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## French Language as a Major Factor in the Development of Enugu State of Nigeria

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### **Abstract:**

*The linguistic apparatus of a people is in no small way one of the determinants of what they achieve on developmental issues. This is not only limited to their own local language or dialects but the extent to which they embrace other languages of international standard like French. Enugu state, as the unofficial headquarters of the south-eastern part of Nigeria, has shown an open hand for meaningful investors who sometimes come armed with a wonderful linguistic tool. Thus, the Alliance française of France came at a time when Nigerians were thirty for a new linguistic escapade to embellish the country's land border operations with their neighboring francophone countries; Benin republic, Togo, Cameroun, Ivory Coast, Gabon, etc. Hence the establishment of Alliance française in the country and Enugu state as a French language institute in 1959. In light of the foregoing, the researchers have come up with their biggest question: How has the entrance of French language aided in the development of Enugu State? The responses to the problem would be accompanied by an empirical research that provides, to an extent, the claims of some of the Enugu residents. This question made the researchers observe that since many Enugu residents were of the opinion that studying French has helped in boosting their Academic profiles, overcoming some immigration difficulties, and linking them with the outside world for business purposes, undoubtedly, it becomes clear that the coming of French language in Enugu has done more good than harm because it has helped in human development which according to the research stands out as the best form of development on earth. Finally, the research is an addition to the already researched works on the effects of French language studies on Igbo States, especially Enugu, which serves to a great extent as the epicenter of the Igbo nation.*

**Keywords:** Academic profiles, escapade, French language, human development, linguistic

### **1. Introduction**

The place of language and culture in our everyday lives cannot be underestimated. This prompted Chomsky to argue that there is a language faculty in the human brain that enables a human child to learn any language in about four years. The understanding of this fact is thus made clear in the International Journal of English Language, Literature & Humanities, which posits that: *Language is the ability to acquire and use complex systems of communication, particularly the human ability to do so, and a language is any specific example of such a system ... language is a man's finest asset.* (Banga, Chaman Lal et.al.2015:181). Other views have argued that there is no such faculty since language derives from general purpose mechanisms of the brain. Whatever the argument, both camps acknowledge the centrality of language in human cognitive development. Culture, on its own part, is a product of the human mind, and it is defined, propagated, and sustained through language. Accordingly, Culture could be defined further as: *...shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and understanding that are learned by socialization. Thus, it can be seen as the growth of a group identity fostered by social patterns unique to the group* (Centre for Advance Research on Language Acquisition). This is why French language, as one of the leading international languages of the world, goes with its culture. Language remains the only mechanism through which the values and civilization of a people are disseminated: *Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones, and a million other things* (Cristina De Rossi, an anthropologist interviewed by Live Science). The relationship between language and culture is indisputably symbiotic. In most cases, a language forms the bases for ethnic, regional, national, or international identity. The concept of nationhood finds resonance in adopting a national language around which diverse ethnic groups can rally. Culture refers to the way of life of a people. This includes their customs, traditions, ideas, art, values their language. Invariably, language can be described as the repository of culture, since a language cannot express or name an entity that is not part of that culture. Research has it that French has moved up to become the world's fifth most-spoken language, thanks largely to the millions of Africans speaking it daily. In view of this, Okeke has this to say in *Journal of Humanities* (Imo State University, 2001).

*France considers her language as a very vital aspect of her proper existence, and through it, France has been able to project her intellectual culture and quite a number of other legacies across the world. She puts in everything (Financial resources, material investments, personnel, etc.). In this promotion, she wants her language to maintain the second position in world affairs after English. Nigeria has a lot to learn from the aggressive manner in which France tackles her language policy in our country given the fact that since 1977...36.*

The adoption of French as the second official language of Nigeria by the military government of late General Sani Abachi has introduced both advantages and disadvantages into the Nigerian system. According to this study, the eastern part of the country has been so peaceful for the language (French) to dwell in; this has been enhanced by the establishment of French Language and Cultural Centres (Alliances françaises) in some major cities of the South East like; Enugu and Owerri. In view of the peaceful and welcoming nature of Enugu State, its French Institute, established in 1959, was chosen as the headquarters of French language and Cultural studies in South-Eastern Nigeria. These French cultural centres help in selling French language and its culture to Nigerians, especially the Igbo.

