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F.A. Soyoye

Staffing Situation and the Teaching of Foreign Languages in Nigerian Universities

Introduction

It is a common thing in developing countries like Nigeria that everybody talks all the time about the new technologies as a way forward. Most of the time, people forget that these technologies are tied to the languages of the developed countries that produced them. Even though English has been accepted as a world language, other international languages have contributed their own to the breakthroughs in the new technologies and also especially in the new world order that has generated the so-called *global village* of today. Foreign languages have become the link between all the peoples of the world in the sciences, technologies, international trade and diplomacy.

No country, developed or developing, can afford not to assess from time to time, the place given to the teaching of foreign languages as the need for language experts (translators, interpreters, teachers, bilingual technocrats, etc.) becomes more and more obvious in the new world order.

The universities as one of the main producers of the manpower needs of Nigeria are expected to be up to the task in producing competent graduates and certificate holders in foreign languages that the country needs. Many studies have been carried out on various aspects of the teaching of one foreign language or another in the country and this study is a contribution to such efforts.

There are many factors that affect foreign languages teaching. Among others, we have government language policies, teacher-related factors (motivation of teachers, competence, training/re-training, etc.), student-related factors (motivation of students, peer-

group influence, age, aptitude, etc.), resources and material factors (availability of textbooks, methods, curricula, teaching aids, etc). Many studies have been carried out on these factors especially on material and resources factors. We want to look into an aspect of teacher-related factors, the staffing situation vis-à-vis the teaching of foreign languages in Nigerian universities. We want our study to contribute to national development in assessing stated intentions and policies.

Nigerian Universities and the Teaching of Foreign Languages

There are three sets of universities in the country. We have universities owned by the Federal government, those owned by the State governments and private universities. Federal universities in Nigeria can be grouped into three categories. We have the first generation universities made up of University of Ibadan (1960), University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1960), University of Ife (now OAU,1962), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (1962) and University of Lagos, Lagos (1962). These first generation universities now offer at least a foreign language and have offered many in the past. The second a generation universities were those that were founded in the 1970s. They include: University of Benin, Benin City (1970), Bayero University, Kano (1975), University of Calabar (1975), University of Ilorin (1975), University of Jos (1975), University of Maiduguri (1975), Usman Dan Fodio University (1975) and University of Port Harcourt (1975). The second generation universities too offer at least a foreign language. The third generation universities were founded in the 1980s and were mostly universities of Technology and Agriculture. They include: Federal University of Technology (1980), Federal University of Technology, Akure (1981), Federal University of Technology, Minna (1982), Military University, Kaduna (1985), University of Abuja (1988), Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi (1988), University of Agriculture, Makurdi (1988), Federal University of Technology, Yola (1988) and the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (1988). None of the third generation universities offer degree or certificate courses in any foreign language to the best of our knowledge.

The two federal universities that were founded in the 1990s are: University of Uyo (1991) and University of Agriculture, Umudike (1992). University of Uyo offers foreign languages while the University of Agriculture, Umudike does not.

The states' universities in Nigeria form another set of universities as we have already stated. They are 14 in all. It is only Rivers State that has a university of Science and Technology which it founded in 1979. The other states' universities follow the pattern of the first generation universities with most of them offering at least a foreign language as we will see in table 1.

Table 1. Nigerian universities that offer foreign languages

s/n	University	French	Germ	Portug	Russ.	Italian	Span.
1	Ahmadu Bello U. Zaria	+	-	-	-	-	-
2	U. of Uyo, Uyo	+	+	-	-	-	-
3	U. of Jos, Jos	+	+	-	+	-	-
4	Delta State U. Abraka	+	+	-	-	-	-
5	Ambrose Ali U. Ekpoma	+	+	-	+	+	-
6	Abia State U. Ituru	+	-	-	-	-	+
7	Lagos State U. Ojoo	+	-	+	-	-	-
8	Imo State U. Owerri	+	+	-	-	-	-
9	U. of Maiduguri, Maiduguri	+	-	-	-	-	-
10	U. of Nigeria, Nsukka	+	+	-	+	-	-
11	Bayero U. Kano	+	-	-	-	-	-

