



Towards the Adoption of French for Specific Purposes (FSP) in the Teaching and Learning of French in Educational Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

All sectors involved in the development of economic and political life in Nigeria are increasingly interested in the French language. However, the education system as it stands today in Nigerian universities is unable to meet all the demands and requirements for learning this language. Teaching must therefore be adapted to the communication needs of learners. But is FSP currently taught in Nigerian universities, and what improvements can be made to effectively meet the specific needs of learners? The objective of this study is to take stock of existing practices, identify the challenges encountered, and propose avenues for more appropriate and professional teaching. The methodology adopted is based on field surveys, including interviews with teachers, questionnaires sent to students, and documentary analysis of FSP programmes. The analysis is based on language needs theory, which posits that learning must be rooted in concrete objectives related to the learners' field of study or activity. The results show a lack of specialised teacher training, a lack of appropriate teaching resources, and poor integration of FSP into Nigerian university policies. It is therefore recommended that teacher training be strengthened, contextualised materials be developed, and partnerships between universities and professional sectors be created to make FSP teaching more functional and effective in Nigeria

Keywords: FSP. Teaching and learning, educational institutions.

Introduction

The French language is presented in the Nigerian education programme as a “system of communication and knowledge acquisition.” This definition is in line with André Martinet's perspective (1980:9) “the essential function of language as a tool is communication”. French, for example, is a tool that allows French speakers to communicate with each other.” Furthermore, there is a very high demand for French, not only in schools, but also among secretaries, flight attendants, doctors, businesspeople, and civil servants at various levels, either at their own request or at the request of their employers or company managers to fill gaps in their language skills and make them more effective in their profession. There is also a clearly expressed political will to encourage its teaching to ensure better conditions for communication with the rest of the world. However, the results so far are clearly insufficient in view of the real needs expressed. Given the urgency and importance of this demand, and considering that the approaches and methods adopted so far have not helped to significantly improve the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria, one wonders whether it might not be appropriate to try a different strategy.

Any teaching that aims to be effective must be based on well-defined programmes and specific objectives. However, French language teaching in Nigeria is generalist in nature and does not



consider the communication needs of individuals. The old programmes are nothing more than simple “listings,” fragmented, piecemeal, and incoherent. These shortcomings are the main reasons why teachers interpret these programmes in different ways. As a result, there are marked disparities between schools, universities, and training centres in terms of the knowledge and skills that learners should acquire. This situation prevents Nigerian schools from providing all learners with the fundamental elements of knowledge. In this situation, it is necessary to develop good automatic responses in learners, which can only be acquired today through teaching French for Specific Purposes. But does this method meet the basic requirements of Nigerian policy on French language learning? Are Nigerian universities capable of training the kind of Nigerians who can maintain Nigeria's policy of openness to the world?

This study aims to critically analyse the current state of learning and teaching French for Specific Purposes (F.S.P.) in Nigerian universities, with a view to identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. It aims to propose concrete ways to strengthen the pedagogical effectiveness of F.S.P and meet the professional needs of learners in a multilingual and competitive context. Five specific objectives can be identified:

1. Assess current F.S.P. teaching practices in Nigerian universities;
2. Identify the main challenges encountered by teachers and students in learning F.S.P.;
3. Analyse the relevance of the teaching content used in relation to the professional needs of learners;
4. Assess the level of teacher training in F.S.P. teaching methods and
5. Make recommendations for better integration of F.S.P. into university programmes and for the development of contextualised teaching resources.

But first, what is the current situation regarding the teaching of French in Nigerian universities?

Observations on French Language Teaching in Nigerian Universities

The objectives of French language teaching in Nigerian universities are not different from those in universities in other countries: to train citizens to communicate effectively in the language to face the many challenges of political, economic, and social life. University programmes in French language teaching are very ambitious and original. But in reality, when talking to students trained in these programmes, or when examining these students, one often feels a sense of desolation, more often than not a sense of unease. The system does not allow them to communicate in French or to succeed socially, as they are not competitive in the job market.

But the important question to ask is whether students should be blamed for not mastering the French language. When the body fails, the head is punished. It is therefore through this old adage that teachers are held responsible for the decline in the level of French language learning in Nigeria. But in reality, when we take a critical look at French language programmes and, above all, the methodologies used to implement them, we can easily see that these programmes do not take certain linguistic or sociolinguistic realities into account. No matter how hard we try, we will never, through complacency, encourage a student who has no vocation to perfect their level in this language. The development of individual language skills is entirely a matter of personal will and decision.



Furthermore, the teaching of French in Nigerian universities is often hampered by the haphazard use of unsuitable textbooks. These shortcomings are the main causes of the decline in students' French language skills.

