



Assessing the Impact of Social Networks on the Teaching and the Learning of French Language in Nigeria after the Covid 19

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Abstract

Online teaching platforms and emerging social networks offer many promising and alternative ways of teaching and learning. During the Covid 19, they helped to ensure not only continuity in the training of learners, but also to improve the level of education in Nigeria. With this new approach, teachers and learners have access to a variety of resources and information at any time and in any place to keep them busy and improve their knowledge. In this study, we used connectivism theory and descriptive statistics to analyse the impact of online platforms and social networks on the teaching/learning of French in Nigeria. 15 teachers and 200 students from two universities and a college of education were interviewed. The analysis showed that online platforms and social networks have many advantages for both teachers and learners of French in Nigeria, even though there are still some difficulties, gaps and apparent weaknesses in their use. To ensure continuity in their use, recommendations have been made to encourage those involved, namely teachers, to adhere to these platforms. To achieve this, they need training to enable them to use these online teaching platforms and social networks effectively and responsibly.

Keywords: Teaching, online platforms, social networks, training,

Résumé

Les plateformes d'enseignement en ligne ainsi que les réseaux sociaux émergents offrent de nombreuses promesses et surtout des alternatifs dans l'enseignement/apprentissage. Ils ont permis d'assurer, pendant la période de covid 19, non seulement la continuité de la formation des apprenants, mais aussi d'améliorer le niveau d'éducation au Nigeria. Avec cette nouvelle approche, les enseignants et les apprenants disposent à tout moment et en tout lieu d'une variété de ressources et d'informations destinées à les occuper et à améliorer leurs connaissances. Dans cette étude, nous nous sommes basés sur la théorie connectiviste et sur l'approche de la statistique descriptive pour analyser l'impact des plateformes en ligne et des réseaux sociaux sur l'enseignement/apprentissage du français au Nigeria. 15 enseignants et 200 étudiants provenant de deux universités et d'un collège d'éducation ont été interviewés. L'analyse a montré que les plateformes en ligne et les réseaux sociaux présentent de nombreux avantages aussi bien pour les enseignants que



pour les apprenants de français au Nigeria même si leurs utilisations rencontrent encore quelques difficultés, lacunes et faiblesses apparentes. Pour assurer la continuité dans leur utilisation, des recommandations ont été faites pour encourager les acteurs en l'occurrence les enseignants à y adhérer. Pour ce faire, ils doivent bénéficier des formations qui puissent leur permettre d'utiliser ces plateformes d'enseignement en ligne et les réseaux sociaux de façon efficace et responsable.

Mots clé : Enseignement, plateformes en ligne, réseaux sociaux, formation,

Introduction

Social networks are currently arousing curiosity in many educational circles. They have become part of our daily lives, making it easier to access information and knowledge in all areas. Having become aware of the growing importance of these media in many spheres of social life and of their appeal, in many forms, to the younger generation, we are wondering what benefits the education system should derive from them and, more specifically, what contribution they could make to the learning of the French language in Nigeria. Indeed, the changes introduced by social networks are not only to be found in the tools (mobile phone, television, computer, radio, internet, iPhone, iPad, etc.), but above all in the uses we make of them to improve and forge the skills we want learners to acquire. In the education sector, for example, social networks, if used properly, can help to improve the relevance and quality of teaching. This being the case, introducing the use of social networks as a means of reinforcing the teaching/learning of French in Nigerian educational establishments becomes a requirement, although it requires rigour, a lot of resources and, above all, an approach. This is especially necessary in view of the need to innovate teaching practices. Based on the principles of connectivism theory, this article aims to show how the integration of these new tools into the teaching of French can enable students to acquire new knowledge that can help them meet the challenges of their learning. Developed by George Siemens and Stephen Downes, connectivism examines the learning process in the digital age and in a networked world (Siemens, 2005). It is a learning theory that uses new technologies to make teaching more effective. Connectivism is characterised by the improvement in the way a student learns thanks to the knowledge and perception acquired through the addition of a personal network (Siemens, 2005). It is only through these personal networks that the learner can acquire the perspective and diversity of opinion to learn to make critical decisions. As it is impossible to experience everything, learners can share and learn through collaboration. And the ability to tap into huge knowledge databases in an instant means that learners can seek to deepen their knowledge. Such an ability to acquire knowledge can facilitate research and help interpret models. Finally, the explanation of learning using traditional learning theories is severely limited by the rapid changes brought about by technology. Connectivism is defined as actionable knowledge. For connectivists, learning is no longer limited to an individual, internal activity. We now also learn through all the interactions made possible by networks. Being constantly connected on Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, etc. means that we are constantly developing new knowledge. You talk to people you wouldn't have met otherwise, and you have access to a wealth of knowledge. Everyone can share and build their own knowledge. The theory of connectivism is based on several principles:

- Knowledge resides in the diversity of opinions and resources. To learn, therefore, we need to relate the various sources of information and make



links between subject areas, ideas and concepts. The aim is to acquire accurate, and relevant knowledge.

