

## A descriptive analysis of French teaching and the place of translation in Bachelor's curricula in Nigerian universities

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### **Abstract**

Teaching French in Nigeria can help mitigate the communication barrier between Nigeria and its French-speaking neighbors. However, acquiring French and translating from English into French can present challenges to Bachelor students in Nigerian universities. This paper examines the context of teaching French studies and translation in Nigeria using the National Universities Commission Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (NUC-BMAS) for undergraduates in the country, as well as other relevant documentary sources. Results show that French is taught at all levels of education and that translation has always been an integral part of the curriculum. Translation is not only taught to increase proficiency in French; it is a separate competence that can orient graduates towards self-employment. Further research is needed to ascertain exactly how translation is taught and how Bachelor students in Nigerian universities are translating into French.

### **Keywords**

Curriculum design, French teaching, translation, Nigeria, universities

## 1. Introduction

Although the emphasis in this paper is on French and translation in Nigeria, it is important to know that English is the official language of Nigeria, the country, having been colonized by the British between the 19th and 20th centuries (Araromi, 2013; Offorma, 2012). While Fakuade (1994) considers English Nigeria's national language, Araromi (2013) states categorically that the "English language is the lingua franca in Nigeria" (p. 94). However, it is useful to clarify that, although English is indisputably the official language of Nigeria, its characterization as the lingua franca of the country appears to be debatable, except if one wants to refer to the varieties of English in Nigeria called Nigerian Pidgin English and/or Nigerian English. As an ethno-linguistically heterogeneous society, Nigeria faces a problem of creating/selecting a suitable and acceptable lingua franca, especially among the numerous indigenous languages (Fakuade, 1994). Nigerian Pidgin English, sometimes simply referred to as 'pidgin' or 'broken English', which is widely spoken by both literate and non-literate Nigerians, is, in some cases, considered more or less a lingua franca within the Niger Delta regions (Akanke & Salami, 2010). This is because, many Nigerians within the northern region still find it somewhat difficult to use it. Since the issue of a lingua franca in Nigeria remains debatable, Fakuade (1994) simply considers English the country's national language derived "from the fact that there is a multiplicity of languages and ethnic groups" (p. 41) in Nigeria.

Considered part of the colonial legacies in Nigeria, English is deeply rooted in the country. To date, it remains the most significant and commonly used language among the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria even after the country's independence in 1960 (Araromi, 2013; Iteogu, 2016; Offorma, 2012). Teaching across all disciplines is usually carried out in English and "use of English features most often on the general study program virtually in all universities in Nigeria. This is in view of the fact that English language is the [...] official language of administration in Nigeria" (Araromi, 2013, p. 94).

Irrespective of the status of English referred to above, French is also important in Nigeria. French teaching in the country dates as far back as the 19th century and, directly or otherwise, translation has always been an integral component of the acquisition of French in Nigeria (Adebisi, 2015; Iloh, 2018). It is apt to also affirm that "translation studies cut across almost all the universities, whether federal, state, public or private" (Iloh, 2018, p. 175). Iloh (2018) states that although some Nigerian universities at the Bachelor's level introduce translation exercises "from English into French and vice-versa without any theoretical basis [...] some universities incorporate basic theories of translation art or science" (p. 175). This assertion proves that translation in Nigerian universities is not simply taught as a pedagogical tool for the acquisition of French, but also as a feature of translator training. The emphasis on English-French and French-English translation across Nigerian universities proves how seriously French is taken in Nigeria. Indeed, the teaching of French is essential to the nation, in view of the country's geographical setting and the place of the language in international diplomacy. Situated in the west of Africa, Nigeria could best be described as an 'island' in the francophone world (Offorma, 2012). This is because the country is surrounded by francophone countries, including Benin, Cameroon, Niger and Tchad; except for the southern part, which borders the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, the teaching of French in Nigeria is considered vital since knowledge of and proficiency in the language can enhance an optimal understanding between Nigerians and their predominantly French-speaking neighbors.

According to Araromi (2013), French is important in Nigeria because it can facilitate unity and global partnership between Nigerians and other people of the world. Thus, Araromi concludes

that Nigeria cannot afford to be an island to itself in terms of international relations and communication. Hence, the entire Nigerians need French in addition to English in order to interact effectively with the French-speaking world.

In the same vein, Omonigho (2016) argues that Nigerians need to have a good command of, at least, two international languages such as English and French, like their neighbors. According to Omonigho, a bilingual Nigeria in the present globalized setting has many advantages. While quoting Nanduti (2009), Omonigho states that being bilingual can create opportunities for people by opening doors to other cultures. It can also help individuals understand and appreciate people from other parts of the world as well as create job opportunities for people in professions that require bilinguals (Omonigho, 2016).

The inevitable need for French in Nigeria must have been a motivating factor for the former Nigerian dictator, late General Sani Abacha, to declare it the country's second official language in 1996 (Igboanusi & Putz, 2008). Ogunkeye (2007) asserts that because of that declaration "Nigeria became officially, an English/French bilingual country" (p. 4). The elevation of French to this status is because the government of Nigeria viewed French as a language capable of promoting smooth interaction between Nigerians and their French-speaking neighbors (Iteogu, 2016; Olayiwola & Ogundele, 2015)

The objective in this paper is to analyze the place of French in Nigeria and to provide a descriptive analysis of how French is taught in Nigerian universities, particularly at the Bachelor's degree level. In doing so, we will shed light on French studies in Nigeria and on the place of translation in the Bachelor's curricula vis-à-vis French teaching in Nigerian universities.

