

FRENCH LANGUAGE: A TOOL IN ADDRESSING SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria is not left out of security challenges like other countries. Though as a nation, Nigeria was formerly viewed as the regional police, stemming insecurity in West African states and restoring peace and order. However, Nigeria has now turned out to become a peculiar security case. The increase in Nigeria's insecurity today affects its development as a nation. To overcome this hydra-headed phenomenon called insecurity, successful governments, both military and civilian, have severally proffered seemingly workable solutions, yet this challenge still raises its ugly head. One is disturbed that insecurity is almost becoming an insurmountable challenge in present-day Nigeria. The thrust of this paper, therefore, is to evaluate the role French Language can play in achieving sustainable national security and development in Nigeria. Literature was reviewed and also suggestions were made concerning how French as the second official language in the country can be looked into, in order to assist in the fight against insecurity to attract sustainable development in the country.

Keywords: Development, French language, government, national security, Nigeria.

Introduction

Insecurity has become a re-occurring decimal in international politics today. As it has always been the case, matters concerning national security or insecurity often snowball into global concern. Similarly, various solutions have been proffered to overcome this challenge, yet it persists. Most nations around the globe are, however, very determined to safeguard their national security and corporate existence. In order to achieve this, they employ different measures or dimensions and connections to re-strategize, cooperate, network and as well share intelligence

on a daily basis. In doing this, these nations enter in most cases, into strategic security partnership with other nation states to engage one another in mutual defense for the purpose of riding their territories of threats to national security and development. (Tolu, 2011: 237).

Since Nigeria is not exempted from these perennial security challenges, it is reasonable that continuous efforts are made to stem the issue of insecurity in the country. Nigeria also needs to adopt this dimension of strategic security partnership with other nations. To achieve this course of strategic security, partnership and mutual defence cooperation with other nations, especially geographical neighbours, are of utmost importance.

This then brings us to the importance of language. It would not be disputed that language plays a paramount role in communication in all human activities. As such, without communication powered by a common language, Nigeria cannot come to gain the knowledge, awareness, and information needed to strengthen the strategic security partnership and cooperation noting that the country is strategically located among francophone countries. To guide us properly on this paper, attempts have been made to clarify some basic concepts central to this discourse such as national security, development, national development and French language.

National Security

The term national security has no single universally accepted definition. There are, however, various definitions providing an overview of the usages of the concept. Some of these definitions will be examined for the purpose of this discourse. According to Bello (2015:24), national security is seen as something that is equivalent to the national interest. To him, national security is predicated upon economic security, energy, environmental security, food security, among others. A concise working definition by Premarathe that paraphrases the aspects of the definition by Harold Brown and Paleri views national security in the mode below: As safeguarding the sovereignty, territorial integrity, citizenry and socio-economic functionality of a nation from an aggressor intent on undermining a particular valued aspect of a nation through violent or unjust means (2017:3). Nigeria, now Africa's largest economy, continues its downward trend and fell seven times in 2016 because of weak public finances as a result of lower oil exports and the security situation (Ubong, 2016:5). Nigeria has indeed, in recent times, witnessed an unprecedented level of security challenges. Akande, during a dialogue session, opined that in recent years the country has been grappling with security issues bordering on terrorism, religious and ethnic crisis, attacks on oil installations, kidnapping, armed robbery, attacks by herdsmen and the likes.

In addition to the security challenges mentioned above:

Nigeria is experiencing other challenges such as increase in cross-border crimes, lack of development, poor security network, Niger Delta militancy and the Boko Haram group that changed content, context and texture of national security. While the militants in Niger Delta operated mostly within that region, the Boko Haram has earmarked the whole country as terrain. However, most of their operations have been in the Northeast Nigeria (Sheriff, 2017:8). To Ubong, the dangerous dimension of this group being its incessant moves into some neighbouring countries like Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Mali. The Boko Haram group is said to have erected bases in these countries where they coordinate their activities (2017:2). Since these Francophone countries are immediately surrounding Nigeria, it makes things easy for them to have this external influence and collaboration. These alarming trends constitute a serious threat to Nigeria's security. This is where security partnership with neighbouring countries, both immediate and distant, comes into consideration in order to overcome Boko Haram and other terrorist elements by sharing military and intelligence resources with them.

