria is known to be geographically surrounded by French-speaking countries and being in this position in the World makes the knowledge of French language imperative for Nigeria's population to allow for easy communication with the immediate neighbouring countries. More to that is the fact that French ranks as the second international language taught in the whole World and also enjoys a second official language status in most international organizations such as: United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), etc. French as a language is very vital in all areas of human endeavours which definitely include Science and Technology. France which has French as her first and official language has contributed a lot to Science and Technology; it has been a pioneer in a number of technological advancements globally. France has played a leadership role in scientific and technological innovations in areas like electronics, chemistry, telecommunications, space, health, transport etc. All these innovations are as a result of her research capacity which can be tapped for technological advancement in Nigeria only if French language is given a chance in our educational system. This paper therefore, tries to reflect on the importance of acquiring the ability to speak, understand and write French language to enhance easy way of tapping into France scientific and technological innovations for technological advancement in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Language, Foreign language, French language, French technology and Technological advancement

### **INTRODUCTION**

Communication is the goal of all human experiences. Everything that has happened to anyone has a lesson or holds some interests for others. When we say "no man is an island", it simply means that the whole essence of being humans is to communicate with each other and communication is powered by language. Language though, is not the only way to communicate, but it is surely the most efficient and most effective. Through language, individuals or humans are able to inform the people around us about their feelings, desires and be able to understand the world around us. In line with this view, Galadi (2008) affirms that language is a vital instrument for all human activities and it is a medium through which ideas are exchanged, social interaction promoted, national cohesion fostered, culture preserved and economy consolidated. In Support of this Danladi (2005) opines that to learn a language is not only reaching out to others but to maintaining a variety of social bonds, a shared sense of values and communal awareness. The relevance of shared values of language is indispensable in the general development of human society which off course includes technological advancement.

Mustapha and Afolayan (2018) note that the Nigerian government has taken vital steps in making the country science and technology inclined for socio-economic liberation of the nation. This definitely is a laudable step taken by the government but not being able to speak one or more foreign languages can affect this venture. That is why Folorunso (2005: 165-166) points out that, "much as nobody will question the enviable steps taken by government in promoting science and technology, it will be incomplete and an unprofitable venture if foreign language is neglected in that foreign languages play some vital complementary roles in the promotion of science and technology". Aware of this fact, Molokwu and Agbagbatu (2018) submit that most nations be they developed or developing have

adopted one or two foreign languages in addition to their national language(s) in order to maintain various social bonds, have a shared sense of values and communal awareness with other nations. Nigeria should not be left out in this process of adopting one or two foreign languages especially French and as remarks by Ojeniyi (2018), Nigeria that is always referred to as “the giant of Africa” and also playing key roles in the international scene particularly in the sub-region needs to embrace the teaching and learning of French in addition to her national languages as this will enhance Nigeria to easily tap into the technology of French-speaking countries especially France that has been a pioneer in scientific and technological innovations.

### **Reflection on Foreign Language**

According to IGI-Global dictionary, foreign language is a language that is not widely spoken and used by the people of a community, society or a nation. French though, was declared as Nigerian’s second official language by late General Sani Abacha in 1996, still stands as a foreign language in the country because it is not widely spoken or used by Nigerians. Language as we know is very important in all human activities; it is a vital instrument in all our affairs as humans. With the aid of language, humans are able to exchange ideas, promote social interaction, preserved culture, consolidate economy, etc. This makes it obvious that acquiring the ability to speak and understand one or more foreign languages in addition to our national languages is of importance as it will help to facilitate communication with other nations thereby making it possible to exchange valuable ideas that can lead to the consolidation of our economy.

Human beings sometimes though, have negative attitudes towards learning a foreign language but it should be noted that there is relationship between language and society and also how people use it. So learning a foreign language has lots of benefits associated with it. Alex, (2016) observes that there has never been a better time to learn a foreign language (French, German, or Japanese) though such languages may not be as widespread as English but they offer rich sets of linguistics and innuendos not found in any dialect of English. The reasons for learning a new language vary but the importance of learning foreign languages is universal and there is always a benefit in one way or another.

Nigeria as a nation should endeavour to appreciate and learn a foreign language and since language is part of culture, Folorunso (2005) once again opines that for a better understanding of another man’s technology, one should know his language. Since the promotion of science and technology in Nigeria is for the economic consolidation of the country, the government should therefore, try and encourage as many Nigerians as possible to learn one or two foreign languages most especially French.

