

PROFICIENCY IN FRENCH LANGUAGE FOR IMPROVED ADMINISTRATION AND CONTROL AT FRANCOPHONE NIGERIAN BORDERS: A CASE FOR FRENCH PROFICIENCY PROGRAMMES FOR THE CUSTOMS AND IMMIGRATION

Yekini, Tokunbo Mouhammed, (PhD)

Department of French Language, Federal University of Education,
Kontagora, Niger State, Nigeria.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13374255>

Published Date: 26-August-2024

Abstract: Better administration and control at the borders of any nation is paramount to its security, economy and political relations, among other sectors. Communication is essential to proper administration and control of borders between nations. Since Nigeria is surrounded mainly by francophone countries, by reason of colonisation — Republic of Benin to the West, Republic of Niger and Chad to the North and Republic of Cameroon to the East — it behoves the government of Nigeria to ensure an appreciable proficiency skill in the French language for the staff of the francophone borders of Nigeria, particularly the immigration and custom services. This study emanating from the humanities and the social sciences tends towards a workable solution to the problem of effective communication at the francophone borders of Nigeria. This research, through the aid of an anonymous descriptive survey in the borders of Seme in Badagry-Lagos state, Illela in Sokoto State, Mfum in Cross River State and Saki in Oyo State, would ascertain the current French language proficiency level among immigration and custom officers through the instruments of questionnaire and interview. The survey would go on to investigate possible challenges to the acquisition of the French language among the targeted officers. Lastly, the research through the survey would determine the most appropriate French language acquisition methodology suited for the immigration and custom officers in Nigeria, and also possible solutions to the challenges of French language acquisition among the officers.

Keywords: Border Control, Border Administration, Customs, French Proficiency, Immigration, Nigerian Borders.

1. INTRODUCTION

As a lecturer who has conducted Language Immersion cum Excursion programmes for Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) students in colleges of education for over 20 years, the usual lack of communication in the French language, among the immigration and custom officers along the south-western borders of Nigeria with the Republic of Benin during these programmes; leaves a lot to be desired. Conversely, the officials at the Republic of Benin side of the border speak appreciable level of the English language, which makes border experience on their side easier than that of Nigeria. Similar

experience trails the report on the Year-Abroad Programmes of universities conducted in Niger and Cameroon. Hence, the research gap of this study. This research aims specifically at remedying this problem by foregrounding tested and trusted French language acquisition methodologies, and applying the most appropriate to alleviate the dearth of French language mastery in the francophone borders of Nigeria among immigration and custom officers. Improving the French language proficiency skills in the staffing of the Nigerian borders, especially among the aforementioned officers, is a must if the country aims at avoiding unpalatable border incidences, especially in the face of the rising level of insecurity and economic recession. Scholarship such as Salaam (2006) and Uchegbu (2023) have established the dearth of proper French language mastery in the staffing of the aforementioned borders of Nigeria.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION

Although late general Sani Abacha made French the 2nd official language of Nigeria in 1996, yet it appears so only in principle and not in practice (Omonigho, 2016). However, recent move of government to open up Nigeria to better international trade in West Africa, underscores the need of proficiency in the French language more than ever before. Out of the 16 West African countries, 9 speak French either as a national language or as an official language, while 4- Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin share borders with Nigeria (Uchegbu, 2023, Ogbonna et al., 2023). The linguistic disadvantages to the non-French speaking keepers of the Nigerian borders and ports become much more apparent and costly, in the face of poor performances in regional trade due to lack of proficiency in the French language, which is the most spoken in West Africa. In tandem, the border experience of many Nigerian and francophone merchants has been harrowing due to the inability to speak the French language. According to Uchegbu (2023): "...there are many Nigerians who would love to engage in such intra-African and sub-regional trade. However, their interests are negatively affected by their inability to speak French...their biggest heartache was getting through immigration and customs at the Nigeria-Benin border...". Furthermore, the security architecture of the nation will be compromised without the immigration and custom personnel having adequate communication skills in the French language, as aptly observed by Salaam (2006) in this quote:

Recent developments in some parts of the country and our boundaries clearly indicate that officers who are saddled with the responsibilities of maintaining law and order and of course protecting the entire nation against any external invasions need a sound and appreciable knowledge of French to actually discharge creditably well their duties.

