

# Assessment Of Junior Secondary School French Language Curriculum In Nigeria

Babalola, Jacob Olaniyi PhD

*Department Of French Language*  
*Federal College Of Education Okene, Kogi State, Nigeria*

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## **Abstract**

*Nigeria, as a nation, has witnessed a great transformation ever since the Federal government has adopted education as an instrument of development. Thus, following the declaration of the late President General Sani Abacha in the year 1996 towards making French language a compulsory subject, efforts have been made towards the proper teaching and learning of the language. In this research work, we analyse the Nigeria Junior Secondary School French Language curriculum. The data were sourced from the Junior Secondary School French Language curriculum and were subjected to analysis using Mc Neil's (2006) systemic curriculum theory. This study concludes by highlighting the historical and ideological perspectives that structured the Junior Secondary School French language curriculum and also pointed out the positive and negative sides of the curriculum*

**Keywords:** Curriculum, J.S.S Students, French Language.

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## **I. Introduction**

The word curriculum depicts different meaning form and purpose for different thinkers. The task of curriculum development is apparently building a relationship among content/subject matter people like students, teachers, parents and society. According to Miol and Lewis, curriculum is a set of goals which provides opportunities of engaging students with various kinds of information and learning techniques (Lewis 1972).

The history of foreign language education can be traced to the world of the great thinkers' philosophers and teachers like Quintilian, Aristotle, Erasmus and Jean-Luis Vives (Huges, 1968). Education is considered as an instrument for change and transformation. The educational sector of Nigeria has witnessed a huge government investment as well as dynamic and rapid transformation since the Federal Government has adopted education as an instrument of transforming individual. This has eventually led the Federal government to clarify the philosophy and objectives that education of the nation focuses on. Again, it clearly spelt out in clear terms the policies that will guide foreign language in Nigeria. Based on Rodgers and Richards (2001) declaration that about 60% of today's world population is multilingual. Thus, from the historical perspectives, bilingualism or multilingualism appears to be the norm. therefore, it is normal prerequisite in today's society for an individual to engage, on regular basis with more than one language in their day-to-day activities. Also, in academics and policy making, language is equally seen as an instrument with which all human activities, social, economic, political, educational etc. is attached with. In essence, no nation, no society nor any organisation can function or develop without language. That is why Adedimeji (2006) maintains that « As no human can survive fully without language, no nation can fully progress and develop without a common linguistic basis ».

## **Teaching of French Language in Nigeria**

The origin of French language teaching is dated back to 1859 (Omolewa 1971:379) when the subject was introduced at King's College, Lagos but failed to last long. Around 1960, during the independence era, the subject was later reintroduced. (Sonaiya, 2002). Thus, since independence, French has regained its stand in Nigeria because of the fact that the nation is well surrounded by the French speaking nations. The Addis-Ababa conference of November 1961 equally supported and declared that the language should be taught in Anglophone countries and English in Francophone countries of Africa. The recommendation was well received by Nigeria to the extent that all private sector proprietors and voluntary agencies that are running schools embraced the idea and keyed into it. So, it was later not strange that the Federal Government gave it a maximum support by insisting that the language should be learnt in all secondary schools in the country.

Precisely in January 1971, the then Federal Commissioner for Education, Mr. Wenike Briggs made an official pronouncement that French should be taught in all grant-aided secondary schools. Both the anglophone and francophone nations supported the idea of communicating and promoting each other's official languages in their secondary schools. For the Anglophones, the first effort to promote the teaching and learning of French

was made at the tertiary levels with the famous “Madam Thibault Method”. It was later realized by Organisation of African Unity (O.A.U) now Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that the need to foster unity among the newly independent nations brought about a policy for linguistic integration of Africa. Thus, it was later resolved that both English and French should be taught in schools at both secondary and tertiary levels. By implications, Nigeria has now become a bi-lingual nation. The policy has been signed by the French Embassy and the Federal and State and governments. The reason being that most of the African countries are colonized by France.

The evidence is shown in Table 1

Table indicating the official languages in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa, most official languages at the national level appear to be colonial languages such as French, Arabic, Portuguese, or English.

