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LANGUAGE METHODOLOGY, LEARNERS' STRATEGIES AND MOTIVATION AS DETERMINING FACTORS IN THE LEARNERS' SUCCESS IN FRENCH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Affirming that French Language is unavoidably important and indispensable in Nigeria is not an overstatement. Nigeria is a giant of Africa and in view of the roles she plays in the international politics in Africa, she needs French language more than any other essential resources one may think of. This assertion is quiet sound because of the great number of Francophone countries that surround Nigeria and the diplomatic and economic ties between Nigeria and the neighbouring French speaking countries. The decline in the study of French language in Nigeria has been a major concern to the stakeholders in the field of French language education. Many researchers in this field have made frantic efforts to unravel the misery behind the slow pace of development in the study of French in Nigeria. Ogike (2005) opines that the problem that has bedeviled the teaching of French language after the political independence is beyond the control of the Nigerian French teachers. These factors responsible for this decline are multifaceted. This paper discusses the concept of language teaching methodology as an excruciating phenomenon in the success in language learning. Methodology of language learning cannot be under estimated while discussing the issue of foreign language education. In addition, the paper discusses the learners learning strategies in foreign language learning situation. Finally, the concept of motivation towards language learning would be considered in the light of the teachers' motivational skills.

Key words: Language methodology, learners' strategies, Motivation, French Language, learners' success

INTRODUCTION

Methodology of language learning could be viewed as a string that links theory with practice. In this manner we are making reference to theories of second language acquisition (SLA) which specify what a language is and how it could be learned. Learners' strategies are also of significant importance to foreign language learning. It could be categorized into two main types i.e. learning strategies and communicative strategies. Learning strategies are techniques learners use to improve learning such as the use of mnemonics and dictionary while communicative strategies are strategies a learner uses to convey meaning such as pro-forms and gestures. Motivation on the other hand, could be defined as the psychological quality that leads people to achieve a goal which ranges from mastery of a foreign language or attaining communicative competence in the foreign language. Garner (1982) identified motivation as one the factors that affect second language learning aside such factors such as intelligence, language aptitude and anxiety.

LANGUAGE EDUCATION AS A FIELD

The concept of language learning came into fusion in the last century. This gave an impetus to the emergence of varied language teaching methods. The quest for the development of a new method occupied the mind of language teachers and applied linguists throughout the 20th century. A researcher such as Howatt (1994) did a comprehensive documentation of the evolution of language teaching methodology throughout the 20th century.

Methodology in language teaching has been characterized in different forms. It could be viewed as a concept that links theories with practice in treating the concept of methodology in language learning. A distinction is always made between method and approach. Methods are held to be fixed teaching systems with prescribed techniques and practices. In a clearer term, a method is a plan for presenting the language materials to be learned and should be based on selected approach.

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An approach on the other hand is a set of correlative assumptions about the nature of language and language learning but does not involve procedure or provide any details about how such assumptions should translate into classroom setting. It could be related to second language acquisition. In order for approach to be translated into a method, an instructional system must be designed considering the objectives of the teaching and learning, the selection and organization of content, the types of tasks to be performed, the roles of students and the teacher alike.

Having delineated the difference between method and approach, another concept in language teaching methodology that needs clarification is the concept of technique. A technique is a very specific, concrete stratagem or trick designed to accomplish an immediate objective. In a nutshell, Approach, method and technique are hierarchical concepts. There are various methods of teaching French language or foreign languages in general. Some of the methods have fallen into obscurity and permanently ignored by foreign language teachers, some are widely used while some have a very small patronage but they offer meaningful insights. The 20th century witness consistent emergence of different methods of foreign language teaching. The methods kept coming in successive manner in line with the request of the foreign language teacher for dependable and reliable method that could facilitate the quick acquisition of a foreign language. One cannot but mention some of these methods in their order of succession. Grammar translation method, Audio visual method, direct method, communicative approach suggestopedia and some other methods that we cannot mention in this paper. The reason adduced to the successive emergence of new methods of language teaching is the weakness and inadequacy of the older methods of language teaching in meeting the demands of the foreign language teachers and learners.