One can glean from the ongoing that lack of proficiency in the French language is a great impediment to international trade and security in Nigeria, especially as the nation's first line of welcome to would-be foreign investors, or defense against potential threats, are handled by Nigerian immigration and custom personnel who do not speak the French language. Although scholarships exist mostly as position papers or investigative researches, in the attempt to expose these challenges, however they do not tend towards empirical approaches at solving the problems uncovered by their investigations. This study is positioned to remedying the problem of non-French speaking immigration and custom personnel at the Nigerian borders, and it tends to do this through practical pedagogical methodologies and approaches.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study sets to:

- i. ascertain the French language proficiency level of immigration and custom personnel at the Seme, Illela, Mfum and Saki borders of Nigeria
- ii. discover the challenges to French language acquisition among the immigration and custom personnel
- iii. determine the viability of a French language proficiency programme for the immigration and custom services
- iv. ascertain the most appropriate French language acquisition methodology for the immigration and custom services

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In his work on the French language and national development, Salaam (2006) did a trajectory of the historicity of the French language, highlighting the roles of the French language in the socio-economic, technological and political development of Nigeria. He emphasized the need for the country to fortify her relations with her francophone neighbouring countries through proficiency in the French language, underscoring the recognised position of the language

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social SciencesVol. 11, Issue 4, pp: (67-77), Month: July - August 2024, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

in intercontinental organisation such as AU, UN, UNESCO, ECOWAS and others. He mentioned the need for proficiency in the French language in the agencies and the security personnel at the Nigerian borders. However, Salaam did not state possible pedagogical approaches of acquiring the French language. Equally, Yekini (2011) worked on the entrepreneurial advantages of the French language in the actualising of the objectives of vision 2020 in Nigeria. He foregrounded possible career applications and national benefits of the language, citing several examples of individual and national losses due to lack of proactivity in learning the French language. He traced the legitimacy and progress of late General Sani Abacha's declaration, on the 2nd official language status of the French language, to Abacha's 1998 National Policy on Education. He established government's position on French language acquisition in the 4th edition of the 2004 National Policy on Education (NPE), section 1, number 10, item (b) as;

For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and Junior Secondary Schools, but Non-Vocational Electives at the Senior Secondary Schools.

Yekini also failed to mention pragmatic ways of alleviating the problem of non-communication of Nigerians in the language, despite government's acts on education.

Ajiboye (2010) described explicitly the conundrum of French as a second official language, citing government's provision in the NPE, and the race of making French Language compulsory at Secondary School level. He also focused on France's interest of supporting the propagation of the language, especially after Nigeria's bilateral accords with the Republic of Benin, Niger and Togo. He did a comprehensive historicity of the progress of the French language in Nigeria, citing milestones like the continual increase in French language candidates for the WASCE May/June examination within 6 years of the 1998 NPE provision, and the establishment of the Nigeria French Language Village (NFLV) in Badagry-Lagos. Ajiboye's dialectics on French as a 2nd official language, led to his enumerating nine (9) unavoidable implications of having a 2nd language. Nevertheless, the specific mention of the implications for immigrations and customs were grossly missing, and so also the possible pedagogical approach to acquiring the French language. Ijaya et al (2010) in their TETFund IBR group research, identified several challenges of foreign language acquisition in Nigeria, among which are attitude of Nigerians, quality and quantity of French language teachers, inadequate funding, and lack of adequate learning materials. The research report made a half-page cursory glance at language acquisition methodologies, without exposing these methodologies, nor ascertaining which would be suitable for teaching categories of professionals such as the immigration and custom personnel.