- Having knowledge is less important than being able to acquire new knowledge. It is therefore essential to know how to search for information and to distinguish between important and unimportant information.
- Decision-making is a learning process in itself, as it involves analysing current needs and considering the relevance and topicality of the information to be taken into account.
- Thanks to new technologies, learning can be done without the help of another person, or at least without a human presence. Nevertheless, knowing how to develop and maintain contacts is essential for lifelong learning. Social networks are a valuable tool in this respect.

It is clear from the principles set out above that connectivism is a theory of learning designed for the digital age. It reminds us that the digital age in which we live must be accompanied by real reflection on the learning process. In this respect, the implementation of online courses is a practical example of connectivist pedagogy. Participants teach and motivate themselves in an animated space. It should be remembered that these strategies, if used properly by the various players, will become part of the many innovations aimed at improving the quality of French teaching/learning in Nigeria. Indeed, social networks, through their many applications, enable learners to continue studying French wherever they are, from their homes and at any time. It is worth remembering that during the Covid 19 crisis, the Federal Government of Nigeria took steps to use online platforms. But this solution, which has proved its worth in many countries around the world, revealed the weakness of the Nigerian education system in general and the teaching/learning of French in particular. 'The Covid-19 pandemic presents unique challenges to Nigeria's already fragile education system' (Obiakor & Adeniran, 2020). Given that these measures were adopted as an immediate response to the crisis (without prior large-scale implementation), it is important to ask how they are working. It is also imperative to generate data that can reinforce the use of these tools in French language learning, which was already in a comatose state. This study therefore seeks to understand the nature of the proposed response and the results of its implementation, its advantages and disadvantages. The study also seeks to understand how learners access the learning opportunities and resources they need.

Teaching French Online

Online teaching or e-learning is a teaching method provided by an institution that does not involve the physical presence of the teacher and learners. It is designed to enable individuals to learn without having to travel to the training site and without the physical presence of a trainer. According to Desmond Keegan (1995), 'online teaching and training results from the technological separation of the teacher and the learner, which frees the student from the need to go "to a fixed place, at a fixed time, to meet a fixed person, to be trained"'. From these definitions, we can say that e-learning separates the learner from the teacher in terms of space, but not necessarily in terms of time. It should be noted that e-learning is a planned teaching and learning experience that uses a wide range of technologies to reach learners at a distance. When well designed, e-learning is based on a variety of entertaining media: videos, interactive formats, podcasts, forums, quizzes, slide



shows, etc. According to Clark and Kwinn (2007), the Internet is the essential medium for online courses. Another basic component of online teaching is the technological platform, a learning management system that manages the distribution and use of training. It is a management system that enables users' attendance at courses and training activities to be tracked (access to content, time of use, results of assessment moments, etc.). All the information on courses and users is indexed on a platform. This function enables users to access effective educational provision from any computer connected to the Internet. The most commonly used platforms for online teaching are: Pronote, Google Classroom, Google Drive, Nearpod, Edmodo, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc.

- Online teaching offers a number of advantages, including:
- Accessibility: the course is flexible in terms of both space and time. This mode of learning facilitates access to audiences by offering teaching and learning situations that take into account the individual constraints of each learner.
- Contextualisation: e-learning enables learners to acquire knowledge in context. In this way, they maintain direct, immediate and permanent contact with the various components of the environment, facilitating the integration of scientific knowledge with practical knowledge and the transfer of knowledge.
- Flexibility: e-learning offers greater degrees of freedom than face-to-face training. In this sense, flexibility refers to the suppleness of the way in which teaching is organised, enabling learners to plan their study activities and learning pace in terms of time and space. It also offers the learner choices in terms of content, methods and interaction, taking account of individual constraints.
- Interaction and collaborative work: the learning process is essentially based on interaction between the teacher and the learner with their peers. The content of the course first needs to be understood and assimilated by the learner, who has to review and restructure his or her individual understanding. This is done through interaction with other learners and the teacher, which enables the learner to arrive at an understanding that is shared by all. This interaction can also take place in the context of collaborative work, which is based on an exchange between learner/learner and learner/teacher during a learning activity, in which each learner takes an active part in the joint resolution of the activity in question.
- Autonomy: online courses allow students to acquire a degree of independence and foster their sense of responsibility. Firstly, they no longer need the administration to organise their timetable. They do it alone and on their own. Secondly, away from the supervision of their teacher and the presence of their classmates, students make more effort to assimilate information and rely on themselves, before asking for help if they can't manage on their own.
- Unlimited resources: Having an online course platform gives students unlimited access to information. This means they can revisit the course as many times as they need to assimilate the information at any given time.