Today, faced with the challenges of development, it is necessary to quickly adapt skills to needs. This involves redefining the type of French that can help achieve the specific communication objectives that the country needs to begin its journey towards development. And FSP, a tool for developing specific skills, can be of paramount importance here. But before returning to this notion of FSP, it is essential to present the tool that will enable us to address this issue, namely the theory of language needs.

Language Needs Theory

Language needs theory is an approach that aims to identify and address learners' specific language needs (Richards, 2001). This theory focuses on the language skills needed to perform specific tasks in a professional or academic context (Munby, 1978). Language needs are defined as the language skills and knowledge required to function effectively in a given communication situation. Language needs analysis is a crucial step in the design of language training programmes. Language needs can be classified into different categories, such as linguistic needs, communicative needs, and sociocultural needs. The language needs approach differs from the traditional approach to language teaching in that it focuses on the specific needs of learners (Nunan, 1988). Teaching methods based on language needs emphasise interaction and the simulation of real-life situations (Swain, 1985). The language needs theory has been applied in various fields, such as teaching business French, legal French, and medical French. Teaching resources based on language needs are often developed in collaboration with experts in the relevant field. Assessment in the language needs approach focuses on target language skills (Alderson, 2000). The language needs theory is a flexible approach that can be adapted to different learning contexts. Teachers who use the language needs approach must have a good knowledge of the specific field and the needs of the learners. Language needs theory contributes to the development of learners' professional skills. The language needs approach is a constantly evolving discipline that responds to the changing needs of learners. It can be identified through methods such as task analysis, interviews, and questionnaires (Munby, 1978). The theory of language needs is based on the idea that learners are social actors who use language to accomplish specific tasks. It focuses on the learners and their specific needs and aims to prepare them to use language effectively in real-life situations.

French for Specific Purposes (FSP)

French for Specific Purposes is often used to refer to the entire field of teaching French for professional purposes. As it has developed over the past few years, FSP essentially enables non-native speakers to master French in their original professional context, targeting specific skills. FSP is a fast, pragmatic, functional, task-oriented approach to learning. It is also perfectly suited to the needs of people in professional situations or in initial training. According to Mourlhon-Dallies (2018), FSP depends on the degree of professionalization of the target audience. This is a pedagogical approach that aims to teach French according to the specific needs of learners. Focused on language skills needed to accomplish specific tasks in a professional or academic context (Mangiante, 2008), FSP considers learning objectives and learner needs to develop tailored training programmes. Content is selected based on real-life communication situations. FSP differs from general French in that it focuses on the specific needs of learners (Mourlhon-Dallies, 2008). FSP teaching methods emphasise interaction and



the simulation of professional situations. FSP is used in various fields such as business French, legal French, and medical French (Mangiante, 2008). FSP teaching resources are often developed in collaboration with experts in the relevant field.

Assessment in FSP focuses on target language skills. FSP is a flexible approach that can be adapted to different learning contexts. To do this, FSP teachers must have a good knowledge of the specific field and the needs of the learners. FSP is increasingly used in online and distance learning (Mangiante, 2008). The FSP approach helps develop learners' professional skills. FSP is an approach centred on the learner and their specific needs. It is a constantly evolving discipline that responds to the changing needs of learners.

In FSP, it is often the case that the students are already professionally integrated (for example, hotel receptionists, engineers, diplomats, authorities, religious and denominational groups, shop assistants, police, military, security forces, athletes, businesspeople, etc.). These are often people who are improving their French (or learning it for the first time) to integrate into a French-speaking work environment (either in France or abroad in a French organisation).

The concept covers cross-disciplinary approaches to different areas of employment and is based on mastering the French language requirements for any job: knowing how to introduce yourself, write a resume, conduct an interview, answer the phone, and converse in a restaurant for business purposes. FSP (in the strict sense, singular) corresponds to relatively short, tailor-made training courses for an already professional audience; and is limited to specific objectives. Specialised French corresponds to teaching French as a foreign language (FLE) tailored to specific fields: medical French, French for tourism, military French, French for education, etc., with training modules and a set of published teaching aids. Based on this definition, French language teaching in Nigeria can set its own objectives in line with its focus to adapt to the communication needs of the target audience, given that it is taught in an environment where it competes with English. But what approach should be taken to make FSP a reality in Nigeria?

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 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 French Institute Abuja, Alliance Francaise Lagos, the National Open University, IBB University, Federal University Lafia and IBB University, Lapai. To achieve the research objectives, the study sample comprised 66 teachers and 849 learners from the above-mentioned institutions in the 2023 academic session.