In her article in the Sunday Magazine of The Guardian Newspaper, Omonigho (2016) elucidated on the importance of bilingualism or multilingualism. She made a case for the benefits of French as a 2nd official language, accentuating growth to individual intellect — especially among political leaders and their overseas counterparts, access to larger international labour market for Nigerians and Nigeria, better access to travel opportunities, among others. Omonigho charged the Nigerian government to be more serious about French as a 2nd language, alluding to French being made compulsory from the age of two to eighteen years in African countries such as Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt. Border administration and control, and the Methodology of French language acquisition were totally missing also from her article. In The Sun Newspaper Nigeria of 13th of July, 2023, Uchegbu Achilles-Chud wrote on the need of Nigerians and the Nigerian government to take French language seriously. He cited Cameroon, Benin and Chad as having two functional official languages, thereby enhancing their international trade, commerce and job opportunities. He identified the French language as one of the several official languages of the United Nations, which has prevented non-speaking Nigerian political leaders, officials, and professionals from attaining certain prestigious positions in ECOWAS, AU and the UN. He cited Onyemelukwe (2003) as concluding that "French has become compulsory in theory but not in practice. Uchegbu did not mention the relevance of the French language to the Nigerian border administration and control; neither did he speak of methodology of acquiring the French language.

Most of the scholarships look into the historicity, the lucrateness and challenges of the French language in Nigeria, without mentioning ways of acquiring the language, nor identifying methodologies of acquisition. Where such mentions occur, they are sparse and cursory. These discoveries emphasise the pertinence of researches into effective means of French language acquisition, especially for border personnel such as the immigration and customs in an Anglophone country that is surrounded by francophone countries, such as Nigeria.

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 11, Issue 4, pp: (67-77), Month: July - August 2024, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

This study is original in that it aims to forward, possibly for the first time, data on the true state of French language proficiency level in the immigration and custom services in Nigeria, especially those on border schedules. The study will assist in furnishing data on the linguistic challenges to border administration and control, while proffering workable solutions to problems stemming from these communication challenges. It will contribute to the body of knowledge on the importance of The French language as the 2nd official language of Nigeria.

From my personal experience as a language instructor to several individuals, and groups of officers of the Nigerian Army — ranging from Army Captain to Brigadier General, from 1999 to 2022 — I discovered that most security personnel have very encouraging attitude, commitment and high level of interest in learning the French language. They were all willing to invest financially in language learning materials, and were very regular and punctual to class. In my over 23 years' experience of training this military personnel, among which were generals, I can attest to their appreciable acquisition of the French language, within the first 6 months. Hence, I can affirm that the objectives of ascertaining the linguistic challenges and prescribing the appropriate French language acquisition methodology for the immigration and custom services in Nigeria are attainable, and within the stipulated research period.

3. METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study will employ the Descriptive survey methodology. It shall be an anonymous survey. This implies that no Personal Identifiable Information (PII) will be collected. Questionnaire and interview will be used as research instruments to give allowance to freer and more robust feedbacks from respondents from the immigration and custom services. Descriptive research design allows for the deployment of array of qualitative and quantitative research methods in the collection of data that assist in the accurate description of a research problem (Voxco, 2021). It will help this study to understand and answer the what, when, how, where and why questions surrounding the French language acquisition problem among the Nigerian immigration and custom personnel. Hence this study adopts this research methodology.

POPULATION

The population of this study consists of all the Nigerian immigration and custom personnel at the Nigerian borders of Seme in Badagry-Lagos state, Illela in Sokoto State, Mfum in Cross River State and Saki in Oyo State.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Immigration and custom personnel stationed at the Nigerian borders of Seme, Illela, Mfum and Saki are selected for this study. The 3 sample borders comprise of 1 immigration outpost and 1 custom outpost each; hence 3 immigration outposts and 3 custom outposts. A total of 6 immigration and custom outposts will be sampled for this study. Both senior and junior personnel will be sampled in this study.

INSTRUMENTS FOR DATA COLLECTION

The main research instrument of this study is a researcher-designed questionnaire. The questionnaire will consist both structured and unstructured questions. This will be distributed to respondents in the selected borders of Nigeria to collect data. Since it is an anonymous survey, the questionnaire will be divided into several parts to include general information on the respondent — which does not include Personal Identifiable Information. Other parts will collect data on the qualifications of respondents, rank, French language proficiency level of respondent, border relations experience, linguistic challenges, and availability of government sponsored French language proficiency programmes, readiness for French language learning programmes, desired conditions for such programmes, among other relevant data necessary for this study.