## **2. Background to French studies in Nigeria**

To understand the present status of French in Nigeria, it is important to highlight some historical details relevant to the current debates of French in the country. It is equally important to juxtapose French with English. This section therefore provides an overview of the prioritization and entrenchment of French teaching in the Nigerian educational curriculum despite the wide use of English in the country. In addition, it focuses on the objectives and the significance of French teaching in Nigeria.

Notwithstanding the importance of French in Nigeria, English remains a powerful means of communication in the country. However, the Nigerian variety of English, which could be referred to as Nigerian English, seems, in some instances, to deviate from the two main varieties of English – American and British English – taught in the world today. McArthur (2002) argues that the variety of English used in Nigeria ranges from standard English to creative semantic extensions whose structures seem to be influenced by mother tongues and West African Pidgin English. According to Nordquist (2018), while most of the creative usages or coinages of English by Nigerians could be attributed to the socio-cultural uniqueness of Nigerian cultural expressions, which English has not (yet) lexicalized, the coinages or semantic extensions also stem from a lack of familiarity with the idiomatic conventions of standard English. Irrespective of the argument about English in Nigeria, the popular understanding is that English is a common medium of communication in Nigeria, though with a variety that seems to be nativised. In giving some accounts of language education in Nigeria, Omolewa (1978) summarizes the views of Awoniyi (1973), Ogunsola (1975) and Omolewa (1975) and states that there is a "debate on the hegemony of English in Nigeria as the official language for administration and the most important language for commerce" (p. 379).

More current research reveals that English remains strong and unrivalled in Nigeria because of the colonial experience. According to Araromi (2013), “lack of strong political will and the influence of the past colonial experience led to the adoption of English language as the sole official language in Nigeria to the detriment of French language” (p. 94).

Thus, it is understood that right from the colonial era up to the present, English occupied and continues to occupy a powerful position in the communicative transactions in Nigeria. On the contrary, French did not have much recognition in Nigeria during the colonial administration and still lags, in comparison with English, as far as communication in the country is concerned. Perhaps, this status of French vis-à-vis English was partly because French had a strong influence on only the colonized territories of France. According to Omolewa (1978),

there is no doubt that the colonial powers agreed that it was the responsibility of the occupying colonial power not only to administer the occupied land but to replace the traditional institutions by ‘modern’ institutions. Language teaching was considered necessary tool of administration and the responsibility of the colonial power (p. 381).

During the colonial era, the British held sway in Nigeria and this could have been the reason behind the non-presence of French in the Nigerian territory. While quoting Charton (1937), Omolewa (1978) establishes that “France had won a large slice of African soil during the scramble for Africa and was busy establishing her culture and civilisation in these territories” (pp. 380–381), leaving Nigeria solely in the hands of the British.

Based on Omolewa’s (1978) arguments, we can conclude that France’s nonchalant attitudes towards sponsoring a language outside of its territory could be a result of the colonial agreement and cooperation that existed among French and British officials in a bid to promote their economic and socio-political interests. Specifically, Omolewa (1978) argues that “already in the colonies, there was remarkable degree of cooperation between French and British colonial officials in the promotion of trade, the arrest of fugitive immigrants, the establishment of border posts, and immigration and customs control” (p. 381).

Additionally, France’s inability to strengthen French outside of its captured territories appeared also to be a result of the recommendation of the colonial administrators’ study team which was in Africa between 1920 and 1921 (Omolewa, 1978). The study team recommended that “the first language to be taught is that of the European power in control” (Jones, 1922, p. 67) so that autochthonous leaders would be able to communicate effectively with colonial administrators. With this, English remained without any rival in Nigeria during the colonial era, despite the influence of French across Europe and many other areas across Africa during the period under review. It is apt to argue in this circumstance that French would not have been a major language in Nigeria during the colonial era as a result of colonial policies and agreements that warranted the teaching of only the language of the power in control: in Nigeria, Britain was the colonial power in control.

It should be reiterated that despite the hegemony of English in Nigeria during and even after the colonial era, French remained and still remains clearly present in Nigeria’s educational curriculum. However, Omolewa (1978) affirms that “although French was not excluded from the school curriculum, its teaching was of poor quality” (p. 384).

As mentioned above, the teaching of French in Nigeria dates back to the 19th century (Adebisi, 2015) during the period of Europe’s invasion of the African continent. According to Offorma (2012), French was introduced in some Nigerian schools in 1859 before the country’s independence in 1960. That is to say the subject was actually one of the earliest subjects introduced into the Nigerian educational system. It is worthy to note that German was also one of the subjects introduced into the Nigerian educational curriculum at the time, but it was abandoned

because it appeared irrelevant “to the actualisation of Nigeria’s foreign policy objectives in Africa” (Iteogu, 2016, p. 19). Indeed, Iteogu (2016) concludes that Nigeria became the first anglophone country in Africa to teach French in schools.

Despite Nigeria’s early beginnings of teaching French in schools, French faced some challenges in the country. According to Offorma (2012), “it was only after independence that mere interest in French teaching and learning started but these were in a perfunctory manner” (p. 142). Also expressing concern over the status of French in Nigeria, Soyoye and Mojola (1998) state that despite the early beginning of the learning and teaching of French, the language suffered some setbacks with respect to its teaching since the era of colonization. According to Iteogu (2016), this is because, in 1882, the British colonial administrators made English the only non-Nigerian language to be taught in schools. However, Iteogu (2016) does state that French was allowed for students who desired to take it “at some British examinations such as the Junior and Senior Cambridge” (p. 19). This affected the teaching of French and German in Nigeria at the time and there was no significant change in the situation until the country gained its independence (Soyoye & Mojola, 1998).