LANGUAGE METHODOLOGY AND FRENCH LANGUAGE

It is not an overstatement stressing the astronomical decline in the study of French language in Nigeria and rate of attrition in the language across the schools. A great number of researchers in the field of French language education have done a lot to demystify the immediate and remote causes of the decline in the study of French language. Researchers such as Obanya (1977), Ubahakwe (1982), Araromi (1987) and Ajiboye (2005) are of the opinion that high rate of drop out in the study of French calls for concern as learner tend to question the rationale behind taking to the study of French language as they progress in the school system. Ajiboye (2005) further elucidates on the issue while stating that the chances of survival of French in a country like Nigeria where the question of National language or lingua Franca is yet to be resolved, is very slim and uncertain. Ogike (2005) dealt a blow on the issue while reiterating that professional body should not lay unnecessary emphasis on the shortage of qualified French teachers in schools and lack of quality and quantity of learning materials as the problem of shortage of qualified teachers and quality teaching and learning materials is not limited to the field of second or foreign language learning but it cut across at fields ranging from humanity to the sciences. The researcher further stated that the French teacher should look inward to find ways of sustaining the interest of the learners in the language through judicious and effective use of the principal professional tool namely method. On the other hand Ebi (2010), in a research conducted on the under utilization of French graduates in Nigeria Secondary School in Makurdi Local Government area of Benue State, reveals that lack of knowledge of the importance of French language by educational managers, lack of incentives and motivation of French graduates, inadequate reading and learning materials, absence of textbooks which hinder effective teaching and learning of French are some of the causes of the under utilization of French graduates in our secondary schools.

The submission of the earlier researcher does not incorporate the concept of methods or teaching methodology in second language learning. Ogike (2005) is of the view that there is urgent need for the French language teachers to review the methods being used whether it could be an innovation into the teaching of French in Nigeria. In some cases, review of methods of teaching in various fields of learning calls for the collective efforts and collaboration of the stakeholders and professionals in such a field. No individual professional teacher can singlehandedly review the teaching methods in his field without due consultation with the professional body in such a field as the case may be. At different time or the other, professional bodies have embarked on organizing workshops on the ways by which the teaching of their subject could be improved. These workshops are sometimes organized in collaboration with textbooks writers and publishers. It is in the course of these workshops and seminars that the new ideas about the new method of teaching are sold to the teachers for proper implementation during their teaching and learning task. In this regards, teachers are made to embrace the features of these new methods of teaching.

Before the advent of communicative approach to the teaching of foreign language, the Nigerian French teachers have accepted the direct method of teaching French language. Ogike (2005) opines that the proponents of this method had used different slogans like the new method, the modern method, la methode

d'avant garde to urge or delude the teachers into accepting the directives of this method to the extent that their initiatives and professional competence are undermined. However, the teachers accept the method for fear of being referred to as conservative or old school teachers even though some aspects of traditional methods may still be of immense benefits to their teaching learning task. This arrangement does not give room for self direction and encouragement because teachers are compelled to disregard the old methods together with their accompanied textbooks that sing their praises. This inadvertently amount to throwing out the baby with the birth water. Old method could still be a pivot upon which newly introduced methods could be hung.

We shall use the direct method of foreign language teaching as an illustration to paint the scenario of the shortcomings inherent in undue emphasis on one method of language teaching. The direct method advocates the use of target language as a medium of instruction with strict compliance with the method by all users. It discourages the use of bilingual dictionaries, translation in foreign language class and encourages learning of vocabularies, expressions and grammar in French language. However, it is grossly disheartening to see some of the ardent adherents to the directives of the direct method to hold the belief that the use of English as a medium of instruction in some of the French textbooks is a clog in wheel of the development in the use of a modern method such as direct method. On the other hand, Ogike (2005) affirmed that the authors of textbooks where English language is used to give illustrations or instructions are rendering a formidable service to a crop of French language teachers with minimal qualifications such Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) or school Certificate, many of whom are stocked in our secondary schools as either full time or part- time teachers. To further throw more light on this argument, a great number of French teachers found in our schools lack adequate exposure to the French speaking environment and this invariably hinder their communicative competence in the French language. Lack of communicative competence may thereby engender attrition or lackadaisical attitude on their parts in implementing the curriculum content of the foreign language they are commissioned to teach.