There are now a number of online French language learning sites. These include:

- *Tv5 Monde* puts the simplicity of learning at the heart of its language offer. It offers a wide range of courses based on different levels and themes.



- *Le français facile* is a website offering a multitude of grammar and conjugation topics that are accessible free of charge.
- *Bonjour de France* is a website offering a wide range of introductory courses in French. Created in 1998, this platform is an excellent way to start learning French. Teaching sheets are published regularly and level tests are available for self-assessment.
- *Fun MOOC* is a web platform specialising in the distribution of courses from the world's most prestigious universities. Launched with the support of the Alliance Française de Paris, it offers countless videos for learning the basics of French.

As can be seen, all these means are very promising for the learning of French. However, it should be pointed out that the expected result, i.e. improving the teaching/learning of French in Nigeria, can only be achieved if the actors accept and appropriate them.

Research Questions

In light of the above, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What innovations, in this case online platforms or social networks have facilitated the learning of French by tertiary students during and after the Covid 19 period in Nigeria?
- 2- What are the main challenges faced by teachers and learners in using these innovations for learning French in this era of alternative learning?

Data and Methodology

This study was carried out using primary and secondary sources. For the primary data, we conducted an online and telephone survey. Data collection began in November 2022 and ended in March 2023. Data was collected via Google Forms and telephone interview responses were also completed using the same platform. For the secondary data, a mapping exercise was carried out to select a few tertiary institutions where French language learning measures were effectively implemented namely the National Open University, IBB University, Lapai and the College of Education Zuba, Abuja. To achieve the research objectives, the study sample comprised 15 teachers and 200 learners from the abovementioned institutions.

Categories of Respondents

The respondents represent lecturers and students in the three types of tertiary education where the French language is taught in Nigeria. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, textual analysis and graphical analysis. The majority of respondents (80%) were from the National Open University. This is due to several reasons including the national character of the university which has branches and study centres all over Nigeria. The National Open University has also been recognised by the Nigerian University Commission (NUC) as the university par excellence in online education. It is therefore a university that has served as a learning model for many other universities during the Covid



19 period. About twenty learners came from IBBU, a university in Niger State. The other participants were from COE Zuba, a college of education in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria.

Data Presentation and Analysis 1- Teachers

Responding to the first question concerning the online platforms and social networks that facilitated higher education students' learning of French during and after the Covid 19 period, the majority of teachers (61%) indicated that their students learn via virtual platforms. 34% indicated that students learn via social media. 3% of teachers had no idea how social networks could be used to enhance teaching. 2% of the sample of teachers said that their learners did not actively learn through these modern means. However, none of the teachers mentioned unknown programmes. The table below summarises the many different ways in which teachers engaged learners during and after the pandemic.

Table 1 How teachers kept students engaged during the pandemic

Students 'engagement	%
Students do not learn actively	2%
Students learn from unknown programmes	0%
Students learn via social media platforms	34%
Students learn via virtual platforms	61%
No idea	3/%

In terms of the platforms used, teachers chose several options. 45% said they were using Zoom during the pandemic, 32% chose social media as their engagement tool, 15% used Google Classroom and 6% used Webex.

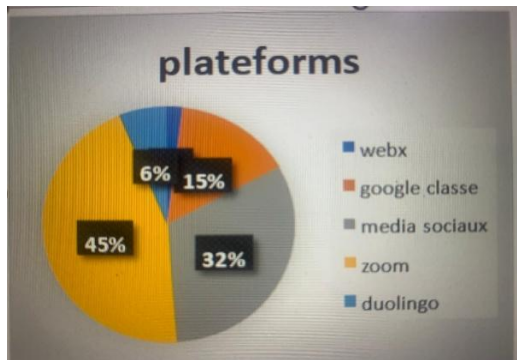


Figure 1: Main platforms used by teachers to teach French

The effectiveness of the platforms used by teachers

Teachers were asked to rate the effectiveness of the educational tools they use to teach. As Figure 2 shows, 34% said the teaching tools were very good, while 31% said the tools were neither good nor bad (neutral). 22% thought the tools were good while 9% thought they were poor and 4% said they were very poor.

