

Challenges facing Students from Francophone Countries in the Nigerian Universities: A Case Study of University of Ilorin

ABUBAKAR SAIDU, ZEINAB A. ABUDU,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin

Abstract. Nigeria being the giant of Africa has become attractive to many countries in Africa particularly sub-Saharan francophone countries. This has led to the immigration of francophone students to Nigeria in search of adequate knowledge and more opportunities in order to be part of the development of globalization. This study therefore examined the challenges faced by francophone students in Nigerian universities using descriptive survey method. Purposive sampling technique was used to select all the one hundred (100) francophone students in the University and a researcher-designed questionnaire, titled “challenges Facing Francophone Students in the Nigerian Universities” was used to elicit personal information of the respondents. The data collected were analyzed using the mean rating and the t-test. It was revealed that language barrier, poor immersion programme, lack of cultural understanding among others were the challenges facing students from francophone countries in Nigerian universities. It was however recommended that orientation programme on the country’s cultural values and norms should be organized by the school management so as to enlighten students.

Keywords: Francophone, immersion, international education

1. Background to the Study

Every society, be it primitive or modern, simple or complex, has a way of educating its young and potential members through various socialisation agents. All over the world, education is regarded as a critical sector whose performance directly affects the quality and magnitude of national development. It is an important means to develop human resources by cultivating appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes, which a nation requires to harness resources, industrialize and take part in the global knowledge economy (Durosaro, 2012).

Researchers such as Bartram, (2007); Keith and Ricardo (2011) have dwelled much on education generally, however the need to be internationally educated has taken over the general view portrayed on education. This is because the day-to-day activities of the average citizens around the world are influenced by burgeoning international connections (Bartram, 2007). Thus, the cross-cultural links people have in and outside the communities, as well as increase worldwide communication capabilities have all contributed to an imperative need for responsible citizens to understand global and international issues. This therefore, provides the basis for the principle of externality whereby the Federal Government of Nigeria promotes international education.

Nigeria has been in the forefront in integrating other citizenry from francophone countries particularly within the African Sub-region to be part of the beneficiaries of her educational system. According to Fafunwa (1994) equality is reached only when the outcome of schooling are similar for all students – the locals and foreigners without taking into consideration racial, ethnic, nationality, language and religious groups.

2. Trends in the Historical Development of International Education in Nigeria

International education is a process by which young people are made to be aware of the global/international issues. They come to appreciate cultural diversity, learn from others in an anti-racist society, develop their ability to articulate their beliefs in a reflective manner, and learn to make judgments related to objective standards (Mori, 1998). Thus, international education in Nigeria cannot be discussed without taking a look back at the historical development of university education in Nigeria. Prior to Nigeria's independence, the country had only two established post-secondary institutions, Yaba Higher College founded in 1934 now Yaba College of Technology and the University of Ibadan which was founded in 1948. It was then a College to the University of London until two years after the independence when she became autonomous (Jekayinfa, 2008). More prominent universities which include University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Obafemi Awolowo University (formerly University of Ife), Ahmadu Bello University and so on were founded in the years that followed the independence.

Hence, Nigerian universities became more attractive to the global world, especially to the sub-Saharan region which is majorly dominated by francophone countries. The first universities in Nigeria to accommodate international students in their ranks were University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Lagos and University of Ibadan in the early 1980s. As observed by Prof Jibril Aminu, a former Federal Minister of Education in Nigeria, University of Ibadan can rightly claim to have given credibility and International recognition to

higher education in this country. The university is internationally famous for its academic excellence by the high standards it set early in its history. However, the Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Lagos and Usman Dan fodio University were the first universities to have registered francophone students into their institution in the late 70s because of their closeness to neighbouring French countries such as Niger Republic, Benin Republic and Cameroun (Onyemelukwe, 2004). These students coming to pursue their university education in Nigeria were motivated by the desire to discover a new environment and to participate in the development of their nations through the acquisition of new skills.