The research shall be showcased in 2 parts. The 1<sup>st</sup> part shall be a presentation of the research carried out in Enugu State of Nigeria on French Language Studies. It will x-ray the problem of French Language Studies in Enugu, the objectives of the study, literature review, and examination of the Survey data. The 2<sup>nd</sup> part is a quality analysis of discussion on the major strides of French Language Studies in Enugu, such as:

- Boosting the Academic profile of the learners,
- Improving the chances of securing visas for young people, and
- Widening the economic horizon of Enugu State people

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem of Development of Enugu State, Nigeria

French language has been so beneficial to the Igbo people of Nigeria because they are always on the move in search of greener pastures. Enugu State of Nigeria is not left out of this assertion. Development has naturally been a problem for leaders in this part of the world hence the need in embracing who can positively imprint development into our society. It is for this reason that Ezeigbo in his article *The Humanities and the challenges of National Development in a Philistine Age* as published in the Humanities and Nation Building, 2013 affirms thus: *Development in the sense in which we conceive it is the gradual growth of a people and society, so that they become better, more advanced, leading to an unfolding of the potentialities of the individuals in that society* (4). Thus, the greatest problem of the research is the x-ray of the improvements in the general lives of Enugu state residents in view of the presence of French language and culture.

### 1.2. Objective(s) of the Study

The objective of the study is to investigate the extent to which French language and culture have been a blessing to the South Eastern part of Nigeria, with a special focus on Enugu State in terms of development. These developmental strides can come in the form of cultural support and technical support like granting scholarships to Enugu State indigenes and granting them visas to travel and study in France and other French-speaking countries of the world so that they can come back and give back knowledge to their immediate society. Many people have continually seen the positive contributions of French language centre (Alliance Française) in Enugu since its establishment in 1959. It is true that globalization makes the world smaller every day by breaking cultural limitations thereby making it easier for people who are foreign to a particular language to learn it with ease. In light of this, the research appreciates the impact of French language on our numerous youths who get employed in areas where bilingualism sells like hot cake. The presence of French has even helped our people regain their consciousness about our mother tongue 'Igbo Language'. This, oftentimes, is shown during the art display. Learning a foreign language can be expensive, especially if you take college courses or pay for private tutoring. It is possible to learn a foreign language from books or computer programs, which often cost less, but practicing speaking with others usually makes learning more fun and effective. Knowing a foreign language is a prized asset in some careers, but it is not helpful for many jobs. And some foreign languages, such as Latin or Ancient Greek, are not even spoken anymore.

## 2. Literature Review

Development at all levels has been a continuous issue and has attracted inputs from scholars whose contributions have stood the test of time. For this reason, Fløttum Kjersti, course leader, Department of Foreign Languages Bergen Summer Research School (2017), University of Bergen has this to say: *Language is a crucial means of communication and interaction. Language not only reflects and expresses facts and observations; it also influences attitudes and behavior. It thus constitutes a vital component of the cultural prerequisites underlying societal development.* This confirms the fact that French Language, just like the Chinese, has helped in the wide infrastructural development of Enugu state. Evidently, the dissemination of French language in the country is no more for mere interaction between Nigerians and their neighboring Francophone countries but opens a wide range of economic, political, technological, social, and cultural benefits for the learners. This is in conformity with the idea of Igbah in his article titled 'Teaching and Learning of French: Imperative for Educational Opportunities, National Development and Transformation' that:

*French language is not only a foreign language but a foreign and international language with enormous potential in terms of economic, political, technological, social, and cultural benefits. It behooves Nigeria, an Island in the sea of francophone countries to tap into these unfathomable benefits by giving accelerated attention to the implementation of French language teaching and learning in its National Language Policy.*