Furthermore, Iteogu (2016) affirms that after the independence of most African countries in the mid-20th century, the Organisation of African Unity formulated a policy for linguistic integration of Africa in 1961 to promote unity among Africans. For this reason, English and French were chosen to be taught in schools of member countries at all levels. This was when French was seen to have been better placed in Nigeria’s educational curriculum, though Iteogu (2016) asserts that it was still studied as an elective subject.

Beside the placement of French as an optional subject in the curriculum, records show that even teachers, especially competent ones, were in short supply. Offorma (2012) states that “the very first challenge to French teaching was production of competent teachers to teach the subject at the secondary school level” (p. 143). At universities, the lack of competent teachers was also visible. This led to concrete steps towards putting in place policies that would promote the teaching of French in Nigeria.

Subsequently, French was elevated by successive governments to the “status of a second official language in Nigeria” (Iteogu, 2016 p. 19). As there was a need for effective interaction with neighboring countries, it became necessary for every Nigerian to have a good command of French; hence, the establishment of concrete educational policies.

### **3. Policies for French in Nigeria**

So far, this paper has emphasized the importance of French in Nigeria as well as the history and circumstances of teaching French as a second official language in the country. For French to function effectively as a second official language in Nigeria, it is necessary to put concrete policies in place. Following this logic, the Nigerian government has indeed put in place educational policies and there appears to be considerable political willpower to promote the language.

The Nigerian policies for French discussed in Section 3.1 (Teacher Training Courses) and Section 3.2 (Curriculum Development) are structured to reflect the challenges facing French in the country and to pave the way for the realization of the aims of teaching French in Nigeria. Therefore, the first step was the need for teacher training. The second step consisted of curriculum development.

#### **3.1. Teacher training courses**

A foreign language such as French may be difficult to acquire naturally in an anglophone environment such as Nigeria. This is because, when compared with English, the use of French

appears to be quite limited in the country. Therefore, French in Nigeria seems to be better acquired through instructional settings. This is why the unavailability of (skilled) teachers initially formed the primary source of concern to promote the learning of French in Nigeria. According to Offorma (2012), “the very first challenge to French teaching was production of competent teachers to teach the subject at the secondary school level” (p. 143).

Consequently, the need for teachers of French led to setting up “a pilot course in French in 1962” (Offorma, 2012, p. 143) at the universities of Nsukka and Ibadan. The hope was that the universities could assuage the lack of teachers of French. Offorma (2012) argues that the pilot program was put in place, among other reasons, “to produce teachers who would implement the French curriculum in the secondary schools” (p. 143). Even candidates without any prior knowledge of French were gaining admission to study French in those universities:

candidates, who had no knowledge of French at all were admitted into the Department of French and they were taught through the means of audio-visual method in their first year. The second-year programme was mainly literature and courses on French civilisation. In the third year, the students were sent to Dakar for summer vacation courses. This is what translated to *the Year Abroad* in all the Nigerian University Foreign Languages Programmes today. It is known as the *Immersion method*. It is the best way to learn a language [...] Graduation is in the fourth year (Offorma, 2012, p. 143)

Subsequent to setting up the pilot French course, departments of French were accredited in universities and colleges of education, up to then referred to as Advanced Teachers' Colleges, to adequately train teachers of French (Offorma, 2012). However, the teaching of French at this point was not effective because

language curriculum content [...] was foreign-oriented, reflecting the content and examination modes of the Cambridge Overseas Examination [...] The examinations focused on translation, the Nigerian child in this situation faced the problem whereby he/she was required to translate from one language to the other and none was his/her mother tongue. Furthermore, he/she was not proficient in any of *the two languages-English or French*” (Offorma, 2012, pp. 143–144).

For Offorma (2012), this ineffectiveness led to changings in the French curriculum to enable students to benefit more. However, in 1981, the Nigerian government “categorised French and Arabic as language options at both the Junior and Senior Secondary School levels” (Offorma, 2012, p. 144) while the categorization of French was not stated in any part of the “policy document under reference for language education at the tertiary level of education” (Awobuluyi, 1998, para. 9).

Policies geared towards enhancing the effectiveness of teaching French in Nigeria seem to be continually put in place. To this end, Offorma (2012) affirms that the university of Nigeria, Nsukka, even began to offer a vacation program similar to internship in 1984 to train candidates who wanted teaching qualification; the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) and this program were set to improve teachers' French teaching skills.

### **3.2. Curriculum development**

Aside from teacher training, teaching French itself in Nigeria generally demands an active French language educational policy as mentioned above. According to Iteogu (2016), “there is the need for a coordinated French language curriculum within the context of a Nation's Policy on Education” (p. 20).

Therefore, to have a firm national policy on French education, the Nigerian government decided to put in place institutions such as the Nigerian Education Research and Development

Council (NERDC), the Nigeria French Language Village (NFLV) and the Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD). These institutions are charged with French language curriculum development and its implementation at different levels (Iteogu, 2016). The institutions are also expected to carry out activities for the development and promotion of French teaching and learning in Nigeria.

It is important to discuss briefly all the three institutions mentioned above, as they all contribute in one way or the other to promote French teaching and learning in the country. However, emphasis will be on the role of the Nigeria French Language Village (NFLV). This is because, of the three institutions mentioned here, the NFLV is supposed to be the only institution that serves as an interuniversity center established not just for teaching of French, but also for managing the French language immersion program for learners of French in Nigeria. Because the emphasis in this article is on the teaching of French in Nigerian universities, the role of the NFLV needs to be more elaborately described than the other agencies.