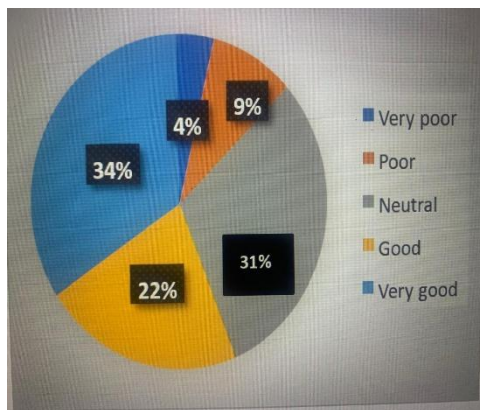


Figure 2: Effectiveness of the teaching tools

Furthermore, the reasons given by teachers themselves on the effectiveness of those tools were examined. Table 2 below sets out the general and specific reasons for this evaluation.

General reasons for the negative rating	Specific reasons for the negative rating	General reasons for the positive rating	Specific reasons for the positive rating
Challenges in terms of infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cost of data - Electricity - Limited or non-existent internet access, including for students in rural areas 		



	- Poor internet quality		
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low penetration of technology and lack of prior digital skills on the part of teachers - Lack of knowledge of the platform used - No room for assessment - Poor student responsiveness - Technical difficulties in submitting work - Lack of interpersonal relations between students and teachers - Teachers' limited ability to ensure compliance with the rules 	Educational benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interactivity and flexibility on platforms such as Zoom and Google - Availability of learning resources. Structure for assessment, quizzes, real-time tracking, etc. - High response rates. - Wide reach (WhatsApp and Facebook). - Encourage selflearning

Table 2 of the assessment

The main challenges cited by teachers, as shown in Table 2, were infrastructural and pedagogical. Teachers complained that they did not feel connected to their students through the virtual platforms. One teacher said: *"Although I can make audio recordings as if I were teaching in class for them, the students do not ask questions and are not all involved for whatever reason"*.

Another teacher, referring to the inaccessibility of virtual learning platforms for students, said: *"I have more than 40 students in my class, but only 17 are on WhatsApp»*.

It should be noted, however, that many teachers feel that the platforms they use for virtual teaching are effective and rate them as good or very good. One teacher who uses WhatsApp to teach his students said: *"The students feel like they're in a normal classroom. You give them homework and they do it. The only difference is that you can't see how they find the answers to the questions asked, which raises the question of reliability and confidence in their ability to find answers on their own. But the normal activity of the class is maintained"*. This statement, although trivial, highlights the fundamental issue of control and strict supervision, which is not possible with the use of these teaching platforms.

French students

When asked about their commitment to learning French through social networks during and after the covid 19 period, almost all of the students, i.e. 98.4%, acknowledged that these innovations had really helped them and that they had continued to use them at all times to improve their learning of French. We asked them which French courses they preferred to study via online platforms or social networks. However, there are differences



between university and college of education students. Table 3 below shows the main courses studied through online platforms

Table 3: Courses taken by students online

Subject	National Open University	IBBU, Lapai	College of education Zuba, Abuja
Listening comprehension	95%	90%	60%
Written comprehension	91%	90%	60%
Oral expression	98%	90%	60%
Written expression	29%	12%	10%
Grammar	89%	90%	95%
Textual analysis	40%	40%	12%
Translation	90%	90%	92%
Literature	34%	50%	10%
Civilisation	90%	95%	10%
Research methodology	5%	12%	1%

From the table above, students study almost all French courses via online platforms and social networks, with a preference for comprehension, expression, translation and grammar courses. On the other hand, the research methodology course is the least studied online: only 1% to 12% of students are interested in studying this course online.

When they were asked specifically what their main preferred mode for learning French was, 70% said that e-learning was the best form of learning, with platforms such as Zoom, Google Class, Webex. 2% said face-to-face classroom teaching was their preferred form of learning and 25% said they enjoyed learning through social networks particularly WhatsApp as shown in Figure 3 below.