Categories of Respondents

To make FSP a reality in Nigeria, it was first necessary to identify the target audience for these specific French language training courses. The respondents in this study represent lecturers and students in some tertiary institutions where the French language is taught in Nigeria. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and textual analysis. The majority of respondents (87%) were from the French Institute Abuja and Alliance Francaise Lagos, 5.98% from the National Open University and 4.29% from Federal University Lafia and 1.68% from IBB University Lapa. This is due to the number and category of learners in such institutions. Most learners at the French Institute



and the National Open University come from professional backgrounds. They are people who already have a job in which the use of French could be a major asset

Table 1a: Demographic Characteristics of Learners

Institutions	Number of Learners	gender		Age	Work Experience	Percentage
		Male	Female			
French Institute Abuja	436	187	249	Between 24 – 45 years old	5 to 15 years	51.35%
Alliance Francaise Lagos	335	144	191	Between 24 – 45 years old	5 to 15 years	39.45%
National Open University	39	11	28	Between 22 – 38 years old	2 to 5 years	3.31%
Federal University Lafia	28	7	21	Between 18 – 21 years old	Nil	3.29%
IBB University, Lapai	11	2	9	Between 18 – 21 years old	Nil	1.29%
Total	849					100%

Table 1b: Demographic Characteristics of Teachers

Institutions	Number of Learners	gender		Age	Work Experience	Training on FSP	Percentage
		Male	Female				
French Institute Abuja	31	16	15	Between 32 – 55 years old	5 to 20 years	Yes	46.96%
Alliance Francaise Lagos	15	9	6	Between 32 – 55 years old	5 to 20 years	Yes	22%
National Open University	6	3	3	Between 32 – 63 years old	15 to 25 years	Never	9.09%
Federal University Lafia	8	4	4	Between 32 – 65 years old	15 to 25 years	Never	12.21%
IBB University, Lapai	4	2	2	Between 32 – 50 years old	15 to 15 years	Never	6.06%



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Total	66					100%
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This table shows the characteristics of teachers in French language teaching institutions. Teachers at the French Institute and Alliance Françaises receive training in teaching French for specific purposes to meet the requirements and needs of learners whereas those at universities have never even heard of FSP.

Table 2: Specific French language courses offered and Institutions

Courses	French Institute Abuja	Alliance Françaises Lagos	National Open University	Federal University Lafia	IBB University, Lapai
Bilingual secretary	24	5	NIL	NIL	NIL
Tourism/hotel industry	68	70	NIL	NIL	NIL
Engineering	12	6	NIL	NIL	NIL
Diplomacy	62	66	NIL	NIL	NIL
Healthcare	28	12	NIL	NIL	NIL
Security	156	8	NIL	NIL	NIL
Entertainment	51	65	NIL	NIL	NIL
Business	37	103	NIL	NIL	NIL
General	2	-	39	28	11
TOTAL	436	335	39	28	11

This table shows the areas of interest of Nigerian learners, such as business, medicine, tourism, health, security, entertainment, and others. It should be noted that apart from the French Institute and the Alliances Françaises, which offer FSP courses, all other higher education institutions offer general French courses that do not meet the real needs of learners.

Discussion

Individuals are increasingly confronted with communication problems in French in their companies and when dealing with customers. Some indeed have a basic knowledge of French, but this does not enable them to communicate effectively in this language. They are therefore



looking for programmes that can help them fill this gap. These FSP programmes, which correspond to specific situations, are easy to design (which does not mean easy to implement...) insofar as they are determined by the desire to achieve precisely identified objectives presented by the individual or organisation requesting them. In other words, training requests are made to French language training schools such as French language departments, French Institutes (IF), Alliances, and professional language schools by individuals or organisations wishing to learn French. The example of the Institut Français (IF) in Abuja is instructive. Thousands of students from all walks of life (secretaries, doctors, lawyers, merchants, soldiers, professionals of all trades, etc.) enrol each year at this institute to satisfy their need to communicate in French. This is illustrated by Table 2, which shows the courses offered to meet the language needs of Nigerian learners of French. Based on the results of this study, the following steps should be taken to set up FSP courses

Needs Analysis

Needs analysis identifies the language situations that learners experience or will experience at the end of their training and which are the reason for requesting the programme. It also considers the cultural background of the discourse exchanged in these situations, which plays a key role in communication. In the examples cited above, the analysis will reveal very different target situations. The French language communication needs of Nigerian doctors must be different from those of Nigerian military personnel and diplomats. Next, training programmes tailored to these needs should be developed in collaboration with experts in the relevant field. Teaching resources should be designed to meet the specific needs of learners. Teachers should receive training in how to teach FSP effectively.