Similarly, the establishment of English as the most widely spoken language gears the francophone students to absorb the idea of bilingualism by creating avenue that can help them to achieve their objectives. This is why English language is applied to the francophone students in the context of foreign language and to support it, Ajiboye (2002) stated that, a language which is geographically and politically exogenous to the mother tongue is identifiable in the geopolitical community under reference. The coming of international students into Nigerian universities especially francophone brought to the knowledge of the Federal Government and the Ministry of Education to the establishment of Centre for International Education in almost all the federal universities in Nigeria in order to have more orientation on the vision and mission on international education.

The Need for International Education

According to Mori (1998), international education is about developing informed attitudes and a willingness to participate in the societal activities, it is about being committed to seeking sensible answers to difficult issues which have an international or global dimension. It is about “thinking globally while acting locally”, it is in short about broadening the minds of the young people, developing and sustaining in them an international outlook, by encouraging them in creativity. To this, one would assert that being internationally educated is not only about studying abroad, but also participating and

having an understanding of what is going on in the global world and also in our immediate environment.

Similarly, one of the vital tools concerning international education is the acquisition of certain skills such as critical thinking to enable learners discover their potentials and make use of it wherever it is needed. Equally crucial is the acquisition of skills that will make them employable in our international world, not only specific skills relating to a particular job or course of study but also the national priority core skills of literacy, numeracy, problem-solving, how to work both independently and with others in the community. In spite of all the above mentioned, a sound and good citizen can only be produced if only one acquires firstly proper manners and cultural understanding of his own society and being a good representative of his nation everywhere in the world.

International Education in the University of Ilorin

International Education is a vital component of a modern University's profile. It enables a University to establish and sustain reciprocally rewarding contacts with foreign institutions. The benefits that accrue to a University when it determines to internationalize its campus are many and far-reaching. Hosting international students on campus, for example, invigorates all the processes of achievement and excellence. By being present to participate in the University's life and culture, foreign students expand their horizons and broaden perspective; they affect the prevailing structures of thinking, heighten self-awareness and open minds to new vistas.

Furthermore, international education enables participation in great cultural, scientific debates and achievements that constitute the legacy of the world wide community of Universities. Indeed, in our contemporary world, institutional linkages and partnerships among Universities have become a crucial lifeline to growth and development. University of Ilorin is poised to achieving all of these goals. Hence, the university vision's statement is "connecting with the world through education". The University is committed to being a world-class University,

offering its students an education of the highest quality. It is recognized internationally for its academic excellence and extensive research activities. It is within this perspective that the University Senate established the Centre for International Education (CIE) in April 2009 with a view to enhance building relationships with other world-class Universities, ranking from Africa to other part of the world.

The specific mandate of the Centre is to promote, support and coordinate all facets of international activities in the University. The centre carries advisory responsibility in all international matters to the academic and the administrative units in the University including faculties and departments. Specifically, the following shall constitute some of the functions of the Centre:

- Develop linkages with local and foreign Universities
- Coordinate the development of short and long term academic programmes for international students.
- Develop and clear all MOU (Memorandum of Understanding)
- Facilitate students and staffs Exchange programme
- Advertise programmes abroad to attract fee paying students.
- Coordinate all International Educational Exchange
- Coordinate cooperative agreements with donor agencies.
- Assist International students on their arrival and departure and be responsible for their welfare on Campus.
- Identify open communication lines and maintain links with institutions/individuals with similar interests as the University of Ilorin.
- Establish strong study abroad programmes in the University for External/Foreign students.
- Facilitate collaborations research and publications within an international framework.
- Promote University of Ilorin's active presence in an increasingly global

intellectual environment.

- Provide technical assistance and administrative support for developing international proposals.
- Provide logistical support for visas for international travel.

Being the main department that carries out International affairs on campus, the centre also supervises the activities of the linguistic immersion centre which aims to give more enlightenment to the francophone students by teaching them English language which is the medium of instruction in University of Ilorin.