### **3.2.1. Nigerian education research and development council (NERDC)**

The Nigerian Education Research and Development Council is concerned with research and the development of education-related matters in Nigeria. It was established in 1988 as a parastatal of the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education with enabling decree, “which brought the merger of four existing educational research and development bodies into one organization. One of the former bodies was the Language Development Centre” (NERDC, 2003, p. 3). According to Iteogu (2016), the department of foreign languages under the Language Development Centre of the NERDC undertakes “activities which revolve around the research and development of English, French and Arabic” (p. 21).

Furthermore, the Language Development Centre conducts research into French studies and publishes textbooks in French for primary and secondary schools. It also publishes materials for teacher education and develops the national curriculum for French at the primary and secondary levels of education in Nigeria (Iteogu, 2016). Additionally, Iteogu (2016) states that to ensure the effective implementation of the functions of the NERDC’s Language Development Centre, the center undertakes activities such as language research, language development and documentation as well as applied linguistics activities such as language pedagogy, curriculum development and translation/interpretation activities.

### **3.2.2. Centre for French teaching and documentation (CFTD)**

As French is structured in Nigeria “to equip students with both linguistic and communicative competence” (Owoeye, 2010, p. 4) of the language, the Nigerian government has put in place the Centre for French Teaching and Development (CFTD) to work hand in hand with the Nigeria French Language Village (NFLV), Alliance française, the French embassy as well as the French cultural centers in Nigeria for the development of the French language curriculum. The status of the CFTD and the NFLV have been raised to that of national institutions for the training and retraining of teachers of French in Nigeria (Iteogu, 2016 p. 21) .

### **3.2.3. Nigeria French language village (NFLV)**

As earlier stated, French occupies a very important and crucial position in Nigeria. Its importance as Nigeria’s second official language accounts for the reason the Nigeria French Language Village was established in 1991 (Owoeye, 2010).

The Nigeria French Language Village (NFLV) organizes a language immersion program that is mandatory for all students learning French at Nigerian institutions of higher education. The immersion program is an integral component of the Bachelor’s program and the Nigeria Certificate in Education in French. The idea behind the establishment of the NFLV is to “provide a

programme that is practical in approach and familiar to the background of the learners” (Iteogu, 2016 p. 21). According to Iteogu (2016), the NFLV “was set up primarily to play a key role in the development and research in French language studies in Nigeria at the tertiary level” (p. 21) and it has been “complementing the efforts of the universities and the NERDC” (p. 21). The NFLV is the only institution that is accredited and certified by the Federal Government of Nigeria to organize the compulsory language immersion program for students of French who are in their penultimate classes in Nigerian institutions of higher learning. (Information-Nigeria, 2012; Hotnigerianjobs.com, 2012)

The Federal Government of Nigeria established the NFLV to replace the one-year study-abroad program, which was previously undertaken by Nigerian students in France. The idea is geared towards creating an artificial French environment geographically closer to Nigerian students. Since its establishment in 1991, the NFLV has been closely involved in activities such as teaching and research in the area of French studies and development (Iteogu, 2016 p. 21). The institution has also actively promoted the teaching and learning of French across other educational institutions in Nigeria. In addition, it structures many formal or informal programs in French for Nigerians, who are not necessarily students, but who wish to learn French to satisfy their needs to become proficient in the language.

Consequently, it is believed that the Nigerian Government has made conscious and consistent efforts to ensure quality investment in the NFLV so that it would not just remain the nation’s interuniversity center for French studies, but it would also fulfil the purpose for which it was established. The NFLV has the capacity to provide the most rewarding residential French immersion experience for students of French in Nigerian institutions of higher learning. In addition, it has adequate language teaching aids and audiovisual equipment to facilitate the teaching and learning of French (Information-Nigeria, 2012). Socio-educative activities such as sports, debates, talk shops, film shows and excursions to neighboring francophone countries are also organized by the NFLV and all activities at the institution are conducted in French. Indeed, activities carried out at the NFLV conform with the academic standards of Nigerian universities in line with the following provision of the law:

Section 10 (1) of the Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) Act, Cap E3, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004, empowers the National Universities Commission to lay down minimum standards for all programmes taught in Nigerian universities (NUC-BMAS, 2014, p. i).

Therefore, as an integral part of the syllabus at Nigerian universities and colleges of education, the NFLV runs courses that conform with the stipulations and guidelines of the minimum academic standards of the National Universities Commission (NUC). This is to ensure that the academic standard set by the NUC for all Nigerian university students is not compromised.

#### **3.2.4. Nigeria French Language Project (NFLP)**

Apart from the Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD) and the Nigeria French Language Village (NFLV), there is also the Nigeria French Language Project (NFLP). The NFLP is run by the Nigerian government, in partnership with France, and coordinates the teaching and promotion of French in Nigeria. Indeed, this agency was established to improve the quality of French teaching in Nigeria (Igboanusi & Putz, 2008). Igboanusi & Putz (2008) affirm that through accredited agencies such as the Alliance française and the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA), France provides support for the implementation of French language policy in Nigeria. The Alliance française and the IFRA have different centers in Nigeria with

state-of-the-art learning infrastructure to facilitate the teaching and learning of the language. The centers are usually run by qualified teachers of French, many of whom are French (Igboanusi & Putz, 2008).