S/N	Languages	Number of Nations where the language is official
1	French	19
2	English	17
3	Major African Languages e.g. Kiswahili, Hausa, Somali	8
4	Portuguese	5
5	Arabic	4
6	Spanish	1

**Source: Bamigbose (1991 P 31)**

For a proper implementation of bilingual philosophies and ideologies in Nigeria, there was a division of the policy into the stages

**Table 2: Schedule for programme implementation**

Stage	Duration	Regulation
First	September 2001 to October 2004	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. French to be made a compulsory core subject from J.S.S. 1 to S.S.S III</li> <li>2. A pass in French as a criterion for promotion from J.S.S 3 to S.S.S. I</li> <li>3. Credit/Pass in French as requirement for admission into the University.</li> </ol>
Second	2004 – October 2008	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Basic Knowledge of French required for recruitment.</li> <li>2. Basic Knowledge of French required for promotion for civil servants.</li> </ol>

**Source: (Personal Communication). In a journal of studies in curriculum. Abuja (2002). WCI, Nigeria chapter**

### **Ideology and Philosophy of The French Language in Nigeria**

The teaching plays a very important role in the language’s acquisition and linguistic policy. The language in which the teaching is offered appears to be a policy choice. Other formal institutions are the public services and the media.

Bamgbose (1999:111) highlights three types of policy namely: the official linguistic policy, pedagogical and general. The official linguistic policy reflects the governmental decision, the pedagogical linguistic policy focuses on the decision of the Ministry of Education towards the languages of instruction at the different levels and the general linguistic policy reflects the people’s idea: the widely used and accepted languages. The fundamental principles of linguistic policy in Nigeria stated in 1977 are into two fields: the principle of mother tongue and that of multilingualism. Consequently, according to official reference text, the National Policy on Education (1981), at the primary level, the language of instruction must be primarily the mother tongue or language of immediate environment and to continue with one of the three major national languages (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) as the secondary. Thus, each child must learn one of the three major languages in addition to the mother tongue and English language. We already notice that right from the beginning, the Nigerian pupil is confronted with so many languages to learn. Beside this, the fourth edition of the National Policy on Education (2004:10) states clearly that: « Accordingly French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and Junior Secondary Schools but nonvocational elective, elective at the senior secondary school».

The NPE also put into consideration the interaction with our francophone neighbours as very important. Going by that, one can say that the junior secondary schools in Nigeria aimed at

- a) Promoting spoken French
- b) Developing understanding of written French as well as
- c) Encouraging a reasonable use of the language as a means of interaction between the Nigerian citizens and their francophone neighbours.

Adopting Mc Neil (2006) principle, it is established that this curriculum appears to be systemic in nature. From the point of view of Mc Neil (2006), systemic curriculum has power as the central focus with emphasis on prescribed instructional materials, highlighted goals and objectives with series of indicators deployed as parameter for measuring learning outcomes.

This systemic curriculum equally talks about the areas for deciding what to teach. This comprises of curricular decisions which occur on four different levels: societal, institutional, instructional and personal. It also stipulates that each level differs from the other on the scope and basis when decisions about curriculum are made. Not only that, it specifies the importance of each level of curricular decision making varies based on context.

Furthermore, the systemic curriculum is made to provide a systematic means of developing instruction that would give room to the performance capabilities of the learner. This is established in the conceptions of the French language curriculum of Junior secondary schools in Nigeria. More facts would be revealed on this under the vital conceptions of the curriculum.

There is a clear difference between the systemic curriculum and other types of curricula in the following areas. For instance, the humanistic curriculum supports individualism and heavily focused on motivating learners to discover who they are and not shaping them into a form that has been designed in advance to meet some specific needs. Social reconstruction on its own part preaches the use of thinking skills and knowledge in ways that are best for learning with application of suitable methods.

### **What the Curriculum Preaches**

To start with, it is very important to highlight some of the general and specific objectives as well as the organization of the curriculum being analyzed. Some of the general aims include:

- a) To teach the learners to communicate effectively in the French language through the systematic use of suitable methods.
- b) To enlarge and widen the scope of students' knowledge about French and the French speaking world
- c) To function as a synthesis of past Nigerian curriculum and those of other nations and benefit from the experiences of the past in order to fit into the present modern Nigerian context.
- d) To aid textbook and instructional materials' developers to produce instructional materials that will suitably reflect the general goals.