The Interview shall be confidential. This will aid in getting honest and factual feedbacks from the respondents, without any blowback to them or their careers. The interview questions will be structured such that they would allow for freer expressions on areas not covered in the questionnaire.

AREA OF STUDY

The area of study is the Nigerian borders of Seme in Badagry-Lagos state, Illela in Sokoto State, Mfum in Cross River State and Saki in Oyo State. The delimitation of this study is the immigration and custom services, among other services

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 11, Issue 4, pp: (67-77), Month: July - August 2024, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

available at the selected borders. The study focuses on French language proficiency challenges and resolutions, while noting possible language acquisition methodology.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE INSTRUMENT

Cronbach’s Alpha would be used for the reliability test of the instrument, since it effectively measures the variance and covariance of the items on the instrument. Also, Content validity will be carried out on the instrument to determine how well it measures the state of French language proficiency in the selected borders, and among the selected personnel.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE INSTRUMENT

The researchers will visit all the immigration and custom outposts in the selected Nigerian borders, and with the permission of the most senior officers, give copies of the questionnaire to the personnel for completion and later return to the researchers. The distribution will be such that both senior and junior officers will fill the questionnaire.

5 interviews will be conducted in each of the selected borders, making 15 interviews in all. Bekele and Ago (2022) cited Bertaux (1981) as labelling 15 as an acceptable quantity for a qualitative research. 3 personnel would be selected for interview from the immigration, while 2 would be selected from the customs. This would be done interchangeably to make up for variation.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Frequency count and percentage distribution would be used to analyse and interpret the data collected. A descriptive study of the data depicted in tables and charts will aid in comparing and generalising findings of the research at completion. The hypothesis of research will be tested using t-test.

4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS BIO DATA

TABLE 1: SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Variable	N	%
Sex: Male	140	83.8
Female	27	16.2
Age: 18 – 27yrs	13	7.8
28 – 37yrs	63	37.7
38 – 47yrs	69	41.3
48yrs and above	22	13.2
Organization:		
NIS	87	52.1
NCS	80	47.9
Marital status:		
Married	136	81.4
Single	30	18.0
Separate/Divorce	1	0.6
Educational Qualification:		
FSLC/SSCE	23	13.8
OND/NCE	36	21.6
HND/DEGREE & ABOVE	108	64.7
Border: Seme	43	25.7
Illela	42	25.1
Mfum	32	19.2
Saki/others	50	29.9
Rank: High	28	16.8
Middle	118	70.7
Low	21	12.6

Table 1 shows the distribution of sample selected for this study. In all, there were 140(83.3%) male and 27(16.28) female personnel of Nigerian immigration and custom personnel who participated. On the basis of age range, 13(7.8%) fell within 18-27 years; 63(37.7%) were within 28-37 years, 69(41.3%) made 38-47 years while 22(13.2%) formed 48 years above. The respondents belong to group of personnel of whom 87(52.1%) were of the Nigerian immigration service and

so (47.9%) were of Nigeria custom service. 136(81.4%) of the respondents were married, 30 (18.0%) were single while 1 (0.6%) were separated or divorced.

Table 1 also reflected that 23(13.8%) of the personnel obtained FSLC/SSCE, 36(21.6%) had OND/NCE, while 108 (64.7%) were of HND or Degree and above. Out of the four border sites sampled 43 (25.7%) of the personnel were selected from Seme, 42(25.1%) from Illela, 32(19.2%) from Mfum while 50 (29.9%) were of Saki/others. The rank levels of the personnel revealed that 28(16.8%) of them were of higher rank, 118 (70.7%) were of middle rank and 21 (12.6%) fell in the lower rank.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS (RQ)

RQ1: What is the proficiency level of French language by custom and immigration personnel at Seme, Illela, Mfum and Saki borders in Nigeria?

To address this question, items 1, 2 and 4 in the instrument were coded for analysis and the result is as presented on table 2.

TABLE 2: MEAN SCORES ON PROFICIENCY LEVEL OF FRENCH LANGUAGE BY PERSONNEL AT NIGERIA BORDERS.