s/n	University	French	Germ	Portug	Russ.	Italian	Span.
12	Benuê State U. Makurdi	+	-	-	-	-	-
13	Ogun State U. Ago-Iwoye	+	-	-	+	-	-
14	U. of Benin, Benin City	+	+	-	-	-	-
15	U. of Port Harcourt	+	+	-	-	-	-
16	Obafemi Awolowo U. Ile-Ife	+	+	+	-	-	-
17	U. of Ibadan, Ibadan	+	+	-	+	-	-
18	Nnamdi Azikiwe U. Awka	+	+	-	-	-	-
19	U. of Lagos, Lagos	+	-	-	+	-	-
20	U. of Ilorin, Ilorin	+	+	-	-	-	-
21	U. of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti	+	-	-	-	-	-
22	Kano State U. Bagauda	*	*	*	*	*	*

N.B. + means language is offered; - means language is not offered;
* means information not available

Of the four approved private universities, only 2 have already started their programmes to the best of our knowledge. Babcock University, Ilisan, is the only one that offers French as a General Studies course in its programme.

In all, there are 42 universities in Nigeria. Of the 24 federal universities, 8 are universities of technology/agriculture and do not offer any foreign language. Of the 14 state universities, only 3 are tagged universities of technology/science while the Ondo State University, Akungba is just starting. The former Ondo State University which has now become the University of Ado-Ekiti has a degree programme in French.

The Data

Our data comes mostly from interviews of French students from various universities doing their immersion programme at the Nigerian French Language Village, Badagry and from the records of the Language Village. Our assumption is that even though these students are mainly French major students, they come from departments that offer other foreign languages. Out of the 22 universities that have departments where at least a foreign language is taught, our data covers 20 universities. Table 1 shows the list of universities and the foreign languages that they offer.

From table 1, it is seen that all the universities that offer foreign languages offer French without an exception. This can be explained by the fact that apart from the political, economic and cultural leverage of the language with respect to Nigeria's African, particularly, West African policy, French is the only foreign language taught and sanctioned by Nigerian examination bodies at the secondary school level. It should also be noted that German is the second foreign language taught by most of the universities. It is also interesting to note that state universities offer relatively the same range of foreign languages like the federal ones.

Staffing

We had access to the data of 20 universities that offer foreign languages in Nigeria as we have earlier said. Table 2 shows the breakdown of the number of teachers/language/university.

Table 2 shows that 155 (82.45%) of teachers of foreign languages in the universities concerned by our study teach French; 16 (8.51%) of the teachers teach German, 13 (6.91%) teach Russian while 5

(2.66%) teach Portuguese. A surface interpretation of the staffing in the teaching of French may give an impression that the French language is not doing badly. But the reality is far from this. It should be remembered that the minimum number of staff required to run a B.A. degree programme in a foreign language is supposed to be 8 teachers if the course has even just a student. We have French programmes that have over 500 undergraduate students and about 20 postgraduate students with a staff strength of 9 teachers.

Table 2. Number of teachers/language/university

s/n	University	French	Germ	Portug	Russian	Italian	Spani
1	Ahmadu Bello U. Zaria	9	-	-	-	-	-
2	U. of Uyo, Uyo	7	1	-	-	-	-
3	U. of Jos, Jos	11	01*	-	1	-	-
4	Delta State U. Abraka	8	1	-	-	-	-
5	Ambrose Ali U. Ekpoma	9	1	-	1	01**	-
6	Abia State U. Ituru	7	-	-	-	-	1
7	Lagos State U. Ojoo	9	-	1	-	-	-
8	Imo State U. Owerri	6	1	-	-	-	-
9	U. of Maiduguri	7	-	-	-	-	-
10	U. of Nigeria, Nsukka	11	3	-	1	-	-