For the specific objectives, I would like to focus on the objectives of two classes to highlight the procedural model attached with this curriculum.

**Table 3: Specific objectives for J.S.S One and Two French Language Curriculum**

S/N	J.S.S ONE	J.S.S TWO
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Description:</b> Learners should be able to describe some physical features or characteristics of someone</li> <li>- <b>Talking about personal features:</b> Learners should be able to talk about individual's attitudes</li> <li>- <b>Talking about time:</b> Learners should be able to say time.</li> <li>- <b>Describing the rural life:</b> Learners should be able to talk generally about rural and urban life.</li> <li>- <b>Talking about what we do to distract oneself:</b> Learners should be able to use some words that are linked to leisure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Talking about people's characteristics:</b> Learners should be able to use some key words to describe people</li> <li>- <b>Explaining attitudes:</b> Learners should be able to explain or give his own opinion</li> <li>- <b>Explaining the features of rural life:</b> Learners should be able to give out the features of rural life</li> <li>- <b>Explaining the features of urban life:</b> Learners should be able to give out features of urban life.</li> <li>- <b>Talking about similarities and differences:</b> Learners should be able to talk about similarities and differences between village and city life.</li> </ul>

**Source: Federal Ministry of Education. Junior Secondary Education Curriculum.**

### **Curriculum Organization for the JSS**

The curriculum takes adequate care of Junior Secondary schools one to three academic year. Each academic year is divided into topics, which spell out the specific objectives. As stated in Table 4 content from Junior secondary school 1 to Junior Secondary School III with clear content and how such a content would be sequenced and organized.

Applying Mc Neil's conception of curriculum, the concepts follow a humanistic design. What this implies is that a curriculum should be based on individualism and self-actualization for effective and constructive teaching and learning to take place. This simply means that the curriculum is interested in making learners to achieve a certain level of linguistic competence with the French language at different points of their lives. That is why series of communicative activities are introduced with the intention of introducing different kinds of linguistic competence at each stage of their lives. Thus, each objective is formulated with the purpose of transmitting facts and skills i.e. linguistic skills for use.

For example:

1. Obj # Students/Learners will identify vocabulary to state the features that are peculiar to each individual like small, big, black etc.
2. Obj # Learners will utilize different adjectives to describe each individual in oral form in the target language

### Steps for Curriculum Decision Making

This consists of the various methods and possible means of defining and highlighting the educational needs with the aims of setting priorities. This can occur as a result of creating new values and orientation, the need for efficiency and preferably suggest the case for these programs and justification for addition or subtraction of some contents. Examining the Nigeria French language curriculum for J.S.S, it appears as if to say it has a mixed models and approaches to decision.

S/N	J.S.S ONE	J.S.S TWO	J.S.S. THREE
1	Talking about people's characteristics	Talking about peoples' characteristics	Naming the sickness and diseases
2	Talking about personal characteristics	Explaining attitudes (judgements and appreciation)	Discussing the causes of sickness
3	Saying the time	Talking about characteristics of rural life.	Talking about the affected population
4	Describe rural life	Talking about the characteristics of urban life	Saying the importance of hygiene
5	Talking about what we do to distract oneself	Talking about the similarities and differences of urban and rural life.	Talking about health professions
6	Talking about journey	Describing the great festivals in the community	Talking about: Pharmacy, hospital etc.

**Table 4**

**Source: Federal Ministry of Education: Junior Secondary Education Curriculum French JSS 1-3**

Having critically examined the above conception of curriculum development for the Junior Secondary School in Nigeria Educational system, I would like to submit that the curriculum follows strictly the behavioural psychology which is similar to systemic curriculum. According to Wikipedia « Behaviourism is a systemic approach to understand the behaviour of humans and other animals » From the point of view of Mc Neils (2006) the systemic curriculum suggests exposing students to prescribed skills, contents with related outcomes, objectives and assessment to measure changes in behaviour. Put simply, the systemic curriculum outlines a linear model of learning that preaches teaching from simple to complex, from known to unknown while breaking learning tasks into manageable components with the application of direct methodology which gives no room for teaching through translation. For instance, the said curriculum has program description with intent and content stressed. The curriculum in question takes into consideration the age grade while defining the context and making. The two models involved are categorized as futuristics and national models. Ralph Tyler who happens to be the developer of the model defines it as traditionalist and business model approach. This type of model preaches a technical procedure for curriculum; thus, the names end depicts approach. Tyler (1950) enumerated four basic elements: objectives, activities, organization and evaluation. This stands to be protocol applied in French language curriculum for the Junior Secondary School in Nigeria. For instance, in the curriculum, there are concise formulation of specific objectives with adequate selection of activities both from teachers and learners to achieve desirable objectives of the lesson. Also, series of activities which would help in presenting the materials comfortably to the leaners are up at the last stage. This is shown in table 5 bellow. Knowing fully well that majority of the learners are coming across the foreign language learning for the first time in their life, the information in this table must be taken into perfect consideration.

