

stated that: "From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and language of immediate environment and French shall be taught as subjects." And, part IV, section 318 (iii) of the 1999 Constitution, where the Certificate of Education or its equivalent (being a minimum qualification in the National Assembly) is interpreted as: "the ability to read, write, understand and communicate in the English language to the satisfaction of the Independent National Electoral Commission."

Beyond politics, the policy and legislation above are discriminatory, and they are clearly at variance with one of the philosophies and goals of education in Nigeria, which states that: "education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, color, ethnic background, and any peculiar individual challenges" (NPE 2013, 1).

The Rivalry between Arabic and French Languages

The choice of languages to be taught in a country's schools is generally determined by its language policies. While many languages are recognized for their importance and relevance to national development or international integration, French and Arabic are more essential in Nigeria because they are considered to be priority foreign languages. Unfortunately, rather than serving as languages of integration and wider communication, the two languages are always competing to outdo each other, and a good example is in the country's north, where Arabic has a significant religious and political influence (Ogunmodimu 2015). Hence, for politico-religious reasons, the rivalry is very evident in the way they are often listed side by side whenever the issue of foreign languages is raised almost everywhere in Nigeria.

Since faith and knowledge are not the same, just as Western education and Christianity are not the same, Amobi (2024) considers it necessary for those in Southern Nigeria to understand that the knowledge of Arabic is not about Islam as a religion but rather about Arabic itself. Similarly, those in the north also need a complete change of the erroneous notion that Western education (which also includes French language) ought to be forbidden because it was brought into Nigeria by Christian missionaries. As of today, it is a popular belief in Northern Nigeria that Muslim children are only being encouraged to go to school in order to get them to abandon their religion and adopt other religions or beliefs in other religions. The popular *Boko Haram* movement, founded in 2002 and literally

translated by Jabo (2023) as "western education is forbidden," is a case study. *What challenge do this and other policies pose to French as a foreign language in Nigeria?*

After a brief review of some of Nigeria's language policy, we're focusing on some of the areas where the implications of the various policies on language are most visible, such as the national curriculum, the French teachers, the teaching of French, the status of French, and the future of French as a foreign language in Nigeria. Let us take the objectives of the national curriculum as our starting point.

French in the Nigerian Curriculum

Following the renewed status of French as the first foreign language in Nigeria by the federal government in 1998, the adoption of French as a core subject at the junior and senior secondary levels is reflected in the various national education policies from the years 1998 to 2013. This new policy, according to the National Curriculum for Junior Secondary Schools (2001), is based on the need for Nigerians to acquire proficiency in French as a major international language for science, commerce, industry, diplomacy, and technology.

Broadly speaking, the secondary French program aims to provide learners with sufficient skills to make French language a tool of communication by the end of their secondary education. However, the current reality is that inconsistency on the part of the government (Isa 2021), which is also responsible for some of our failed education policy, has defeated this and the various other objectives of the national curriculum. A clear example is the fact that French was initially considered "compulsory in schools" (NPE 1998, 9), it was then repealed and replaced by "be compulsory in primary and Junior Secondary Schools, but Non-vocational Elective at Senior Secondary School" (NPE 2004, 4); and currently, "it will be taught as a subject" alongside Arabic (NPE 2013) and several other subjects in the humanities.

The implication of the above is that the fourth objective of the national curriculum (2001), which states that the program "seeks to encourage teachers to lead learners to use French language as a tool for enhancing technological excellence in whatever discipline they may choose in future" (i) would be difficult to achieve because, at the time of registration for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examination Council (NECO), which are the