Variable	N	X	SD
Organization: NIS	87	2.5747	.64035
NCS	80	2.4375	.80887
Border: Seme	43	2.7674	.57060
Illela	42	2.3333	.75439
Mfum	32	2.5625	.71561
Saki	50	2.4000	.78246

Table 2 shows the mean score difference on French Language proficiency level of the personnel considered in this study based on their organizations and the border locations. by organization, the Nigeria immigration service (NIS) had a higher mean score (X = 2.57;SD = .640) while the Nigeria custom service had a lower mean score (X = 2.44; SD = .809). This implied that personnel of the Nigerian immigration service were more proficient in French language compared with their custom service counterpart.

Considering border location as yardstick for determining proficiency level of French Language by the personnel, it is revealed on table 2 that personnel of both the NIS and NCS at the Seme border had the highest mean score (X = 2.77; SD = .571), followed by those at Mfum (X = 2.56; SD = .716), then by those of Saki (X = 2.40; SD = .782) and least for those at Illela (X = 2.33; SD = .754). This shows that personnel of NIS and NCS at Seme border were most proficient in French language and closely followed by those of Mfum while those of Saki and Illela displayed some bits of mishmash. In this regard the areas of concern in this study that the personnel of NIS and NCS were to showcase their proficiency level of French language or otherwise include: the extent of reading, writing and speaking; posting of the personnel and problem of language barriers. The result therefore indicates that personnel of NIS were more proficient in the areas identified than the NCS as well as those personnel at Seme border portrayed a higher proficiency level than others.

RQ2: What are the challenges of French language acquisition amongst immigration and custom personnel at the Seme, Illela, Mfum and Saki borders of Nigeria?

The challenges of French language acquisition amongst personnel at Nigeria border were discovered from the coded and analysed items 5, 6 and 7 and the result presented on table 3.

TABLE 3: MEAN SCORES ON CHALLENGES OF FRENCH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AMONGST PERSONNEL AT NIGERIA BORDERS.

Variable	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7
Organization:			
NIS (N = 87) X	1.72	1.69	2.61
SD	.898	.906	1.038
NSC (N =80) X	2.20	1.93	2.94
SD	1.163	1.149	.932

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 11, Issue 4, pp: (67-77), Month: July - August 2024, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

Border Seme (N = 43) X	—	1.98	1.84	2.74
SD	—	1.012	.998	1.026
Illela (N = 42) X	—	2.21	2.07	3.26
SD	—	1.116	1.091	.767
Mfum (N = 32) X	—	1.97	1.44	2.53
SD	—	.933	.840	1.135
Saki (N = 50) X	—	1.78	1.70	2.52
SD	—	1.093	1.075	.931

Table 3 indicates that there was a common response pattern from the respondents on items 5, 6 and 7 in the instrument which bothered on considerable effect of language barriers on optimum performance of personnel, misrepresentation, misunderstanding and misinterpretation due to language barriers as well as exhibition of aggressive behavior because of language barriers respectively. The mean scores of personnel on the challenges show that the highest value was on item 7 both for the organization and border categories as asterisked on table 3 (i.e. exhibition of aggressive behavior). Next was on item 5 with mean scores higher than those on item 6 (i.e. language barriers effect on optimum performance of personnel). The mean scores on item 6 were the least all through (i.e. the challenge on misrepresentation, misunderstanding and misinterpretation). All the mean scores on table 3 on all the items 5, 6 and 7 were higher than 1.5 which implied that personnel of the NIS and NCS at the Nigeria border were all confronted with challenges of French language acquisition which affected their optimum performances, misconception and questionable behavior disposition to their duties.

RQ3: How viable is French language proficiency programme for the immigration and custom personnel be at the Seme, Illela, Mfum and Saki borders of Nigeria?

This question was answered by coding items 3, 8 through 18 in the questionnaire and analyzed. The result of the analysis is as presented on tables 4a and 4b.