**Table 5: How to apply the curriculum**

**In the interest of the instructor, the following information are necessary**

The teaching of French language at the Junior secondary school must be concentrated majorly on the oral comprehension, written and the practical, especially through fun activities. The introduction of written is essential at this level given that the learners has developed more in the oral competence at the primary level

**Source: Federal Ministry of Education: Junior Secondary Education Curriculum French J.S.S 1-3**

**Translated from pg viii**

### Points on the J.S.S French Language Curriculum

For effective dissemination and application of the Junior Secondary School French Language curriculum, the program is organized on the basis of communicative aims and objectives, contents, teachers and learners' activities, learning resources as well as evaluation.

- Under Communicative Objectives: it is imperative for teachers of foreign language like French to indicate, before the commencement of the lesson, what objectives to be attained at the end of the lesson.

- Under Language Expression: The teacher of foreign language should bear in mind that for the objectives to be realized, there is a great need to make a selection of the appropriate language expression to deploy taking into consideration the students' level of maturity and age for the learning objectives to be realized.
- Vocabulary Usage: The teacher should find the appropriate use of words and lexical items to be deployed for his teaching while the grammar column provides the main grammatical contents to be learnt under the lesson period. It should be noted that the grammar teaching should not be the central focus.
- Under Suggested Class Activities: There should be cordial interaction between the teacher and the learners. The teacher should endeavour to find different activities that will arouse the interest of learners to learn. Such activities are song, poems, drama and quiz. He/she should make sure such activity is ready before the lesson. Put simply, the lesson should not be the teacher's centeredness.
- Time Table: For effective realization of the teaching and learning of the curriculum contents, it is advisable to create three periods at least in a week for the teaching of the subject. Each period must last for at least forty minutes.
- The last column is Evaluation where teacher make sure he/she gives different exercise to evaluate the level of his learners' compliances at the end of each unit.

**Source: Federal Ministry of Education: Junior Secondary Education Curriculum 2009.**

As suggested by Tyler, objectives should have something to do with the learner, the social condition and the subject matter. This is affirmed in the curriculum, for instance, the learner should be able to describe the physical features of someone in French. After all the above criteria has been established, what to follow is for the activities to be organized in sequential order that is most appropriate for the learning. After the implementation of various activities, what next is for the learners to be evaluated. The evaluation suggests how appropriate the students have achieved the objectives which should be done periodically, and in this case, done at the end of each lesson. Sometimes, learners can equally be assessed at the middle of the lesson.

On the issue of futurist model, it is a fact that the lesson should be taught in such a way that whatever skills that are acquired in a lesson should be applied in future communication knowing fully well that Nigeria is surrounded completely by francophone countries, one can boldly say that the Federal Government deems it fit to incorporate the subject in the curriculum for the purpose of communication with the neighbouring countries. This is because one of the main goals of education is to prepare students to compete in the society of the future. This is reflected in the first general objective of the curriculum that maintain «enseigner comment communiquer en français par l'emploi systématique d'une méthode communicative » [to teach how to communicate in French by systematic use of communicative method] **Translation.**

### **Learning Principles and Theories**

There are series of teaching and learning principles and theories according to various researches carried out by different scholars. Among such theories and principles are: Socio-cultural theory, Behaviourism, Motivational, Social learning theory etc. According to my own perception, the J.S.S French language curriculum in Nigeria contains a behaviourist approach. According to the behaviourists, this is an approach that focuses on how people learn through their interactions with the environment. As a result, one views the curriculum as a product that lays emphasis on measurable behaviour of students for instance:

