# FRENCH LANGUAGE: A TOOL FOR CAREER BOOST

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***Abstract***

*In a world where countries are beginning to understand the need to forge partnership and alliance, where globalization is becoming the order of the day, it becomes imperative to learn and adapt the culture, language and belief of other nations. Countries worldwide are experiencing the effects of globalization, which has led to social and economic change in many nations. It has also had direct implications for the language practices of businesses worldwide. Language has always been the tool for integration and as a result plays a key role in globalization process which in turn leads to job creation. Currently, a good number of jobs available especially in West Africa require employees who are competent in French and in any other regional language such as English, Portuguese and Spanish. This is because, multinational corporations and international organizations are trending towards a more multilingual environment, where receptiveness to working cross-culturally, and across languages becomes the norm. This paper examines the role of French language in job creation process. It examines different sectors in which knowledge in French language can lead to job opportunities. Furthermore, this study proposes ways to improve on language learning especially as it concerns French language.*

**Keywords**: Career, French language, tool, globalization, job creation, opportunities

## Introduction

According to UNECA (2012), there is growing consensus that education and vocational skills are sine qua non conditions for young people to enter the labour market and increase their productivity potential. Universities across West Africa graduate students yearly but according to Bensch (2017), the reality is that many recent graduates and school leavers are struggling to find employment. He stated further that in Ghana, for example only 10% of school leavers find work within the first year, while 7.9 million youths in Nigeria remain unemployed.

Thus, with the high competition for jobs and the few opportunities in workplaces it becomes necessary to accompany professional skills with the knowledge of language. In today's world, due to globalization, it does not suffice to have only the professional skills need for a particular job. There is also need to possess the linguistic competence in another foreign language to transcend beyond one's borders. Many countries want their new employees to possess foreign language skills and need people with high levels of proficiency. Moreover, foreign language plays a role as a means to understand other cultures, while understanding cultures of customers is beneficial in running businesses. The world opens widely to meet people from different cultures and understanding the customer's culture helps organizations manage conflicts arising from cultural barriers or differences (Schaub, 1992).

Often, people have the notion that learning a new language is a daunting task. Languages are the bedrock of the world's cultural heritage. Knowing a second language increases one's employability in a global environment. French language is a good choice especially in West Africa where many countries use French as an official language. According to experts job vacancies advertised by public employment services showed that proficiency in two foreign languages are asked for in the case of two out of five vacancies where language skills are a requirement.

An interview conducted by ERASMUS (2017) shows that foreign language is the preferred method of checking the applicant's ability, and is used by two thirds of businesses. Many businesses are looking for people who are fluent in other languages. French language skill provides a competitive edge in career choices in the contemporary job market (Ebling, 2005).

## French Language in the globe

In many respects, French can be considered a global language. With over 220 million speakers, it ranks as the sixth most widely spoken language in the world, after Chinese, Hindi, English, Spanish and Arabic. Worldwide, French is still often considered to be one the most practical language. According to the website, *Alliance Francaise* (2018):

*While any language will be useful for some jobs or for some regions, French is the only foreign language that can be useful throughout the world as well as in the United States. French as a foreign language is the second most frequently taught language in the world after English. The International Organization of Francophonie has 51 member states and*

*governments. Of these, 28 countries have French as an official language. French is the only language other than English spoken on five continents. French and English are the only two global languages.*

According to a post on *Alliance Française* website, concerning the recent listing on international jobs (8/30/05) distributed by the US State Department, 204 required or preferred French, 71 a UN language (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish), 53 Spanish, 19 Arabic, 9 Portuguese, 12 Russian, 4 German, 3 Italian, Chinese 6.

French language is well established in Europe, North America and the Caribbean, Africa and the Mediterranean. It is shared by the 57 member states and governments and 20 observers of the International Organisation of La Francophonie (IOF). Furthermore, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2014: 6) points out that, French language is both a working language and an official language of the United Nations, the European Union, UNESCO, NATO, the International Olympic Committee, the International Red Cross and international courts. French is the language of the three cities where the EU institutions are headquartered: Strasbourg, Brussels and Luxembourg.

**Market demand for French language competence**

For global competitors, the most very important factor is the ability to communicate on a wider range, quicker and clearer basis and ability in communication is focused on foreign languages which are widely used (Walters, 1990). According to Faniran and Keji (2016: 67), "most Nigerian graduates are now aware of the facts that one should not solely rely on his or her course of study". The employment situation in Nigeria has never given any room for relying only on your area of specialization. Therefore, French can serve as a booster to one's dream forgetting good jobs in both national and international establishments and companies. As one of the most widely used languages in the world, French is very attractive to many who need it for "its socio-economic, political and strategic purposes" (Oguegbune-Okwenu, 2000: 55). Language is an essential tool that we use to communicate with other people in our daily activities and working lives. The work and market places of the 21st century are and will be markedly different from that of the past. Experience has shown that people skilled in two foreign languages can easily pursue a career in various domains

As regards translation, a translator is someone who works between at least two written languages, working with documents such as textbooks, instruction manuals and newspaper articles. Translation is a profession that appeals to French speakers because of the flexibility it offers. In many cases you can work remotely, thanks to the Internet, and set your own schedule if you work on a freelance basis. According to Chloef (2018), in most cases, it is advisable to specialize in a specific domain (law, science, medicine, education) so as to target a specific niche. As a matter of fact there are professional bodies that oversee the activities of translation activities such as American Translator's Association (ATA), International Federation of Translators, Proz etc.