Most of the Nigerian Professors of French language, literature, and translation studies in Big and famous Nigerian Universities of reckon in the South-Eastern part of the country like: University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu State University of Technology, Enugu, Imo State University, Owerri, Abia State University, Uturu, etc. were once in a time trained in France. Based on their numerous inputs and years of experience, these professors have trained many graduates who, in turn, have contributed to the country's development. In spite of Obinna's claim in his Inaugural lecture titled '*Communication Matters: Language in literal and literary concatenation (Beyond the French Eye, 2012)*' that:

*All languages possess the same spirit of expression and sufficiency in their various manifestations. None is better or worse than the other, and none is incapable of taking care of its people's local needs. The possibility of cultural growth and survival remains debatable for a people whose language is considered 'dead' (while the people are still alive?). (Communication Matters: Language in literal and literary concatenation (Beyond the French Eye) (19).*

The research sees modern international languages like: English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and German, to mention a few as First class languages because directly or indirectly, through the tool of colonization, they have contributed to developing others, especially the third-world continents and countries like Africa and Nigeria. Based on this, Igbo language which is spoken in Enugu does not in any way possess the same kind of developmental force as French, which was a language of Colonization and has crossed bounds into the Anglophone world. This is the reason why the paper appreciates the idea of Shelly Shah in her article titled *Language and its' Importance to the Society* which states that:

*Since language is a great medium of communication, the assumption has been made that if the people of the world have the same language, it may help a great deal in removing the cultural barriers and bring the people of the world nearer to each other, thereby serving the cause of international understanding and cooperation. No doubt, a universal language may help in the cultural unification of the people of the world and remove misunderstandings that grow out of the inability to communicate effectively. However, the practical difficulty is to find out such a language.*

(<https://www.sociologydiscussion.com/essay/language-and-its-importance-to-society-essay>)

This assertion shows that Enugu State is in the limelight of holistically embracing globalization since it was one of the first states of Nigeria to embrace French Language as early as 1959. This is why the state houses the most developed city in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria with an economy that is more stable than other parts of the geopolitical zone. This also confirms the clear mission of the Alliance française of Nigeria which is the dissemination of the language and culture for the development and upliftment of its host state and city, as published on Business Connect titled 'About the Alliance Française of Nigeria (Enugu)':

*For over a century, the Alliance Française has seen through an ambitious project: Spreading French language and culture well beyond the borders of France. A network of associations set up throughout the world has been benefiting from the Alliance's mark of quality to disseminate French language abroad...*

[https://businesses.connectnigeria.com/view\\_details/the-alliance-fran%C3%A7aise-nigeria-enugu-47457.html](https://businesses.connectnigeria.com/view_details/the-alliance-fran%C3%A7aise-nigeria-enugu-47457.html).

The Alliance Française in Enugu has a training centre named Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD) where Teachers of French in Primary, Secondary Schools, and Colleges of Education are retrained once in a while. These are character molders who go back to their institutions to give back what they received to students. That is the best form of developmental stride anybody can think of.

### 3. Methodology of the Study

#### 3.1. Study Area

The study area is French Language and Development, and the research is carried out in Enugu State, Nigeria.

#### 3.2. Procedure

The design of the research is descriptive, explorative, and investigative. The bulk of the materials for the Literature review came from journal articles, questionnaires, conference papers, textbooks, and internet articles.

### 4. Data Analysis/Discussion

Basically, two groups were involved in the arrangement, which are:

- The working class, and
- Students

This was done to generate more detailed feedback on the issue of French language and its contributions to the development of Enugu State. This was done to view the different perceptions of the two groups of people (The working class and the students) on their different encounters with French as a language and how it has been beneficial to them. The questionnaires were given to the respondents based on their Ages, Educational backgrounds, marital status, and General experiences. Some of the respondents were below the age of 30, in their middle age (35-45), and between the age bracket of (45-60) i.e. before retirement. The striking outcome is that some respondents are aware of the developments brought about by French language in Enugu while some are unaware of it. The questionnaires were given to people from different walks of life apart from the students who were met in their different schools and in different parts of Enugu State, both rural and urban areas, who have to gather different views about the developmental power of French language in Enugu state. In other words, the questionnaires were designed in a simple way to include multiple-choice questions and binary

'yes/no' answers. It equally has 'don't know' columns where respondents can input their own comments. One thousand eight hundred (1,800) questionnaires were shared with the respondents, and 940 people responded to the questionnaires anonymously.