s/n	University	French	Germ	Portug	Russian	Italian	Span
11	Bayero U. Kano	4	-	-	-	-	-
12	Benue State U. Makurdi	5	-	-	-	-	-
13	Ogun State U. Ago-Iwoye	4	-	-	3	-	-
14	U. of Benin, Benin City	7	1	-	-	-	-
15	U. of Port Harcourt	8	0	-	-	-	-
16	Obafemi Awo-lowo U. Ile-Ife	8	3	4	-	-	-
17	U. of Ibadan, Ibadan	7	2		4	-	-
18	Nnamdi Azikiwe U. Awka.	5	1	-	-	-	-
19	U. of Lagos, Lagos	12	-	-	3	-	-
20	U. of Ilorin, Ilorin	8	1	-	-	-	-
21	U. of Ado Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti	***	-	-	-	-	-
22	Kano State U. Bagauda	***	***	***	***	***	***
	TOTAL	152	16	5	13	1	1

N.B. - : Course not available; *: Lecturer on sabbatical leave offers course for just one year; **: A French teacher also teaches this language
***: Information not available

The overall picture of about 188 teachers of foreign languages in the Nigerian universities is not a sign of good things. We do know that out of these 188 teachers, there are overlappings where a teacher has been counted twice because he doubles as a French and Russian teacher or as a French and German teacher.

Reasons for the bad staffing situation

The Nigeria Universities Commission (NUC) policy of FTE is a major factor in the bad staffing situation of the teaching of foreign languages in the Nigerian universities. The FTE given to the Faculty of Arts where departments that offer foreign languages are based is 1:18 (i.e. 1 teacher to 18 students). The implication is that for a department offering a foreign language to have a staff establishment of 10 teachers for a language, there should be 180 students of that language. The result is that since the last 10 to 15 years, the foreign languages teachers that left the university system have not been replaced because the Departments are still "overstaffed" after more than half of their personnel had left.

Another reason for the bad staffing situation is non-availability of qualified personnel. The university teaching career seems not to be attractive to young graduates again such that even when Heads of Departments of Foreign Languages succeed in convincing university authorities to employ people, candidates are rare. Some attend interviews and refuse to later take up appointments offered.

The salary and conditions of service of university teachers of foreign languages may be another factor for the bad staffing situation. Those competing with the universities for the few foreign languages graduates (auditing firms, oil companies, banks, consultancy firms, translation/interpretation outfits) offer better salaries and conditions of service. It is even now becoming a pattern that university dons opt out of the system to take up teaching appointments in private secondary schools and private primary schools that pay far better salaries than what obtains in the universities.

Conclusion

It is obvious that staffing in the teaching of foreign languages is in a crisis situation. Everything should be done to make government and all those implicated in manpower production to see this situation. The country needs to produce more graduates of foreign languages than it is presently producing. The aspiration of the country to have breakthroughs in the new technologies does not contradict the fact that even Nigerian scientists need foreign languages to be able to interact more meaningfully at the international level.

It is disheartening to note that none of the universities of technology/agriculture offers a foreign language degree. If these universities can see nothing wrong in offering programmes in Business Studies, Marketing and Accounting, I do not see any reason why foreign languages would be what will make them lose their science(s). The universities' authorities should realize that they may fail the nation by not responding appropriately to the bad staffing situation. We agree that more studies are needed to explain the dearth of teachers of foreign languages in the country, but meanwhile government and university authorities as well as private concerns should put up machineries to encourage teachers of foreign languages to continue to hold the forth. The idea that the country does not need more "men of letters" should be scrapped. Foreign languages should be taken as part of the baggage that the country needs to acquire the new technologies. The country cannot afford to have itself cut-off by language barriers from other members of the global village.

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