Furthermore, one can also develop a career in interpreting either community interpreting or conference interpreting. An interpreter is one who works with at least two

spoken languages. Interpreters are most often needed in conferences and courtrooms, hospitals etc. Simultaneous interpretation is the most in-demand form, in which a language is decoded as it's being spoken, as in the exemplary case of UN interpreters. Not only must you be extremely comfortable not only with speaking, you also have to decipher non-standard accents and find apt and equivalent expressions across languages as well. Like translation, interpretation is a highly competitive field. Like translation, there are many associations that regulate interpreting activities: International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), APTIC etc.

Another choice of career is the Foreign Service. A country's Foreign Service provides diplomatic services to other countries. Embassies and consulates that are staffed by Foreign Service officers are required to speak the local language. As a Foreign Service officer with a mastery of French, your placement options are numerous! These prestigious positions are highly competitive and applicants are weeded out by way of a rigorous examination process.

Moreover, one of the most popular field or career where bilinguals or multi-linguals look out for is the Educational sector. In Nigeria for example, French language is taught from the primary right to secondary school. At the university, it is field of study on its own. Another opportunity for bilinguals is developing a career in Non-governmental organization (NGO). Non-governmental organizations are constantly looking for people who speak several languages. Organisations such as *International Federation of Human Rights, Action Contre La Faim* etc. are in constant search of bilinguals especially French language. Due to globalization, businesses have expanded across the globe and many investors move into other countries. As a result, foreign language is necessary (Cook, 2007). According to Odlin (2007), foreign language plays a remarkable role in communicating and creates better employment opportunities

Many bilinguals have carved a niche for themselves in the entertainment and media industries which happen to be another sector that requires foreign language skills. Presently, new opportunities are opening up. This is a positive sign for French language speakers who understand another foreign language.

**Common Benefits of French Language**

It is no doubt that the ability to speak a second international language has always been an advantage and will continue to be. According to *Igboanusi et al.* (2008), the two former Secretary Generals of the United Nations, Mr. Boutrous Boutrous Ghali and Kofi Annan, are said to be at home with no less than two international languages. Again, prominent multinational groups and firms list English and French among their official languages UN, UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, FAO, AU, ECOWAS, ELF, FIFA, CAF, etc. and ability to speak French is evidently an advantage to the individual. Further afield, The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC),

the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) etc. All these organizations or institutions use French language a one of the official languages. Thus, Nigerians for example, who have a mastery of French language have the opportunity to work with these great diplomatic organizations.

Ajiboye (1999) opines that French could be regarded as one of the most important foreign languages used by most countries. Most of these countries need to interact to form unified bodies for economic, political and technological advancement. French language, particularly in Nigeria, needs to be studied by Nigeria youths especially because of its socio-cultural benefits. It is possible for Nigerian graduates to be keenly interested in French culture and civilization. The knowledge of French culture and civilization could engender unity and solidarity. When one knows about a country, one can easily relate with the country, one can initiate economic ties with the French speaking countries; given that culture is inseparable from a language. From another perspective, knowledge of French cultural will enhance easy access to French speaking nations for entertainment, commercial or educational benefits.

Socially, the knowledge of French will help to strengthen relations with other people from French speaking countries. Nigerian youths can attend seminars, conferences and meetings in French speaking countries if they have the knowledge of the language and they will be able to understand the bone of discourse in the programme. According to Brann M.C (1976:10) there is no serious-minded organization political, scientific, philosophical or even athletic which does not have the ambition to associate with other groups, sharing its idea outside its national boundaries. Therefore, the language promotes inter-personal relationship among the speakers. Furthermore, those who engage in sports activities need to know more about French. This will help them in their careers. The importance of French language is inestimable. There is a demand for foreign language competencies in business administration (Ali, 2009). The demand of foreign language in business administration is for communication. In sharing information among employees, employers and customers, foreign language plays important role both inside and outside the company.

**Recommendations and Conclusion**

Today in the world, employers need personnel with new and relevant specialized skills. They will require workers with a knowledge and understanding of the relevant domains such as management, energy; health care; education; environmental management; engineering; legal services etc. Furthermore, they will demand future employees with international experience but above all, they will prefer those who are bilingual and even multilingual (Texiera 2004: 8).

Thus, this paper recommends that Nigerians and other West African English speaking countries should study French and other foreign languages if they want to be successful in the business or career. For a democratized nation like Nigeria, to attain greatness, the issue of second official language should not be handled with levity. There is need to propagate the role of French language, particularly, in African Anglophone countries.

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