- Description of physical features of someone
- Providing response to classrooms instructions
- Talking about what we do to distract oneself

Mc Neil (2006) also affirmed that cognitive psychology and information processing theories have a place in systemic curriculum. A viable example and impact of these two theories in a curriculum can be described in two different forms. First, the ability of the teacher to know where and how to use knowledge and strategies. Second is the breaking of information into meaningful units. The same thing applies to how curriculum is being analysed. In the "How to apply the curriculum" section, the provision is made for the teacher to use his own discretion in carrying out this task. Thus, the instructor is free to make use of the reasoning ability of the students to know whether to add more to the existing ones. This attribute brings out the information processing theories. According to this information processing theories, teachers can affect how learners receive, process and apply information. This happens when teachers or instructors decide on the need to accommodate new information or do other thing to help the comprehension skill of the learners. The breaking of curriculum content should be based on maturity, age, class that represent another influence of both the cognitive and information processing theories of instruction. Thus, learning theories make provision for the better idea of the purpose behind teaching and learning, hence it serves as a guide to both learners and teacher on how to achieve the basic competencies in language skills.

### **Standardization of Curriculum Adjustment and its Evaluation**

Another great impact on the curriculum is evaluation. This is because of the fact that the results of the assessment will surely determine whether the teacher will need to change his/her method of teaching or not. For example, in this J.S.S curriculum for French language, the evaluation column states clearly that continuous assessment which could be in form of take-home assignment, group assignment, class test individual or group project and terminal exams could be used to pass a judgement on student's progress. In another way round, teachers are equally expected to give some test to detect whether the objectives are realizable or not while the government either state or federal has the sole responsibility of conducting the assessment for the terminal class. Therefore, it can be deduced that there is a form of alignment for there is a banking model of education. Teachers give orders with the intention of equipping their students to get prepared by memorizing and repeating what has been taught and learnt. Put simply, education is now realized as an act of dumping, in which the learners are now recognized as reservoirs and the teachers are seen as depositors. This is necessary because there are required standards for different subject area with stipulations as regards number of hours of teaching per term and proficiency test. As testing is very important, most teachers are now compelled to teach to the test. This makes the teaching to be in conformity with curriculum standard with more emphasis on observation of change as means of assessment. As regard the situation of Junior Secondary School French Language curriculum in Nigeria, I would like to state clearly that it makes learning to progress from known to unknown, simple to complex having considered the age in the preparation of the content. This, I consider very good. It equally followed the simple linear approach to the development of behavioural goals. With this, the instructors have the mandate to organize learning experiences to have maximum cumulative effect. Goals and objectives are stated in such a way that learners will be able to progress adequately having taken into consideration their age limit and experience in preparing the contents. Also, it makes provision for active participation through the interaction of teachers and learner's activities through the way objectives are stated for instance, students should be able to say their age. So, if a student cannot do this to a satisfactory level, it is a serious indication that there is a need to do other things to enhance student's ability.

Equally, the inclusion of evaluation in all steps is also considered as a good method of enhancing learning. This one will serve as a measuring technique and as an instrument to detect the learning progress as well as diagnostic tools.

Summarily, the fact that there are areas of positivism does not indicate that there are no flaws in the curriculum for the J.S.S students. To start with, the curriculum has a restricted range of student knowledge and skills, thereby enhancing rote learning. Not only that, it does not give room for explicit curriculum because of the fact that it has narrowly interpreted objectives. In the contemporary curriculum, there should be need for both explicit and implicit curriculum in all round development. In addition to that, one realizes that planning this type of curriculum wastes a lot of time and it is equally problematic. As a result, the beginning teachers and teachers in training most especially the teaching practice students might find it extremely difficult to apply during the course of their teaching exercise.

## **II. Conclusion**

From the discussion above, one can summarize that curriculum practice is a dynamic process. This idea of curriculum is hardly new, but the way we understand and theorize it has altered over the decades. Planning and developing curriculum is focused on guiding and directing both the teachers and the learners to achieve the broad objectives of educational system. My discussion has surveyed the underlying principles of Junior Secondary School Curriculum of French Language in Nigeria. This discussion has succeeded in highlighting the historical and ideological perspectives that structured the French language curriculum for students in Nigeria and also pointed out the merits and demerits of the said curriculum.

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