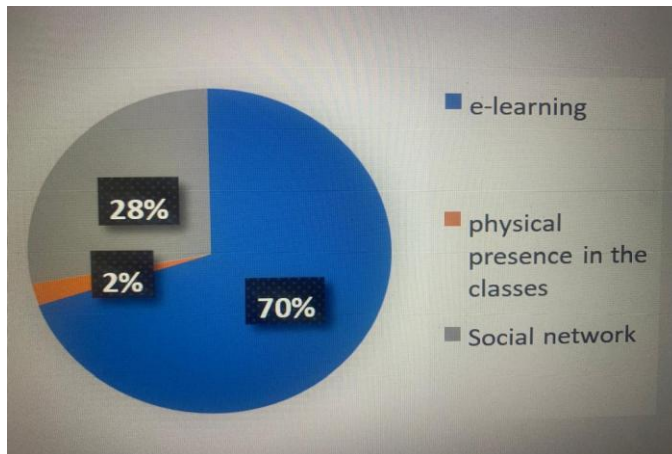


Figure 3: Preferred mode used by students to learn French

Assessing the effectiveness of students e-learning platforms

Findings indicate that the main difficulties encountered by students who learn primarily through online platforms are those of access to devices and other related infrastructure. Respondents who rated their learning platforms as good and very good identified pedagogical benefits as the reason for their ratings. More specifically, the following were cited as the areas that led to the positive rating:

- broad content including basic skills outside the school curriculum (e.g. critical thinking and problem solving)
- a preference for flexibility and independence achieved through self-directed learning and more learning time
- the opportunity to build or practice independent learning, - mental strength, digital, technology and innovation.

Discussion, recommendations and conclusion

This study highlighted key issues relating to the teaching/learning of French in higher education in Nigeria through social platforms and networks during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The study sought to understand the opportunities for continuity of learning offered by government measures during Covid-19. Primary and secondary data and innovations in French language learning were collected. 15 teachers and 200 students responded to the survey. The respondents represent a significant cross-section of stakeholders in the field of French language teaching in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Like all research, this study also had certain limitations. One of these was the sample size due to the low response rates expected when conducting online surveys. Although it is acknowledged that the sample size of 215 respondents may not be fully representative of all aspects of the country, it is believed that the results of this study provide substantial information on the current state of French language teaching and learning during and after the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria through online teaching/learning platforms. This study provides us with the opportunity to address the following key questions on the basis of our findings.



- 1) On the usefulness of e-learning, despite the apparent gaps in learning, the responses from both teachers and students show that they all like e-learning. They also seem to combine several platforms depending on their learning needs, their level of education, their personal preferences, their access to the Internet and their devices, among other things.
- 2) On the question of the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the teaching/learning of French in Nigeria, this study has enabled us to observe that the authorities have shown great responsiveness. In a short space of time, many innovations were introduced and teachers and students of French began to have access to alternative learning methods. This study allows us to conclude that the covid 19 pandemic has not significantly disrupted the teaching/learning of French in Nigeria particularly in the National Open University of Nigeria, but has, on the contrary, given rise to innovations and technological upheavals which many teachers and students have come to accept and to which they have adapted to learn. Most of the teachers interviewed said that they would prefer a blended approach to learning in the future. There is no doubt that e-learning offers unique opportunities to enhance the learning of French in Nigeria. But it still faces many challenges. The study found that the majority of students and even teachers of French do not have access to the internet, digital devices and other resources to teach or learn online. The quality of internet access was also highlighted as a major challenge for students wishing to access e-learning. Students living in rural areas found it more difficult to access learning via e-learning platforms.
- 3) Another major challenge identified by the study is that of electricity supply. Most of the respondents complained about the lack of electricity or power outages, which prevent them from charging their devices and being able to attend online courses.

Recommendations

The effectiveness of e-learning is severely limited by infrastructural deficiencies in Nigeria. Government and other education stakeholders need to step up their investments in accessible, quality internet connections, stable electricity and e-learning tools such as mobile phones, laptops, etc.

In addition, the development and well-being of teachers of French in higher education cannot be overstated. Given the pedagogical, financial and infrastructural support that these teachers require, the authorities must invest more in their training to increase their capacity to use digital tools and ultimately create a pool of pedagogical talent to continue to use online platforms as well as social networks to enhance the teaching/learning of French in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Faced with the threat of the health crisis, a great deal of effort was made by those involved in the teaching and learning of the French language in Nigeria. The temporary closure of training establishments slowed the momentum of French language learning, which was already comatose. It was therefore necessary to find ways of overcoming not only the consequences of the covid19 health crisis, but also those of the drop in the level of French



language learning in Nigeria. Several initiatives were taken to help learners of the French language to continue their education. In addition to innovations involving the use of information and communication technology tools, online teaching is becoming more widespread, requiring more and more appropriate training for teachers. Educational research has shown that teacher training programmes are more profitable if they consider the level of development and requirements of the modern world. Teachers are the key to the success of innovation and the teaching of French online. The most important thing is that they should be able to continue their training so that they can rise to the new challenges posed by this new methodology.

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