TABLE 4A: MEAN SCORES ON FRENCH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY PROGRAMME VIABILITY FOR PERSONNEL OF NIS AND NCS AT NIGERIA BORDERS

Variables N = 167	Items											
	3	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Organizations (NIS and NCS) X	1.78	2.37	2.56	1.92	2.56	2.28	2.05	1.73	1.49	1.49	1.78	1.72
By Border (Seme, Illela, Mfum And Saki) SD	.959	1.225	1.117	1.114	1.095	1.086	1.086	.991	.790	.828	.989	.877

TABLE 4B: X² FOR VIABILITY OF FRENCH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY PROGRAMME AT NIGERIA BORDERS.

Variable	O _f	E _f	df	X ² value	Phi value	Approx sig
NIS	8780	87.0	30	63.884	.618	1000*
NCS		80.0				
Seme	43	43.0	90	133.341	.894	.002*
Illela	42	42.0				
Mfum	32	32.0				
Saki	50	50.0				

Table 4a shows that the man score for French language proficiency programme viability was highest in item 9 and 11, then in descending order: item 8, 12, 13, 10, 17, 3, 14, 18, 16 and least on item 15.

Table 4b indicates that introduction of French language proficiency acquisition programme to the personnel of NIS and NCS at all the Nigeria border locations sampled was significant (organization X² = 63.884 at α = .000, Border: x² = 133.341 at α = .002). This implied that French language proficiency acquisition programme by NIS and NCS personnel would help to: overcome the poor treatment of migrants and traders at the borders; checkmate possible chances of

corruption and maltreatment of migrants/trader; overturn poor treatment of migrants and traders to presenting good image of Nigeria in international trade and commerce; assume well-coordinated security architecture of the nation, as affirmed by Salaam (2006); remove all forms of impediment to international trade; impact on the economic fortune at the borders; invest their resources and ready to learn; enhance international trade relations to be more friendly and beneficial; reveal that the quality and availability of French language teachers, inadequate funding and lack of adequate learning materials can be addressed; encourage personnel to learn French language in order to be able to effectively communicate migrants at the borders; develop positive attitude to learn French language given the opportunity and guarantee the possibility of acquisition of French language proficiency at the borders by the personnel's.

RQ4: Which methodology is most appropriate for French language acquisition for the immigration and custom personnel at the Seme, Illela, Mfum and Saki borders of Nigeria?

Items 19, 20, 21 and 22 in the instrument were coded and analysed to obtain a result as presented on table 5 and used to address research question 4.

TABLE 5: MEAN SCORES ON APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGY FOR FRENCH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOR PERSONNEL AT NIGERIA BORDERS

Variable	N	X	SD
Organization			
NIS	item 19	87	1.9540
	Item 20	87	1.6437
	Item 21	87	1.3408
	Item 22	87	1.4483
NSC	item 19	80	2.3750
	Item 20	80	2.0750
	Item 21	80	1.2875
	Item 22	80	1.3375
Border			
Seme	item 19	43	2.2791
	Item 20	43	1.8837
	Item 21	43	1.3256
	Item 22	43	1.4419
Illela	item 19	42	2.5952
	Item 20	42	2.1429
	Item 21	42	1.3095
	Item 22	42	1.3333
Mfum	item 19	32	2.1875
	Item 20	32	2.0625
	Item 21	32	1.5625
	Item 22	32	1.8125
Saki	item 19	50	1.6600
	Item 20	50	1.4400
	Item 21	50	1.2400
	Item 22	50	1.1400

Table 5 indicate that out of the methodologies proposed for French language acquisition for NIS and NCS personnel at the border, item 19 had the highest mean score (asterisked) in all the categories. This implied that making French language a compulsory requirement for posting of personnel at the Nigeria borders was most appropriate to encourage personnel in learning language skills in French. However, item 20 was next in magnitude of mean score in all, which means that continual increase in French language candidates for the WASCE May/June examination is another method that can eventually resolve personnel language problems at the borders first like item 22 followed in mean score size and reflected that allowing certificate course in French language for NIS and NCS at the borders will ease language barriers. The least possible methodology was that proposed on item 21 with the least mean score which showed that NIS and NCS personnel may not avail themselves for distance learning programme, online coaching, home tutorial/classes, work study and regular school system as alternatives for language acquisition.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the result of the Bio-data in table 1 suggest that more French is spoken at the Seme border by the custom and immigration personnel, than any other border in Nigeria. Appreciable level of Proficiency in the French language is expected of the custom and immigration personnel at all the borders of Nigeria. However, the result indicate that proficiency in the French language is the lowest among custom and immigration personnel in the North. This begs the question of communication and its effects on the security architecture of the regions, given that problematic security issues are most rife in the north of Nigeria. Although Hausa is conveniently the lingua franca in the northern borders of Nigeria (Adeola & Fayomi, 2012), yet the need for proficiency in the French language cuts across all borders of Nigeria.