French Language in Nigeria

Overcoming the security challenges in Nigeria truly calls for a new approach and will be founded on credible intelligence gathering and sharing. This can be achieved by adopting strategic security partnerships with other nations to work together on military and intelligence sharing, especially with the immediate neighbouring countries. This, therefore, demands knowledge of the French Language. As we all know, Nigeria as a nation is geographically located in the milieu of Francophone countries. This is where the knowledge of French comes in. To work with our immediate Francophone countries, Nigerians need to acquire the knowledge of French to make communication easier and without a barrier. Nigeria has three major indigenous languages (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, etc.) besides English, which is the official language. However, global challenges in different terrains like academic, business, security, social, economic and political, and the growing need to interact with the Francophone neighbours demand the knowledge of more than just English as the only official language in the country. This was the brain behind late General Sani Abacha's announcement of French as the second official language in Nigeria in 1996 as the then military Head of State. Although there are several other languages, such as Dutch, German, Greek, Italian, Russian, Spanish, etc., being used as official languages worldwide for business, politics and diplomacy, French is the most appropriate as a second official language in Nigeria not only because of Nigeria's geographical location, but also because it is the largest language after English and also the only language after English spoken in all five continents of the world (Iyang, 2010:9).

The awareness to learn French started long ago in Nigeria with the need to interact with Francophone neighbours. It was officially included in the secondary school curriculum in 1956 with secondary schools such as Kings College, Lagos, and

Government school, Ibadan studying it. Later in 1960, it was included in the university curriculum (Timoth, 1999:34). Iyang opined that with the cooperation of the French government, French centres such as Centre for French Teaching and Documentation, Alliance Française, Centre International d'Etude Française and Nigeria French Project were established to promote the language. The knowledge of the French language has been and is needed in Nigeria to enable easy communication with our immediate neighbouring Francophone countries to achieve successful strategic security partnerships on military and intelligence sharing to tackle the security challenge in the country. The pride of any country's government is the attainment of a higher value level of development in such a way that its citizens naturally attach to the government. However, there must be some prerequisites for a nation to be in a development phase (Tolu, 2011:234). These prerequisites include security and developmental stability. To achieve developmental stability in Nigeria, there must first of all be security stability because security is central to development. Where there is no security, there can never be development. This is because investors (both potential and existing ones) would not feel free and secure. Ubong (2016:8) noted that: the implication of insecurity situation in Nigeria for business activities can be viewed from two broad perspectives, viz the perspective of potential business investment and the perspective of existing business enterprise. Potential investors feel discouraged because of insecurity feeling that the situation might increase the cost of running the business either through direct loss of goods and properties or the cost of taking precautions against business risks and uncertainty.

For the existing ones, the insecurity situation in the country can, and in many cases, halt business operations during periods of violence, thereby causing the outright closure of many enterprises. Generally, if there is no peace and security, it is challenging for a business to survive and where there is no business or investment, there can never be development. Therefore, to have sustainable development in Nigeria as a nation, there must be national security. So, there is no better time to tackle security problems than now. The government has done a lot to curb the menace of insecurity in the country. A lot of efforts and progress have been made in restoring peace and security. One of such effort is the step taken by the government to harness the dimension of re-strategising by adopting the strategic security partnership on intelligence sharing with France and other Francophone neighbouring countries. To achieve a result, President Muhammad Buhari paid an official visit to Paris, France, following the invitation of François Hollande, the then President of France. This visit took place from 14 to 16 September 2015 and while there, the two leaders discussed bilateral, regional, international and global issues. They reaffirmed their commitment to bilateral relations, and tackling the issue of security and defence was one of the areas they agreed on to strengthen their partnership. To further illustrate their shared intention and determination to work towards Nigeria's security stability, they decided to set up between the two countries (France and Nigeria) ministries of defense, a high-level defence

committee on operational, strategic, arms and defence. To execute this, France and Nigeria decided to build on the Paris summit for security in Nigeria, which was held in May 2015. The Paris summit was convened by France to enable Nigeria work hand-in-hand with its Francophone neighbouring countries in order to come out with appropriate modalities to combat the terrorist group, Boko Haram.