#### **4. Nigeria Universities Commission (NUC) requirements for French**

“French – the one that is common in Nigerian educational settings today – is designed to equip students with both linguistic and communicative competence” (Owoeye, 2010, p. 4). Owoeye’s assertion confirms the main objective of the Nigeria Universities Commission (NUC) policy on French teaching and learning in Nigerian universities. The stipulations of NUC are to make graduates of French highly bilingual and linguistically competent to be able to use French in the most effective style.

Consequently, through the NUC, Nigeria appears to have deployed all necessary measures to ensure quality and standard, not only for the degree in French, but also for all of the degree programs in the country. The NUC is a Nigerian government agency, established since 1962 as the Executive Cabinet’s advisory body. It was given a statutory responsibility in 1994 to (1) grant approval for the establishment of institutions of higher education offering degrees and (2) ensure quality assurance of all academic programs offered in Nigerian universities (NUC, 2018). The NUC has put several measures into place to ensure globally acceptable standards of teaching French so as to have graduates across all academic disciplines with a good level of communicative skills in French.

Indeed, the NUC designed the curriculum for French education in Nigeria to improve learners’ general knowledge of French and to enhance the acquisition of adequate oral and written skills in French. In so doing, graduates of French from Nigerian universities are expected to receive recognition for adequate communicative skills. According to NUC-BMAS (2014), curriculum design should ensure that graduates of French have the requisite knowledge of French grammar and usage, of elegance and style in diction and of appropriate varieties of language in the various administrative and professional job opportunities. They should also be able to pursue postgraduate studies in language, linguistics and literature.

As far as curriculum design and translation competence is concerned, it is noteworthy to state that, although translation is not explicitly mentioned as one of the potential postgraduate courses on offer to graduates of French from Nigerian universities, Iloh (2018) affirms that “most universities with Departments of French or Foreign or Modern European Languages undertake postgraduate programmes and Translation Studies is one of the programmes” (p. 175). Iloh (2018) further states that in the postgraduate program in translation, “prerequisites for admission requirements are a good Bachelor’s degree in French or its equivalent. There must be evidence that the candidate has had sufficient training in translation. This brings to mind the undergraduate training in translation” (p. 176).

In addition to the intended learning outcomes of other courses in the Faculties of Arts and Humanities at Nigerian universities, it is stipulated in the NUC-BMAS (2014) that the French language program is designed:

1. To train students to acquire adequate communicative competence in both the spoken and written varieties of French, thereby giving them a good grounding and effective mastery of the language in its various applications [...]
2. To equip students with the knowledge of the forms of the varieties of French used in different professional domains such as business communication, diplomacy, legal communication, electronic broadcast media, print journalism, advertising and sports commentaries, book publishing and biography writing.

3. To equip students with adequate linguistic knowledge of the French through a detailed study of its sound system, its lexicon, its syntax, semantics and usage.
4. To prepare students adequately to carry out research at the postgraduate level in the area of French and Linguistics.
5. To orient students towards self-employment by a focus on skills such as creative writing and other kinds of original output through independent thought, inventiveness and creativity (pp. 127–128)<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, these outcomes, especially the one that relates with biography writing, would provide graduates of French not just the opportunity to develop their linguistic competence, but a chance to carry out research and learn interesting facts and opinions about people around the world. Moreover, outcomes 1 and 2, which highlight the need to train students to acquire communicative competence are essential to translators. For instance, business communication could be the actual 'purpose' of translation, but when translators communicate with clients, they also need writing skills to conduct their communication professionally. This is essentially part of identity creation for translators/professionals. Indeed, with the outcomes above, it is expected that at the end of the Bachelor's program, "graduates of French should be seen to have achieved greater competence and sophistication in all branches of French language and literature, in critical and creative expression, as well as a better understanding of the relevance of French to the society" (NUC-BMAS, 2014, p. 128). According to NUC-BMAS (2014), although it is generally believed that French language and literature is a text-centered discipline, in the context of learning the language in Nigerian universities, students of French are brought into contact, at the end of the program, with cultures of the French-speaking people across the globe. In so doing, students can tap the vast repertoire of cultural practices for which the French-speaking people and, indeed, other people around the globe are known.

Consequently, there are specific resource requirements for teaching and learning French, particularly in the universities. Since the universities do not generally have vast numbers of students taking French, learners are provided with a conducive learning environment, which includes adequate facilities such as libraries, computers, language laboratories and recording equipment. There are also well-trained staff members to develop the necessary competences in students. According to NUC-BMAS (2014) data, one lecturer should teach twenty students or less at a time to ensure the effectiveness of learning and teaching practices.

In addition, standards are also set for admission into French courses and for graduating with a Bachelor's degree in French studies in Nigerian universities. Of course, as is the case in universities in other parts of the world, minimum standards are usually set as policies for the smooth and consistent progression through academic courses and programs. In Nigeria, the NUC has set benchmark minimum standards for all university programs. A Bachelor's degree in French is generally completed in four years. According to the BSU (2017), the four-year Bachelor's program is usually open for candidates who successfully passed the required subjects at senior secondary school. Candidates are also required to register for French and pass it, along with other subjects in the mandatory University and Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) administered once a year nationwide by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). Furthermore, candidates with attested educational gaps in French and other senior secondary school subjects and candidates who never took French at the lower level of education are usually subjected to an extensive one-year pre-degree program at university. These two groups of students must pass all the pre-degree courses in addition to the UTME before gaining admission to start a four-year Bachelor's program in French. However, candidates who have success-

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<sup>1</sup> Objectives not originally numbered.

fully completed programs at other higher institutions and have obtained a National Diploma Certificate (ND) or a Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) in French with, at least, an Upper Credit may be allowed through Direct Entry (DE) to do three years starting from the second year in the university (BSU, 2017).