The results in table 2 indicate findings that more immigration personnel speak the French language, than custom personnel at the borders of Nigeria. While it is expected that the same amount of personnel of both services speak French, however this results appear logical since the immigrations deal more with people directly, than with goods and services like the customs at the borders. This is not to say that French language acquisition programmes do not concern the customs, but rather to suggest that both services are in need of better proficiency in the language for effective administration and control of the borders.

The findings on the effects of language barrier in table 3 corroborate those of Ebong (2022) as cited in Oriakpono and Senayon (2024) such as the ineffectiveness of security personnel, and lax security initiatives at the border. Lack of proficiency in the French language is a great impediment to the stability of the border regions. Custom and immigration personnel would benefit from a campaign against French language barrier, and its attendant effects. According to gleanings from the responses to the structured and unstructured questions of the questionnaire; altercations and fights sometimes break out at the border due to misrepresentations and misinterpretations. Language barrier begets suspicion, lack of trust and eventual hostility.

The results of tables 4a and 4b present the advantages of organizing French language proficiency acquisition programmes for the customs and immigrations. Among others, the prevention of maltreatment of migrants, curb in level of corruption, better security architecture and trade relations at the borders are preeminent. Eselebor and Okunade (2020) as cited in Oriakpono and Senayon (2024) affirm that the security challenges faced at the borders of Nigeria are associated with language barriers. Furthermore, Oriakpono and Senayon (2024) identified significant positive economic and social transformation and interconnectivity with the integration of French language proficiency at the Nigerian borders. The infusion of French language proficiency among the custom and immigration personnel at the borders will improve social interactions and douse the tensions emanating from language barriers at the borders.

Findings from table 5 reveal that making proficiency in the French language a compulsory criteria for posting custom and immigration personnel to the borders of Nigeria, will resultantly produce more custom and immigration personnel who are proficient in the French. Also, that acquisition of O'level result in French as a subject, will lay the foundation for proficiency acquisition in the French language. Thirdly, that mandatory certificate courses in French language will motivate custom and immigration personnel to learn to speak the French language.

However, experience has shown that availability of interest, time and resources are great factors coefficient to the acquisition of any language, in this case the French language. Without proper motivation, commitment and funding, language acquisition is nearly impossible. Hence, the research recommends that government commit to the cause of rendering the NIS and NCS communicable in the French language, to foster effectiveness and stability in the administration and control of the border territories of Nigeria.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Several of the following recommendations were gleaned from the responses to the unstructured questions on the questionnaire administered for this research. Others are based on the findings from the results of the structured questions. Hence, the research recommends that:

1. There should be better emphasis on French language proficiency among custom personnel, since they have less staff that speak French, than the immigrations.

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 11, Issue 4, pp: (67-77), Month: July - August 2024, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