### **The Need for French Language in Nigeria**

One may ask, why the need for French language in Nigeria? Here are some facts you need to be aware of. French is the official language in twenty-nine countries, the mother tongue of over seventy-five million people in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Quebec in Canada etc. Giving some reasons why French language is needed in Nigeria, Ojeniyi (2018) highlights these points;

- French is the first language of over ten million people outside Europe
- It is the only language other than English which is being spoken in all five continents
- One hundred and twenty million francophone in forty-five countries use French every day and two hundred million from around the world understand, speak, read and write French.

He adds that on the African continent, eighteen countries use French as their official or as one of the two official languages. There are also three Maghreb countries where French has powerful presence and the total population in these countries is over two hundred and fifty million. The Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) is made of fifteen countries out of which eight are French-speaking countries, five are English-speaking and two are Portuguese. French as a language is directly and indirectly the communication key to a quarter of a billion people in an enormous expanse of this continent.

It is also vital to know that French is the second most studied language globally after English and since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it has competed with English as the international language of diplomacy, currently the second official language of the United Nations (UN), European Community, the African Union (AU). Egwalusor (2015) observes that French is one of the international languages mostly used for commerce, scientific and technological research, administration, education and literature. It is also

the language of culture, politics, diplomacy, art, fashion, publicity, dance and cuisine. No wonder Mohammad (1998) submits that empirical studies have confirmed that while any foreign language will be useful for some jobs or regions, French is the only foreign language that can be useful throughout the world. So when deciding on the foreign language to learn as a nation or as an individual, French should be considered because the ability to speak, understand and write French will offer among other things, the opportunity to easily tap into the knowledge of technologically advanced francophone countries such as France.

### **Technological Advancement**

Technological or scientific advancement is the generation of information or the discovery of knowledge that advances the understanding of technology or scientific relations. According to Parker (2015), the advancement of new technology has been taking place since the beginning of human history. From invention of items like spear and knives made from rocks and sticks to aid in capturing and killing of animals for food, to items like the first printing press and computer. Technological advancement is increasing with time, humans are looking forward to create and develop easier ways to live and lengthen their lives and as such technological advancement has been exceptionally fast in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century with electronic technology and machines being produced and improved all the time.

Technology has advanced with years and so many changes have been brought about by these continuous technological advancements thereby having a lot of positive effects on humanity. For instance; our lives have been highly dependent on technology that has advanced. It has changed the way we purchase products, the way we live, communicate, travel, learn and so on. As people's demands and life style change, the demand for advancing type of technology we use is high and thanks to technological advancement, almost everything we use has been innovated to better standard. Some areas where there has been technological advancement and the benefits;

- Technological Advancement in mobile phones; The mobile phones we had in the past are no longer on demand because with the passing of time, users of mobile phones demand simplicity and more functionality, which has forced mobile phone producers to develop computer minded smart phones that are easy to use.
- Technological Advancement in Medicine and Health care; Technological advancement has helped in saving many innocent lives. Human medicine and health sciences have improved. Doctors and medical students have embarked on medical technological tools to carry out extensive research on human health problems and challenges. The extensive research has resulted into development of new drugs and treatments which have helped in curing most challenging human diseases and this has helped in saving many lives and has prolong the human lifespan.
- Technological Advancement in Communication: Communication is a major factor in both human lives and business. Before the advent of mobile phones, we were using land line to communicate and then, this was the best means of communication with our family, friends, business partners and suppliers. The challenge then was that it was fixed, if we were not at home or in the office, people could not reach us. However with years, technology has evolved and we have witnessed new mobile phones making communication easy.
- Technology Advancement in Agriculture; Advancement in agricultural technology has played a big role in the face of agriculture. This advancement has resulted in increased production and enough food supply. An example is the advanced automated water sprinkler. This sprinkler is used for irrigating big farms and it can be set based on the time of the day and movement of the sun to enable the crops get sufficient water. The use of this sprinkler not only save the farmer's time, but also pave way for large output as well as production of high quality products.
- Technological Advancement in Education: Advancement in technology has greatly changed the education sector. With technology we are now able to learn through mobile gadgets and tablets. It has simplified the methods of teaching students and has also helped students to be able to learn from anywhere as well as having access to academic information at anytime

from anywhere. Technological advancement in education sector has made research better and easier for teachers and students.