The French courses for Bachelor's degrees in Nigeria are designed specifically to enhance the effective training of graduates of French to acquire both oral and written communicative competence. This gives the graduates a good grounding and mastery of French in its various applications, thereby enabling them to explore different aspects of the language in their future endeavors. That is why translation is also incorporated into the French syllabus to prepare students for self-employment after their studies. Although the structure of the training of Bachelor students of French in Nigeria includes translation, translation is not explicitly mentioned in the NUC BMAS intended learning outcomes. However, translation is included in the training (see Sections 4.1 and 4.2, as well as Tables 1–4) and this also appears to be implicitly present in outcome 1: communicative competence, which entails writing competence and outcome 5: self-employment.

#### **4.1. French courses and translation in the curriculum**

In today's world, translation plays a crucial role in facilitating mutual understanding among different people around the world. This means that translation enables the forging of global, borderless, interactive relationships among people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, translator training today is a pressing necessity (Tar, 2012). In Nigeria, translation is receiving much attention and it is offered at all levels in Nigerian universities. Translators' activities are also regulated by a professional body. In order to regulate the activities of translators in Nigeria, the National Association of Translators and Interpreters (NATI) was created in 1978. Subsequently, the Nigerian Institute of Translators and Interpreters (NITI) was created in 1996 as an offshoot of NATI (NITI, 2019). As stated on the NITI website, NITI would also likely establish a training school for translators in the future, but for now, it is "a professional association, the accreditation body, the regulator and protector of translation and interpretation profession in Nigeria" (NITI, 2019, para. 2).

Traditionally, translation courses are offered in the department of foreign languages across Nigerian universities (Uwajeh, 2013). Specifically, Mombe (2019) states that translation is actually taught as a component of Bachelor's programs in French across Nigerian universities, although "no Bachelor of Arts degree in Translation studies [...] is awarded by any Nigerian university" (p. 66). This means that, although Nigerian universities do not specifically award Bachelor's degrees in translation, directly or indirectly, translation has always been an integral part of French studies in Nigeria at the Bachelor's level. The study of French has also brought translation studies to prominence especially in the Bachelor's curricula in Nigerian universities (Iloh, 2018). In Section 4.2, we adopt a holistic approach to providing an overview of the French courses with special attention to the presence of translation in Bachelor's programs.

For the teaching of French in Nigerian universities, the courses shown in Tables 1–4 and their credit units apply. Students must take and pass these courses before they can graduate. Students who fail any core course must re-register it at the next available opportunity. In addition, such students must also register for any other new courses at the next level of study subject for a maximum of 24 credit units. The credit system in use in Nigerian universities is described in more detail in Section 4.2 (BSU, 2017; NUC-BMAS, 2014).

## 4.2. Course credit system (CCS)

The Course Credit System (CCS) is a system in Nigerian universities where areas of a given subject are broken down into examinable course units that are weighted accordingly. Following the minimum academic standards set by the National Universities Commission (NUC), the French Bachelor's program is broken down as presented in Tables 1–4. The Bachelor's program runs for three years (for Direct Entry candidates) or four years (for candidates who gained admission through the University and Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) (BSU, 2017; NUC-BMAS, 2014).

The Course Credit System (CCS) allows for the effective assessment of students' academic performance on a semester basis (BSU, 2017; NUC-BMAS, 2014). In Nigeria, two semesters make up one academic year. Thus, a 3-year Bachelor's program in French requires a minimum of 6 semesters for DE candidates, while a normal 4-year Bachelor's program requires a minimum of 8 semesters.

In this system, courses are arranged in a progressive order of level of academic progress (e.g., year-one or 100 level). Usually, codes representing courses of study are abbreviated. For the French program, the abbreviation 'FRE' is usually written before the level of study. Codes with odd numbers generally represent first-semester courses while those with even numbers represent second-semester courses; e.g., FRE 101 (1st semester) or FRE 102 (2nd semester) for Year 1, FRE 201 (1st semester), FRE 202 (2nd semester) for Year 2. Years 3 and 4 are also coded in that manner.<sup>2</sup> General Studies (GSTs) and courses from other departments are usually taken by the students of French to broaden their horizons and to increase employability after graduation in areas other than French (BSU, 2017; NUC-BMAS, 2014).

Following the NUC BMAS, Bachelor's degree candidates are expected to take a minimum of 15 credits and a maximum of 24 credits each semester. In all, Direct Entry candidates are expected to graduate with a minimum credit total of 108. By contrast, candidates who gained admission through the Universities and Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) usually graduate with a minimum credit total of 144 (BSU, 2017, p. 20). Also, each semester is expected to cover a minimum of 15 weeks of lectures and assessment. Therefore, in one academic year, academic activities are expected to cover a minimum of 30 weeks of contact between staff and students.

In the Course Credit System (CCS), courses are weighted based on the credits assigned to courses. Credits consist of the number of student–teacher contact hours in each week of a semester. Credits are used to measure the weight of courses and the work load of students (NUC-BMAS, 2014). Course weighting varies according to the credits assigned to the courses. Each credit represents a student–lecturer learning contact of 60 minutes (i.e., 1 hour). This means that a course with 2 credits may require two one-hour classes per each week in a semester. Alternatively, such a course may require a one-hour class in addition to 3 hours of practical work per each week of a semester (BSU, 2017; NUC-BMAS, 2014).