3. Purpose of the Study

This study examined the challenges faced by students from francophone countries in integrating in the Nigerian higher education system with particular reference to University of Ilorin. Specifically, the study examined:

- (a) the challenges facing francophone students in Nigerian universities.
- (b) whether male and female francophone students in Nigerian university are facing different challenges

4. Research Questions

Answers were sought to the following research questions:

- (i) What are the challenges facing francophone students in Nigerian universities?
- (ii) Is there any difference in the challenges facing francophone

students in Nigerian universities based on gender?

5. Research Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the challenges facing francophone students in Nigerian universities based on gender

6. Methodology

In this study, descriptive survey method was employed with a focus on challenges faced by francophone students in University of Ilorin. The descriptive survey method enables the researcher to obtain opinions of the respondents as representatives' sample of the target population so as to generalize the findings for the entire population.

The population for the study was the entire foreign students in University of Ilorin, Ilorin. The target population was students from francophone countries in the University. Purposive sampling technique was used to select all the one hundred (100) francophone students in the University.

A researcher-designed questionnaire, titled "challenges Facing Francophone Students in the Nigerian Universities" was used. The questionnaire entailed two sections (A and B). Section "A" contained items to elicit personal information of the respondents while section "B" contained statements on the challenges faced by francophone students in integrating in the Nigerian educational system. The data collected was analyzed using the mean rating and the t-test.

7. Results

Research Question One: What are the challenges facing francophone students in Nigerian universities?

Table 1: Ranking order of Challenges Facing Francophone Students in Nigerian Universities

| S/N | Item | Mean | Ranking |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------------------|
| 1 | I encounter admission registration difficulties | 2.93 | 3 rd |
| 2 | I was not given adequate orientation about the school programmes | 2.84 | 7 th |
| 3 | I do not have knowledge of Nigerian values and norms | 2.91 | 5 th |
| 4 | Changing of environment is a challenge for me | 2.80 | 8 th |
| 5 | I am not considered in the classroom instruction | 2.31 | 10 th |
| 6 | Differences in the Anglophone and Francophone educational systems is a challenge for me | 2.93 | 3 rd |
| 7 | I have learning difficulty | 2.89 | 6 th |
| 8 | I am unable to cope with English language in my academic activities | 3.10 | 1 st |
| 9 | The immersion program I had was not comprehensive | 2.67 | 9 th |
| 10 | The study materials for language learning was inadequate | 2.94 | 2 nd |

Table 1 indicates the mean ranking of the challenges facing francophone students in Nigerian Universities. Nine out of ten items depict various forms of challenges facing francophone students in Nigerian universities because the mean scores is above 2.50 which is the cut-off for decision since the responses are patterned after the four-point Likert Scale Format. “ I am unable to cope with English Language in my academic domain” ranked 1st with a mean score of 3.10. The study materials for language learning was inadequate ranked 2nd. Differences in the Anglophone and Francophone educational systems and admission registration difficulties are both ranked 3rd with mean score of 2.93. Other challenges are inadequate orientation for francophone students; changing of environment; incomprehensive immersion program; cultural issue and learning difficulty. These findings corroborate the findings of Adelaku and Oludeyi (2013) which revealed that culture shock, language barrier and poor orientation programme are common challenges encounter by international students in Nigerian Universities.

Testing of Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the challenges facing francophone students in Nigerian universities based on gender

Table 2: Analysis of the challenges facing francophone students in integrating into Nigerian higher education system based on gender

| Gender | No | Mean | Std | Df | Cal. t | Sig.(2-tailed | Decision |
|--------|----|-------|------|----|--------|---------------|----------|
| Male | 58 | 94.17 | 9.42 | 98 | 2.17 | 0.03 | H01 |
| Female | 42 | 90.10 | 9.04 | | | | Rejected |

P> 0.05

As shown on table 2, the calculated t-value was 2.17 while its calculated significance value is 0.03 at alpha level of 0.05. The calculated significance value (0.03) was lower than 0.05 alpha level. On this basis, the null hypothesis one was therefore rejected. This means that there was a significant difference in the challenges facing francophone students in integrating into Nigerian higher education system based on gender. This finding negates the findings of Odilora (2007) which revealed that the challenges facing francophone students are not different in terms of gender.