In addition to the features of direct method is the emphasis on the use of films, photographs and gesticulations which serve as alternatives to the use of English language in the foreign language class. We must bear in mind that images are subject to individual interpretations and it has much to do with the cultural milieu and the background of the individual learner as far as foreign language class is concerned. Learners come to the foreign language class with different mindset and different cultural beliefs. Majority of the pictures, diagrams and photographs displayed in the French language recommended texts are not in tandem with the foreign language expressions that accompanied them. In a situation where the use of English language as a supportive language of instruction is discouraged, the learners tend to view the images with their cultural microscopic eye. As we have used the direct method as a case study to debunk the fallacy that a particular method of foreign language teaching is superior to others, we also make bold to say that foreign language teachers should be encouraged to exercise their freedom and bring their professional competence into bear while faced with the task of imparting the knowledge of the foreign language into the learners. In actual fact, experts and professionals in teaching methodology are of the view that combination of methods in teaching and learning situation is more ideal and appropriate than using a single method.

Language Learning Strategies Open To Foreign Language Teacher

Language teaching in the present day has experienced a revolution as experts in language learning now lay emphasis on the learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching. One should emphasize at this juncture that the roles of teachers and learners in language learning is complementary and symbiotic. However, the importance of language learning strategies in foreign language learning cannot be over emphasized Wenden (1987) defines learning strategy as "any sets of operations, steps, plans used by the learner to facilitate, obtain, store and retrieve information. Richards and Platt (1992) states that learning strategies are "intentional behaviour and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn or remember new information. Claus and Casper (1983) stress that a learning strategy is an attempt to develop linguistic and socio linguistic competence in the target language.

Oxford (1990) sees the aim of language learning strategy as being oriented towards developing communicative competence in the learners. According to him, he divided learning strategy into two main groups: Direct and indirect learning strategy. He further subdivided the strategies into 6 parts i.e.

- Meta cognitive: which helps to regulate learning
- Affective - Emotions such as confidence
- Social strategy – Increased interaction with target language.

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- Cognitive strategies - Mental strategies used to make sense of their learning.
- Memory strategies – help learners to store information.
- Compensational strategy – help learner to overcome knowledge gaps to continue the communication.

Rubin (1987) grouped language learning strategies into two: strategies contributing directly to learning and those contributing indirectly to learning. These strategies are categorized into three main groups, i.e. learning strategies, communication strategies and social strategies. Both communication strategies and social strategies are indirectly contributing to learning. Communication strategy involves participating in a conversation or getting meaning across or clarifying what the speaker intended while social strategy involve activities which learners engage in that enable them to practice their knowledge i.e. exposure to the target language community. Learning strategies on the other is sub-divided into two viz cognitive and meta – cognitive strategies. Cognitive strategy contributes to learning directly. They involve activities such as clarification, verification, guessing, practice, memorization, inductive and inferencing while Meta – cognitive strategies are used to oversee, regulate or self direct. i.e. planning, prioritizing, setting goals, etc. (Hismanoglu, 2000).

It is not ideal believing that learners use the same language learning strategies in the course of learning a foreign language such as French language. Aside some vital variables that affect the success of learners in French language such as age, gender, personality, motivation, self concept, life experience, learning style and anxiety, French language teacher must pay keen attention to the learning strategies used by individual learner of the foreign language being taught. The foreign language teacher must be conversant with the language strategies already in use by the learners. The teacher should take a step further by learning about the learners' interest, motivations, learning styles etc.