Below is the presentation of the overview of courses offered in the Bachelor's program of French. More detailed description of translation-related courses is presented in the appendix.

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<sup>2</sup> Course codes may vary from one university to the other. Here, we follow the NUC B-MAS coding system, which is a model for all universities. At the NFLV, for instance, courses are presented as FLV 321, FLV 322 etc., but such courses have "FRE" equivalence in Year 3 of the conventional universities.

	FIRST SEMESTER			SECOND SEMESTER		
Course Codes	Course title	Credits	Course Codes	Course title	Credits	
FRE 101	Corrective French Grammar 1	2	FRE 102	Corrective French Grammar II	2	
FRE 103	Introduction to Composition writing in French	2	FRE 104	Introduction to French Literary Genres: Poetry and Drama	2	
FRE 105	Practical French 1	2	FRE 106	Practical French II	2	
FRE 107	Introduction to French Literary Genres: Prose	2	FRE 108	Composition Writing in French: Informal and Formal writing	2	
FRE 109	Introduction to a Second Foreign Language 1	2	FRE 110	Introduction to a Second Foreign Language II	2	
LIN 101	Introduction to Linguistics 1	3	LIN 102	Introduction to Linguistics II	3	
GST 111	Communication in English 1	2	GST 112	Logic, Philosophy and Human Existence	2	
GST 113	Nigerian Peoples and Cultures	2	GST 121	Communication in English II	2	
GST 121	Use of Library, Study Skill and ICT	2				
	Total Credits	19		Total Credits	17	

**Table 1.** Course overview for year 1<sup>3</sup>

	FIRST SEMESTER			SECOND SEMESTER		
Course Codes	Course title	Credits	Course Codes	Course title	Credits	
<i>FRE 201</i>	<i>Translation: Theory and Practice<sup>4</sup></i>	2	<i>FRE 202</i>	<i>Translation: "Version and Theme"</i>	2	
FRE 203	French Grammatical Structures	2	FRE 204	Introduction to French Phonetics and Phonology	2	
FRE 205	Creative Writing in French I	2	FRE 206	Creative Writing in French II	2	
FRE 207	Advance Practical French I	2	FRE 208	Advanced Practical French II	2	
FRE 209	Second Foreign Language Study (Practicum)	2	FRE 210	Second Foreign Language Study (Practical)	2	
LIN 205	Advanced Studies in Linguistics	3	FRE212	Advanced English Composition II	2	

<sup>3</sup> Taken from (BSU, 2017) and (NUC-BMAS, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Translation courses in the tables are italicised for easy identification.

GST 211	History and Philosophy of Sciences	2	FRE 214	French Literature in the 18 <sup>th</sup> century	2
EPS 201	Entrepreneurship Studies I	2	FRE 216	Introduction to the Culture and Civilizations of Francophone Africa	2
FRE 211	Survey of French Literature: 16 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> Centuries	2	LIN 208	Advanced Studies in Linguistics II	3
FRE 213	Critical Appreciation of Literature	2	GST 222	Peace and conflict Studies	2
FRE 215	Background to Caribbean Literature in French	2	EPS 202	Entrepreneurship Studies II	2
	Total Credits	23		Total Credits	23

**Table 2.** Course overview for year 2

	FIRST SEMESTER			SECOND SEMESTER	
Course Codes	Course title	Credits	Course Codes	Course title	Credits
FRE 301	Translation I (Theme)	2	FRE 302	Translation II (Version)	2
FRE 303	Advanced Studies in French Phonetics	2	FRE 304	The Sociolinguistics of French	2
FRE 305	Advanced Studies in French Language Structure I	2	FRE 306	Advanced Formal and Informal Writing in French II	2
FRE 307	Advanced Formal and Informal Writing in French I	2	FRE 308	Oral Communication skills in French I	2
FRE 309	Oral Communication skills in French I	2	FRE 310	Comparative African Literature in English and French	2
FRE 311	Comparative study of Nigerian and French Civilizations and Cultures	2	FRE 312	French Literature in the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century: Prose	2
FRE 313	French Literature in the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century: Poetry and Drama	2	FRE 314	Caribbean French Literature	2
FRE 315	Introduction to African Literature in French	2	FRE 316	Introduction to Project writing/Research	2
CMP 301	Advanced application of Computers to Language I	2	CMP 302	Advanced Application of Computers to Language II	2
	Total Credits	18		Total Credits	18

**Table 3.** Course overview for year 3

	FIRST SEMESTER			SECOND SEMESTER		
Course Codes	Course title	Credits	Course Codes	Course title	Credits	
FRE 400	Project (Dissertation writing)	6	FRE 402	<i>Advanced Translation II (Version)</i>	2	
FRE 401	<i>Advanced Translation I (Theme)</i>	2	FRE 404	Linguistics Applied to the Teaching of French Language	2	
FRE 403	Linguistics Applied to the Teaching of French Language I	2	FRE 406	20 <sup>th</sup> Century French Literature: Prose	2	
FRE 405	Advanced Creative Writing in French	2	FRE 408	Post-independence Francophone Africa Literature: Prose	2	
FRE 407	20 <sup>th</sup> Century French Literature: Drama and Poetry	2	FRE 410	Theories of Literary Criticism	2	
FRE 409	Post-independence Francophone Africa Literature: Poetry and Drama	2	FRE 412	Francophone Literature: Europe and Canada	2	
FRE 411	Culture and Civilizations of Member Countries of the Francophone	2	FRE 414	Multilingualism and Language Contacts	2	
FRE 413	Contemporary French Theatre	2	FRE 416	Nigerian Literature in French	2	
PHL 403	Philosophy of Language	2				
	Total Credits	22		Total Credits	17	