People (Men/Women Issued Questionnaire)	Total no. of Respondents	Percentage no.
	940	100%
People below the age of 30	235	25%
People between the ages of 35-40	376	40%
People between the ages of 45-60	329	35%

Table 1

## 5. Discussions: Implications for the Development of Enugu State

From the table above, 235 out of 940 or 25% of the respondents below the age of 30 are not aware of the developmental contributions of French Language in Enugu State. Some of them who added their comments think that they do not have much to gain from French because they are still studying and do not seem to be exposed yet to the labor market. These seemingly young people do not really understand that French as a language has come to stay, as confirmed by Mokobia that: *French Language is second rated international language after English in terms of the number of persons who speak it* (<https://www.globalacademicgroup.com/journals/the%20nigerian%20academic%20forum/Jiff60.pdf>). This group of respondents may not actually understand how French can strategically place them in the world of Labor Market until they finish their studies. The table also shows that 376 persons, who form 40% of the total respondents (940), understand and appreciate that the knowledge of French as a language has contributed immensely to the development of Enugu state. This conforms to Ndukauba's view in her article titled '*French Language and National Development: The Case of Nigeria*' (2020) for a Nigerian speaker of French: *You understand better other people's culture, and there is mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence, you acquaint yourself with scientific and technological discoveries. When you travel, you make friends more easily. You are able to communicate with locals, and you enjoy your trips better* (<https://valleyinternational.net>). Nigerian travelers who speak International languages find life easier than the ones who cannot speak. This is the reason why some young people who travel to places like: Canada, Belgium, France, China, and Japan are placed on a compulsory language program for at least a period of one year. This is often the case because it will help equip them and make them more acquainted with the new environment. On the other hand, 329 persons, who make up 35% of the respondents and are between the ages of 45-60 years understand and appreciate the contributions of a language like French in the development of Enugu. Some of these people confessed to having traveled to places like: South Africa, Portugal, France, and Italy and appear to be experienced in life. This group of persons has tasted, to an extent, the benefits that accompany an international language like French. This is why Olusa *et al.*, in their article titled *The Role of French Language towards the Development of Nigeria*, posit:

*Some French companies, through their educational policy that is based mainly on French Educational System, have been able to contribute to the Technological Development of Nigeria. Peugeot, founded in 1792 with the aim of producing Peugeot Automobile vehicles, has been able to reach almost all parts of the world, including Nigeria as of then. Apart from this, the French Government has been able to provide a scholarship in so many fields to contribute meaningfully to the area of technological advancement.*

(<https://casirmediapublishing.com/wpcontent/uploads/2019/09/Pages-11-20.pdf>)

The most striking thing is that of these persons between the ages of 45-60 working with those French companies thereby contributing their little quota in the development of their immediate environment especially in the Anglophone world like Enugu. Based on the foregoing, the introduction of French Language in Nigeria has contributed immensely to the development of the nation. This is why Kalgo confirms thus in his article '*La CEDEAO et L'Enseignement de la langue Française au Nigéria*': *Le Cas de la Zone Nord-Ouest du pays (ECOWAS and teaching of French language in Nigeria, 2015): 'Sur le plan économique, le Nigéria a abrité, depuis toujours, des compagnies de commerce de statut international comme Total, CFAO et Peugeot, pour ne citer que cela. La maison de la Peugeot à Kaduna au Nigéria a fourni beaucoup de véhicules aux individus aussi bien qu'aux Governments en Afrique occidentale et au-delà'* (107) (Economically, Nigeria has housed for some time commercial companies of international repute like total, CFAO and Peugeot, to cite but a few. The Peugeot Company at Kaduna in Nigeria has supplied a lot of vehicles to individuals as well as Governments in West Africa and beyond) (Our own translation).