8. Conclusion

It is evident from the findings of this study that francophone students are faced with numerous challenges which have significant effect on their academic achievement. The challenge that is most common is language and this is attributed to short duration for the language immersion program before they were given admission into the main stream. Poor knowledge of Nigerian values and norms similarly put francophone students in a state of disorientation in the sense that, the newly arrived students hardly integrate into the values and norms they met on ground. The cultural diversity met by francophone students can be traced to the multiple ethnics group found in Nigeria. And it creates at time some chaotic situation whereby Francophone students need to be counseled about the Nigerian cultural heritage so that they will not trespass the limits.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

- a) Prospective students from Francophone countries should find out properly about the country's educational system before engaging him/herself into it.
- b) Proper awareness programme should be done by University authorities on their school website in order to enlighten the prospective students on the school activities and the immediate environment
- c) Orientation programme on the country's cultural values and norms should be organized

by the school management so as to enlighten students on the cultural values of the society.

d) Schools are also advised to provide adequate instructional facilities that can help francophone students in improving their English language

e) Workshop, seminar and symposium should also be frequently organized for francophone students with the view to give them the opportunity of interacting with the school authority so that they could easily discuss their challenges.

f) Lecturers and native students should always consider the presence of francophone students the in class by explaining and giving more details during classroom instructions without making them feel rejected, desperate and lonely.

References

- Adelaku, S. O., & Oludeyi, O. (2013). The Nigeria Educational Challenges and International Student's Choice of Study in Nigerian Universities. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, volume 2 No. 4, pp2-9.
- Ajiboye, T. (1993). Foreign Language learning in Nigeria: *Stop or encore? A ten minute paper presented at Nigeria Interlanguage Fair(NEXPOLINGUA 1993)*. Badagry .
- Ajiboye, T. (2005). Integrating Foreign Language into the Nigerain Eduactional System: What policies. In T. Ajboye, *Nigeria and Foreign Language Questiion* (pp. 40-56). Ibadan: Caltop Publications.
- Alberta, L. (2000). Affirming Francophone Education. In *Francophones Education* (pp. 10-21). Edmonton: 11160 Jasper Avenue.
- Bartram, B. (2007). The Socio-cultural Need of International Students in Higher Education: A Comparison of Staff and Students views. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11 (2), 205-214.
- Connecting to the World through Education*. (2010). Retrieved April 21, 2014, from

- http://www.unilorin.edu.ng/CIE_Website_handbook.html
- Durosaro, I. A. (2012). Cognitive Behavioural Theory. *A Counselling Intervention for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* , Vol 29 (No 2), pp188-193.
- Fafunwa. B. (1994). *Falling Standard of Education in Nigeria* . Ibadan: National Association for Educational Administration and Planning.
- Keith, M., & Ricardo , S. (2011). *Changing Patterns of Access to Education in Anglophone and Francophone Countries in Sub Saharan Africa: Is Education for All Pro-Poor*.
- Mori, P. (1998). Why do we need to be Internationally educated? In *A Curriculum for Global Citizenship* (pp. 9-12). SOED Scottish CCC.
- Odilora, A (2007). *A Survey of the Problems facing French Teaching in East Central State Secondary Schools*; being a Project Submitted for the Completion of PDGE, Institute of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Onyemelukwe,I (2004) *The French Language and Literary Creativity in Nigeria*. Zaria. Labelle Educational Ltd
- Stephany, E. (2009). Do Language Barrier affect Students Performance in School. *Journal of Global Post International News* , pp1- 6.