Hismanoglu (2000) opines that the teacher can make use of a questionnaire to ascertain the learners' learning goals. This would better inform the teachers about the learners, their goals, motivations, language learning strategies and the understanding of the subject concerned. The fact that learners in the same classroom have different learning style and varied awareness of learning strategies, the teacher needs to know the purpose of learning a language and their favorite and least favorite class activities. It should be noted that giving priority to the learners' learning exigencies does not out rightly render the language teacher useless in the teaching and learning situation. The current approach to learning of school materials in the advance countries now bends towards laying emphasis on the learners. The learners' characteristics and their learning style are highly tantamount to the success of the learner with particular emphasis on the foreign language learning.

However, Hall (1997) affirms that the most important role a teacher could play in a foreign language learning situation is the provision of a range of tasks that would cater for varied learning styles. The foreign language teacher should lay his hands on foreign language textbooks that take into cognizance, the difference in learning styles of the learners and must review and analyze his own overall classroom style and method.

French Language and Motivation

The concept of motivation in language learning is of significant importance to the language teacher. Motivation is a difficult concept to define but it could be defined easily on terms of the motivated learners. i.e. one who is willing or eager to invest efforts in learning activities and to progress. Donyei (2001) considers external factors that affect learners of a foreign language, laying emphasis on the instructional technique as a vital tool in motivation. The teachers' instructional style and teaching method inform the learners' interest and attitude towards the learning of a foreign language such as French language. The difficulty or the complexity of subject could be subdued if the teachers could be highly equipped with the motivational techniques and skills to endear the learners towards the learning of French language.

Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) did pioneering work to explore the nature of motivation specific to language learning. They based motivation towards the second language on socio – psychological approach. They are of the opinion that a successful learner willing to learn a second language must be prepared to adopt various aspects of the behaviour which characterize members of the linguistic or cultural group. Gardner high lights two different types of motivation i.e. instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental type of motivation entails learning a foreign language for external rewards such as earning good grades, commercial purposes, getting international appointment etc while integrative motivation entails learning a foreign language so as to be identified with target language community and integrate successfully into the language community concerned. Gardner and Lambert (1969, 1972) affirm that success in a foreign language is likely to be lower if the underlying motivational orientation is instrumental rather than integrative. Further study declined on the authenticity of this claim and that it should not be generalized on

foreign language learners. Pragmatically speaking, learners of foreign language tend to dissociate themselves from the language immediately their goals have been achieved if their motivational orientation is instrumental. A learner who is compelled to learn a French language in order to secure an international appointment may relent on his efforts to dig deep into the learning of the language immediately the appointment is guaranteed. Foreign language teacher should go extra miles to inculcating the cultural values of the target language into the learners. We make bold to say that these cultural elements are already embedded in the language materials to be taught to the students. In second language learning, the cultural elements cannot be divorced from the language itself because the two phenomena are interrelated and interwoven and should not be treated in isolation. Moreover, there are various motivational techniques available to the French language teacher in the course of his or her teaching task. These include among others, good pedagogical approach, choice of current and relevant textbooks, exposure to francophone or French speaking countries, good teacher – student relationship, fluency and linguistic competence in the language and the use of audio-visual materials such as projector, television set, tape recorder, current cassettes or audio CD'S just to mention a few. If all these issues are put into consideration by the French language teacher, the success of the learners in the foreign language will increase astronomically and their interest in the language would be sustained.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have considered vital issues that determine learners' success in the foreign language learning with special emphasis on the French language as a foreign language in Nigeria. The concept of methodology of foreign language learning is of vital importance to the foreign language teacher. We conceived that a great number of methods have been successively invented by foreign language teachers and applied linguists. These methods could be combined in teaching and learning situation to bridge the gaps between the old and the new methods of teaching foreign language. We also perceived that teachers need to be acclimatized with the learning strategies and learning styles of the individual learner in the foreign language class in order to cater for diverse learning characteristics of the learners. The concept of motivation as a powerful force to be reckoned with in the foreign language learning situation should not be under – estimated. The teachers need to be well equipped with motivational techniques in order to create and sustain the interest of the learners in the foreign language.

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