**Table 4.** Course overview for year 4

From the presentation of the courses above, we can state that translation is taught at the Bachelor's level in its own right, since it represents 12 credits of the 157 as shown in Tables 1–4.<sup>5</sup> Although Iloh (2018) highlights that translation courses begin in Year 3, the researcher fails to support this position with any source. On the contrary, the NUC-BMAS (2014), which is the point of reference that sets the minimum standards of all academic programs in Nigerian universities, presents the structure of French courses as presented above. Therefore, it is more appropriate to argue that translation courses actually start in Year 2 of the Bachelor's program. This implies that a certain level of proficiency of writing skills and various applications of French is expected before commencement of translation studies. Although a total of 12 credits appears somewhat limited for undergraduate translator training, the intended learning outcomes for the Bachelor's program in French (see Section 4) state that graduates of French

<sup>5</sup> Credits shown here include General Study (GST) and elective courses from other departments. While GSTs are obligatory for all students, elective courses are optional; designed to broaden students' knowledge in other disciplines.

are supposed to be adequately trained to be able to use French in its various applications. Translation being part of the curriculum, the graduates are also supposed to be prepared for advanced translator training.

It is also worthy to note that translation is integrated into the Bachelor's curriculum in addition to specific courses on writing and it is considered a separate competence. However, this does not mean that the grammar translation method is not used in other courses. It also goes to prove that translation is not only seen as a means to increase proficiency in French, since it is taught in both directions (i.e., French–English, English–French). If translation were taught only to increase written proficiency in French, it would be offered only as translation from English into French and not in both directions.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper has described the context of French teaching in Nigeria in general and in Nigerian universities in particular. In so doing, we have described the geographical setting of Nigeria with regard to the French-speaking countries that surround it, highlighting how Nigeria, as an English-speaking nation, is an 'island' surrounded by French-speaking countries and how French is important to the country. French is vital to Nigerians since the language has the potential of serving as an instrument of unity and a tool for global partnership between Nigeria and other nations of the world that use French. Therefore, in addition to English that is deeply rooted in Nigeria, it is established that French is needed by Nigerians for international alignment and communication.

Moreover, the work described Nigerian government's commitment towards realizing the objective of making French a second official language. We revealed that through formulations of different policies and establishment of various agencies, the Nigeria government strives for the promotion of French in the country. The establishment of agencies, such as the Nigeria French Language Village (NFLV), the Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD), the Nigeria French Language Project (NFLP) and Alliance française, is a step towards promoting French and giving it a pride of place in Nigeria.

Therefore, it is concluded that with the awareness being created by researchers in the field of French studies in Nigeria, and its glaring importance in the country, French would not just be a second official language on paper but a greater majority of Nigerians would be using it as an important means of communication as much as they do in English. This is why different aspects of French studies in Nigerian universities, particularly the Bachelor's curricula incorporate aspects that enhance students' writing skills into French including translation. In fact, we pointed out that translation is not only a means to increase proficiency in French; it is viewed as a separate competence, which would eventually orient graduates of French towards self-employment. Thus, to actualize the objective of incorporating translation into French studies at the Bachelor's level, there is a need to further interrogate the position of translation in the curricula. The questions calling for further research are: how exactly is translation itself taught? What are the tools for teaching translation? How do Bachelor candidates in Nigeria translate into French? Is there any influence of English on the translation into French by Bachelor students in Nigeria? What could be responsible for the interference of English when they translate into French? Moving forward, therefore, the issue of the influence of English on the translation into French by students in Nigerian universities has to be adequately investigated.

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## APPENDIX

This appendix lists the translation courses presented in the NUC-BMAS (2014, pp. 127–137) and the Handbook of Languages and Linguistics, Benue State university, Makurdi-Nigeria (2017). In addition to other courses dealing with French, these translation courses are the minimum standard requirements that all Nigerian universities offering French follow in the Bachelor's program of French Studies. Other Nigerian universities also have their specific handbooks designed in compliance with the NUC BMAS guidelines.

### Year 1

#### (2nd semester)

**FRE 108- Composition writing in French: informal and formal writing (2 Credits)** Students are introduced to Francophone African oral literature such as folktales, myths, legends and proverbs, its evolution to the written form with emphasis on early writings on Africa and Africans and by Africans before independence.

### Year 2

#### (1st semester)

**FRE 201- Translation: theory and practice (2 Credits)** This course takes students to the very beginning of what is required in translation. It introduces students to the various theories and procedures in translation.

#### (2nd semester)

**FRE 202- Translation: version and theme (2 Credits)** This course is the continuation of FRE 201 as described above.

### Year 3

#### (1st semester)

**FRE 301- Translation I (Theme) (2 Credits)** Course designed to equip students with more skills and techniques of translation from French into English and vice-versa, through practical exercises.

#### (2nd semester)

**FRE 302- Translation II (Version) (2 Credits)** Here, students are to translate from and into French more complicated texts. They are initiated into the analysis of translation errors.

## Year 4

### (1st semester)

**FRE 401- Advanced translation I (Theme) (2 Credits)** Translation from English into French and vice versa at an advanced level.

### (2nd semester)

**FRE 402- Advanced translation II (Version) (2 Credits)** This course is the continuation of FRE 401 as described above.



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