### 5.1. The Opportunity to Study Abroad

An in-depth knowledge of French Language can help the youths gain scholarship opportunities in some Francophone countries of the world like: Canada, Belgium, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, etc. The fun of it is that these students would be exposed to the Francophone system of Education which defers from the Anglophone's. Getting educated elsewhere would give typical Nigerian youth garner some knowledge and experience that can help to uplift their motherland. For this reason, Mokwenye in his article titled '*Aimé Césaire et son Africanité à travers ses oeuvres*' (University French Teachers' Association Journal, 2014) has this to say: *A partir du moment où Césaire est entré en contact avec l'Afrique, grâce à la liaison avec Senghor et pendant toute sa carrière littéraire, il n'a jamais cessé de promouvoir la cause africaine...*(3) 'From the moment when Césaire entered into contact with Africa, due to the connection with Senghor and during all his literary career, he didn't ever cease to promote the African cause' (Our translation). Aimé Césaire, who was a

Caribbean youth, represents the generality of the black race who travel abroad to learn new things for the development of the African continent. Enugu State is not left out of this because some of our respondents studied in France under the scholarship scheme of the French government, came back, and are working in the state.

### 5.2. Conquering Immigration Difficulties

Some respondents confessed to the fact that they were able to get visas to travel to France and other francophone areas of the world because they spoke the language of their host country. The power of a people's language cannot be over-emphasized. One of the requirements for being granted a German Visa as a student is having a knowledge of German language, among other documents (<https://www.germany-visa.org/student-visa/student-visa-visum-zu-studienzwecken/>). This is also the case for studying in France and most of the well-developed countries of the world.

### 5.3. Enhancement of the Scope of Business

One of the rare advantages of knowing the command of a foreign language is to enhance the scope of one's livelihood. This is what French language has done for some Enugu residents who are businessmen. They learnt French in Alliance Française Enugu so they can communicate in countries like; Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Congo, and Senegal.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The adoption of French in Nigeria during late General Sani Abacha's regime was not a mistake as it made France become more interested in Nigeria. This has made the Nigerian nation benefit immensely from France in the area of Technical, Educational, and Trade exchanges. This support from France is also extended to states like Enugu, which is the headquarters of Alliance Française in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. Having x-rayed the contributions of the language called French in Enugu state, the research agrees with the view of the former Minister of State for Education Professor Anthony Anwuka in his speech as published by Azeezat Adedigba on November 2, 2017, in *Premium Times* (titled 'French Language will give Nigerians More Opportunities in International Labor Market': where he said that: *The Nigerian Government has reiterated its commitment to the teaching of French Language in Nigerian Schools, saying being multi-lingual will give Nigerians more opportunities in the International Labour Market...Since Nigeria has adopted French as the second official language, the Federal Ministry of Education through the Nigeria French Language, NFLP, implemented two French Language projects* <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/248135-french-language-will-give-nigerians-opportunities-international-labour-market-minister.html>.

- The Government of Enugu State of Nigeria needs to make French language a compulsory subject in both Primary and Secondary schools so that pupils and students would be exposed early to the numerous benefits of knowing a foreign language of this standard. This would help the children to make the choice of their future career very early in life.
- The Government of Enugu State needs to retrain their teachers of French once in a while to update them on the latest methods of teaching the language to make their classes more communicative and attractive to pupils and students.
- The Government of Enugu State needs to encourage senior students at the level of senior secondary 1-3 to sit for French in the West African Examination Council examinations so that some of them who are interested can study French at the university. This would help in preparing lecturers of the language in Nigerian higher institutions of learning.
- The French Government needs to update its interest level in the francophone world by re-introducing the French Government scholarship scheme for the best graduating students of French for their post-graduate studies in France.
- Again, France needs to encourage Nigerian Primary and Secondary Schools by ensuring that their French language laboratories are well-equipped for better productivity.
- The French Government also needs to Sponsor at least the best 10 3<sup>rd</sup> year university students of French for their linguistic immersion program in France. This will help to strengthen the spirit of competition among the students of that level.
- The Governments of Enugu State and Nigeria need to ensure that French language graduates get employed after their studies. They need to do this by insisting on the employment of qualified graduates to teach French in big schools (Both public and private) instead of employing people who speak the language fluently but lack the paper qualification. This will encourage French students in such a way that they will put in their best in their studies.

## 7. Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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