- Technological Advancement in Business; Technological advancement has helped business and organizations save time and cost of production which has been an advantage to all business. In the past, only big successful companies would dominate the market because they could afford the expensive adverts on television to reach any target market which small business owners could not afford. Now with advanced internet technology, a small business owner can use the most advanced internet marketing tool with small amount.

The list of technological advancement is inexhaustible and the advancement has great positive effects on all areas of human endeavours. It has simplified the way we do things, it saves time, increases production and has improved health care as well as improvement in the educational sector.

### **French Contributions to Science and Technology**

French is the mother tongue and as well the official language of France which as a country, has contributed a lot to science and technology. When talking of scientific and technological innovations, France is one of the countries on the tip of our tongues alongside countries like USA, UK, China and maybe Germany. It is interesting to know that France has been a pioneer in a number of technological advances.

Though being the third country to have satellites alongside USA and Russia, France has actually been the leader when it comes to technology. The French have introduced many innovations that have positively impacted the world, from technology to food. The list of French innovations is inexhaustible but reference will be made to some French inventions and their inventors that have positively impacted the world.

- The parachute was invented by Louis-Sébastien Lenormand in 1873
- The stethoscope was invented by French physician Rene T.H. Laënnec in 1816
- The photograph was invented by Nicéphore Niépce in 1822
- Aspirin a drug for pain relief was invented by French chemist Charles F. Gerhardt in 1853
- Cinema; the very first patented film camera was designed by Louis le Prince in 1888
- Pasteurization of milk was invented by Louis Pasteur in 1864
- The Food Processor was invented by Pierre Verdun in 1960
- The first camera phone solution for sharing pictures instantly on public networks was created by Philippe Kahn in 1997.
- Gas refrigerator was invented by Ferdinand Carré in 1859
- Pencil sharpener by Bernard Lassimonne in 1828
- Canned Food was invented by Nicolas Appert in 1809

Aside these, France is also a world leader in medical research (the AIDS virus was first isolated by French doctors), a world research centre in the field of nuclear physics and also the site of the world's first nuclear fusion reactor, European leader in aerospace, the fourth largest producer of automobiles in the world and the third largest exporter, the train (TGV-Train à Grand Vitesse) was manufactured by France, the fastest plane, Le Concorde is a French-British joint venture, the world's third manufacturer of electronics equipment and so many more, the list is endless.

### **CONCLUSION**

France is a highly developed country, it is a strong member of the group known as G8 (the eight most industrialized nations of the world). Today, the colleges and universities throughout France offer Science and Technology courses to help future scientists in the country. They have large scientific buildings that work on science, technology and mathematics making them to remain one of the leaders in technology. France leadership in all areas of scientific and technological innovations is as a result of her research capacity. So to ensure proper promotion of science and technology in the country as already initiated by the government, we need to give French language a chance in order to tap into France research capacity.

However, one cannot talk of transfer of technology without taking into consideration the acquisition of the language of the people from whom the desired technology is to be transferred. Ojeniyi (2018) believes that, the language of the owners of a given technology is thus a vital access to the

technology, and its proper study can greatly aid the mastery of the technology, thus facilitate its domestication. If we desire to acquire French technology, we cannot but learn French language to facilitate such acquisition for our technological advancement.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are some recommendations put forward with the hope that they will help to boost the promotion of French language in Nigeria to facilitate the transfer of technology for our technological advancement.

First, there should be proper nationwide education and sensitization programme by the government to enlighten Nigerians on the importance of learning French at all levels of education.

Secondly, French language should be made compulsory from primary to secondary schools level in order to sustain and perfect its learning.

Thirdly, French language should be included as one of the General Studies courses and should be made compulsory for higher institutions undergraduates in Nigeria. This will help to equip them with the basic knowledge needed for any future endeavour.

Furthermore, government at all levels should provide adequate funding to all educational institutions for proper training of Nigerian students in French.

More to that, French language professionals should be sent on training to improve their teaching skills through the use of modern appropriate teaching techniques. This will enable them to design the teaching and learning of French language in such a way that will make Nigerian professionals have access to the language and utilize it in boosting their professionalism.

### CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the importance of French language to technological advancement in Nigeria. It discussed French contributions to science and technology and how France has been a pioneer and leader in technological advancements due to her research capacity. It also discussed positive impacts of technological advancement on humans as the more reason why it should be promoted in Nigeria. French language needs to be given a chance in the country by its proper study at all levels of education as this can greatly aid the mastery of technological advancement being promoted by government.

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