The importance of regional and international cooperation was highlighted in order to eradicate this threat to national security. Following this, France promised to assist Nigeria and its neighbours in intelligence sharing, training and logistics in their security partnership and cooperation to tackle and eradicate security threats in the region. Still, in its continuous efforts to strengthen Nigeria's efforts to find a durable solution to security and development problems in the country, France also supported the International Forum organised by the Senegalese government in Dakar in 2015. They feel the forum will be an excellent opportunity to exchange views on the security challenges affecting Nigeria and other African countries and plan ways to resolve them. Considering this, one can see how France, which has the French language as its first and official, along with other Francophone neighbouring countries, is planning with Nigeria through cooperation and partnership on appropriate modalities to eradicate insecurity in the country. This now brings us to the topic under discussion.

French Language for National Security and Development in Nigeria

To effectively work with France and the other Francophone neighbouring countries on this dimension of strategic security partnership and cooperation on intelligence sharing, training and logistics as promised to be provided by France, there will be a need for communication. For interaction to take place between Nigeria and these countries, there must be communication and communication is powered by a common language. Therefore, language plays a vital role in tackling and eradicating insecurity. Bello (2015:25) says: The interactions with the other countries involve the use of language. So, since we are virtually surrounded by French-speaking countries and these countries are our kith and kin as opined by late General Sanni Abacha in 1996. Nigeria as a nation needs to integrate French language into the strategic security partnership of intelligence sharing. Aderoju and Ijaola (2021:158) believe that; It should be the interest of Nigerians to learn French language in order to facilitate effective and easy communication between Nigeria and these Francophone countries especially with France which has promised to assist in terms of intelligence sharing, training and logistics. Nigeria needs the cooperation of its Francophone neighbours in its totality so as to create or form a strong force to tackle and overcome the threat to security and sustainable development in the country. This can only be realised if we are able to speak and understand French language which is their first official language and fortunately Nigeria's second official language.

In a similar way, regional cooperation is also very important to avoid crises and sometimes to resolve issues such as border disputes, trans-border smuggling and other crimes. This cannot be achieved without bilateral talks between the affected countries. It will be a problem for both parties to discuss and not understand each other because of the barrier created by language. This can lead to disintegration and complication of issues that could cause a threat to national security and development. For instance, Nigeria peacefully settled and conceded some of its land around Bakassi area to the Cameroonians because both parties understood each other. Peace-keeping missions and conflict resolution become problematic and impossible, and regional cooperation becomes truncated without the knowledge of the French language (Bello, 2015:26).

Recommendations

This paper recommends the following with the hope that they will serve as a panacea for solving the insecurity problems in Nigeria.

- i. Law enforcement agents should be trained in francophone countries to enable them to speak and understand the French language at various borders.
- ii. Nigerians should be better educated and informed on the need to encourage learning and speaking French at all levels of education and, in fact, across disciplines.
- iii. The government should assist in the importation of French books, journals, magazines with a view to promoting literacy in the French language.
- iv. French should be introduced as a course in the training programmes of all security organisations.
- v. French language should be declared a language of security in Nigeria.
- vi. French language should be made compulsory for all students up to Senior Secondary School in Nigeria so as to start, sustain and perfect its learning.
- vii. In order to attain the knowledge of the French language in Nigeria, it should be made compulsory and used alongside English in the preparation and publication of various official documents. Its usage should also be enforced in the media (television and radio stations), hospitals, banks, ministries, etc.
- viii. French teachers should be encouraged to stay on the job by giving them incentives, better remunerations, and sponsorship to seminars and workshops.
- ix. Government should endeavour to set up a monitoring committee to monitor the implementation of the educational policy on the teaching and learning of French at the primary and secondary school levels.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the concepts of national security and development as well as Nigeria's security problems. It also discussed the need to learn the French language in Nigeria to enhance effective and easy communication between Nigeria and the Francophone countries. This is vital because the total cooperation of these countries is needed in order to form a strong force to tackle and eradicate threats to national security and development.

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