Assessment mechanisms should also be put in place to measure learners' progress. Implementing FSP in Nigeria would also require partnerships with institutions and businesses to provide real-world practice opportunities. Finally, decision-makers and stakeholders should be made aware of the importance of FSP for Nigeria's socioeconomic development. With a coordinated approach and political will, FSP could become a reality in Nigeria. This would help improve Nigerians' language skills and strengthen their competitiveness in the global market.

Data collection

Data collection is probably the most specific stage in the development of an FSP programme. It is, in a way, the centre of gravity of the process. On the one hand, it confirms, completes, or even significantly modifies the needs analysis carried out by the designer, which remains hypothetical until it is confirmed in the field. On the other hand, it provides the information and discourse on which the language training programme will be based. It is what leads the teacher to step outside their usual working environment and enter contact with a milieu that is, a priori, unfamiliar to them, and to which they must explain their objectives and the meaning of their approach to obtain the information they need. The first question that arises for the trainer, when searching for data to collect, is where to find it. The data must be collected within the workplace where the learners will be immersed, by those responsible for the programmes. This is very important in that it will enable the trainer to determine the content of the training.

Data analysis and instructional design



Data collected often reveals discourse that is familiar to the teacher and requires analysis on their part, the results of which will determine the instructional activities offered to learners. Instructional design, meanwhile, is based on the following methodological principles:

- Activities are designed to support the needs analysis itself, which is carried out based on the communication situations identified.
- The teaching programme is developed in close connection with the information obtained from the analysis of the data collected.
- It is based on the communicative approach (authentic documents, natural communication within the group).
- It requires maximum participation from learners and minimal involvement from the teacher.

Developing a specialised language programme

According to Marc Mangiante (2002), the development of a French programme for specific purposes begins with a training request, which is used to conduct a needs analysis. Once this analysis has been completed, the designer collects data, which is then used to build the language training programme. This authentic data must then be analysed and processed to become teaching materials that will give rise to classroom activities.

Course/class

Let's look at two quick examples to illustrate this approach. Nigerian military personnel and doctors often go to France for training courses. The aim is to organise training that will enable them to acquire the language skills they need for their stay in France. In response to this training request, the programme designer makes initial assumptions about the communication situations that these Nigerian military personnel and doctors will encounter in their dealings with their French counterparts. For military personnel, we might consider situations involving greetings, introductions to superiors, visits to camps, training, protocols—in short, military jargon. For the doctors, topics related to hospitals are considered: consultations with patients, operating rooms, visiting patients in their rooms after surgery, etc. These hypotheses are only a first approach. They must then be confirmed, refined, and modified by collecting language data in the field.

This field approach begins, for example, with contacts with one or more military personnel and doctors who are asked about the situations experienced by military personnel and doctors on training courses: the different people they talk to, in what situations, about what subjects, what they write, read, etc. This first step in the field provides information about communication situations.

Recommendation

Considering the approach outlined here, each French programme with a specific objective must be unique and tailored to a specific audience. This is a case-by-case approach, which is quite labour-intensive to develop and not easily transferable. It cannot be done individually, but must be a team effort. This task, as well as the interest it generates, requires the involvement not only of teachers and students, but also of the institutions and authorities responsible for French language teaching in Nigeria. The case in question reveals several levels of cooperation:



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- between French teachers and political authorities: it is their responsibility to develop the project and the steps involved in its implementation. In other words, authorities and teachers must become more involved in designing programmes that can meet the new requirements for communication in French. Such an undertaking also requires an appropriate strategy for training trainers and conducting periodic evaluations, which can be achieved by organising regular seminars and conferences on French language teaching in Nigeria.
- between students and teachers: it is clear that student participation in French is essential, especially in universities and colleges of education, as well as in all language centres. It is true that the education system, as it is designed, does not allow them to express their needs and participate in their training, but they can get involved by choosing from the outset the type of French they need in the context of their future profession.
- between French language departments at Nigerian universities and the French Embassy: this type of initiative falls within the scope of promoting and disseminating the French language and should therefore be of interest to the French cultural service, which can provide political and logistical support.

Conclusion

Language projects with specific objectives give rise to necessary synergies. On the one hand, reflection on the construction of these programmes promotes the relationship between teaching and research in language didactics. On the other hand, these projects create links between the French language and other disciplines within French language departments, insofar as their teaching serves these disciplines. Language teaching in general is, by its very nature, intended to facilitate cross-border contact. And as we can already see, Nigeria's involvement in international politics and, above all, its leadership in Africa in recent years prove that it is now a fact that Abuja has become a global capital, just like Paris in Europe. Furthermore, analysis of Nigeria's geographical location in relation to French-speaking countries shows that there is a considerable need for French language training for specific purposes. This will enable better communication and significantly improve exchanges between Nigeria and the rest of the world.

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