2. Proficiency in the French language should be a criteria for posting personnel to the francophone borders of Nigeria, in order to checkmate possible chances of corruption and maltreatment of migrants and traders, and to present a good image of Nigeria in international trade and commerce.
3. French language proficiency courses should be organised specifically for the personnel of the NCS and NIS, to overcome the challenges of French language barrier, which has affected optimum performances, and caused misconceptions, questionable behaviour and disposition to duties.
4. O'level passes in the French language should be a requirement for employment into the custom and immigration services, especially as Nigeria is surrounded by francophone borders (Adeola & Fayomi, 2012).
5. Personnel of the NCS and NIS should be sponsored on certificate courses in the French language, to ensure a well-coordinated security architecture of the nation.
6. There should be awareness programmes on the importance of the French language to sensitize and motivate the NCS and NIS personnel to acquire proficiency in the French language.
7. Government should address the problems of low quality and quantity of French language teachers, inadequate funding, and lack of adequate teaching and learning materials for the French language.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research underscores the critical role of French language proficiency in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of customs and immigration operations at Francophone borders of Nigeria. By investing in specialised French proficiency programmes for customs and immigration personnel, government can improve border administration, and control significantly. Findings indicate that better communication can reduce misunderstandings, and streamline border control processes. The findings also highlight that linguistic competence not only facilitates smoother interactions with migrants, travelers and traders, but also supports better enforcement of regulations and improved border security. Implementing robust French language training initiatives is therefore essential for optimizing administrative control and engendering a more cohesive operational environment in Francophone regions.

Moreover, the study has demonstrated that by investing in French language training, governments can empower their officials to effectively manage borders, facilitate legitimate trade and travel, and combat transnational threats. The implementation of French proficiency programmes will not only strengthen border management, but also encourage greater cooperation and collaboration between Anglophone and Francophone countries. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the importance of language proficiency in international relations cannot be overstated. This research serves as a call to action for governments and stakeholders to prioritize French language training, and empower the customs and immigration officials to excel in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

REFERENCES

- [1] G. I. Adeola, and O. Fayomi, The Political and Security Implications of Cross Border Migration between Nigeria and Her Francophone Neighbours. In International Journal of Social Science Tomorrow, 1(3), pp. 2, 6, 8. 2012.
- [2] T. Ajiboye, Le Français comme 2^{ème} langue officielle au Nigeria ? Oui, mais... Dans Linguistique et Applications Pédagogiques, Regards sur le Français Langue Etrangère. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359686500_Le_francais_comme_2eme_langue_officielle_au_Nigeria_Oui_mais. 2010.
- [3] W. B. Bekele, and A F. Y. Ago, Sample Size for Interview in Qualitative Research in Social Sciences: A Guide to Novice Researchers. Research in Educational Policy and Management, 4(1), 42-50. <https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2022.3> 2022.
- [4] Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN). National Policy on Education (NPE). Federal Republic of Nigeria, Abuja. 2004.
- [5] B. S. Ijaiya, T. M. Yekini, T. O. Ezema et al., *An Appraisal of Language Teachers and Materials in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Niger state*. By the Research and Publications Committee, School of Languages, Federal College of Education Kontagora, Niger State. TETFund Group Research. 2014.

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social SciencesVol. 11, Issue 4, pp: (67-77), Month: July - August 2024, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

- [6] C. N. Ogbonna, E. L. Nsemba, and C. Nwangwu, Border Governance, Migration Securitisation, and Security Challenges in Nigeria. In (Im)Mobilities, Security And Identities In West Africa Borderlands, Springer Society (2023) 60, 304. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-023-00855-8>. 2023.
- [7] S. Omonigho, French As Nigeria's Second Official Language. The Guardian. <https://guardian.ng/sunday-magazine/french-as-nigerias-second-official-language/> Feb. 2016.
- [8] M. Oriakpono, and E. Senayon, French Language Integration and Security Dynamics on Nigerian Borders. In NIU Journal of Humanities, 9(1), Nexus International University, pp. 192, 195, 198. 2024.
- [9] O. W. Salaam, French Language in Nigeria: A Veritable Drive Towards Achieving National Development, in Kontagora Journal of Languages and Literatures (KONJOLLS). Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 220, 224. Sep. 2006.
- [10] A. C. Uchegbu, Isn't it time to take French seriously? The Sun. <https://sunnewsonline.com/isnt-it-time-to-take-french-seriously/?amp> Jul. 2023.
- [11] Voxco, Descriptive Research Design. voxco.com. <https://www.voxco.com/blog/descriptive-research-design/> 2021.
- [12] T. M. Yekini, "Functional French as an Entrepreneurial Bridge towards Achieving the National Objectives of Vision 2020 in Nigeria. " Multidisciplinary Journal of Research Development. NARD. UNIPORT, Port-Harcourt. Vol. 17, No. 2, Sep. 2011.