

**FRENCH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AS PANACEA TO BORDER  
INSECURITY**

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***Abstracts***

*The role of Nigerian armed forces in fighting crimes across various borders that are mere artificial boundaries cannot be over –emphasized as the constitutional roles and responsibilities of the Nigerian army are religiously spelt out in the Nigerian constitution. Nigerian Army being the largest in West Africa Sub- region has as its responsibilities, the security of citizens and the nation and defending the territorial integrity of the country from external aggression. It should be noted however that Nigeria is surrounded by four major Francophone Countries that adopt French language as their official language and language of trans -border communication, thus proficiency in French language among the Nigerian armed forces should not be underestimated considering the danger in trans –border crimes. National Policy of Education recognized French language as a foreign language, second official language, language of diplomacy and international communication among French speaking countries of West Africa Sub-region. However, this paper looked critically at the pivotal role of French language proficiency on the sustainability of trans–border security and safeguard against external aggression. Suggestions were made on how to incorporate French language teaching and learning into the training and operations of the Nigerian army.*

**Keywords:** *Proficiency, Armed forces, Sustainability, National Security, Territorial Integrity*

### **Introduction**

It is worthy of note that security is of prime importance to all citizens as successive government has always vowed to protect life and properties of the citizens. Whether these promises are fulfilled or not, it is constitutionally documented that the government carries out this responsibility towards the citizens. It is not a news that state of insecurity in Nigeria in the world over calls for concerted efforts and it is somehow pathetic most especially in Nigeria. Activities such as terrorism, banditry, Fulani herders and farmer clashes, trafficking in persons and kidnapping just to mention a few have left untold hardship on the Nigerian citizens and claimed several innocent lives and damaged properties worth millions of naira. All these nefarious activities cannot be divorced from safety and security of land borders. Trans- border activities have significant impact on the internal security.

The case of Nigeria is highly pathetic due to language barrier at the border communities with Francophone French speaking countries that share border with Nigeria; Republic of Benin, Cameroun, Niger Republic and Tchad are former colonies of France that adopted the language of their formal colonial master as official language of communication even for carrying out Trans-border communication. Proficiency in both English and French by the members of the armed forces cannot be under estimated because their constitutional duty is to protect the territorial integrity of Nigeria and safeguard the country against external aggression. Competence in French language is a myth among Nigeria armed forces and it is dangerous for the survival of the country that has porous borders.

Heavy presence of security agents such as Customs, immigration, Interpol, National Drug law enforcement agency officers (NDLEA) and Soldiers are noticeable at the borders between Nigeria and some of these French speaking countries of West African origin. It is worthy of note that illegal immigrants find their way into the country without proper checks and balance, the inability of these security agents to understand the language of these illegal immigrants is suicidal and inimical to the security of the citizenry.

Nigeria armed forces has not won the battle against the dreaded Boko Haram terrorist group despite the huge amount of money voted by the ministry of defense to curb the menace of this terrorist group who has consistently launched attack on innocent citizens. The Nigerian armed forces should not only rely on logistics in the effort to decimate this terrorist group and focus attention on French language proficiency among the officers and men of the army.

#### **(A) Security situation in Nigeria, trans-border crimes, terrorism and banditry**

Security is a basic condition for the survival of humans' beings. This security is synonymous to Freedom from danger fear and doubt among others. Nwagboso (2012) argues that security is essential concept which is commonly associated with the alleviation of threat of survival of individuals or group.

Nigeria is faced with an unprecedented wave of different but overlapping security crisis from kidnapping to extremist insurgencies, almost all the geo-political zones have been ravaged with al manners of crises and violence of different magnitude and proportion. The state of insecurity in Nigeria has threatened the fabric of Nigerian society to the extent that human lives are lost

and material resources permanently destroyed at every attack. The citizenry has lost confidence and faith in the democracy as a system of government and the constitutional mandate by the government to protect the life and properties of the citizens. This high level of insecurity has been associated with staggering poverty, youth unemployment which stands at 32.5 % and the country is in the middle of worst economic depression in 27 years. According to UN, by the end of 2020 conflict with group had led to deaths of almost 350 000 people and forced millions from their home. There are different types of violence and crimes observable in Nigeria:

**(i) Clashes between herders and farmers**

There had been clashes between Nomads and farmers in Nigeria for many years. The climate change has necessitated the migration of herders to the south in search of greener pasture which resulted into quarrel and disagreement over the use of land and water as well as grazing routes. States in middle belt such as Benue and Plateau have recorded deadliest attack.

**(ii) Banditry and Kidnapping**

One of the devastating and pathetic threat of families in Nigeria is kidnapping of school children from their classroom and boarding houses. More than 1000 students have been abducted from their schools since December 2020. Some of these children are only released after the payment of ransom running to millions of naira. These criminals commonly referred to as bandits in Nigeria raid villages and kidnap innocent citizens and burn down houses.

**(iii) Separatist Insurgency**

Many separatist groups have emerged from different zones and regions of the country demanding for self- determination due to dissatisfaction resulting from nepotism, sectionalism, segregation and tribalism. The most prominent among the separatist groups is the indigenous people of Biafran IPOB which

has had various clashes with Nigerians security agencies. Many of the groups from Igbo extract are agitating for referendum and self – determination. This group was founded in 2014 by Nnamdi Kanu though Biafra is not new in Nigeria political history because the Civil war in Nigeria in 1967 which led to the death of over million people was due to declaration for the independent state of Biafra by the regional leaders.

#### **(iv) Oil Militants**

South–South region of Nigeria is the oil producing region of the country which is also the Nigeria biggest foreign export earner and the militants in Niger militants in this oil rich zone of the country have long agitated for a greater share of the profit. This demand is based on the presumption that majority of the wealth come from this region and the environmental damages caused by oil exploration making it practically impossible for them to fish due to oil spillage on water. The militants mount pressure on the government by kidnapping oil workers and attack security personnel.

#### **(B) Security Situation at the Border Communities in Nigeria**

The border is an essential symbol of state sovereignty and as result, great care is taken to ensure that it is not breached (Foucher, 2019. Anning and Pokoo, 2017). The border is a security construct (Onucha 2013). The border is used by a state to exercise their ability to determine who is permissible to enter into their territory and who is not (Bauder 2018). However, border security is the totality of efforts made by a state to manage crossing over its borders to facilitate the movement of people and goods while keeping out threats or crime (Anning & Pokou. 2017). Border security is a delicate process by which threats

to the state are kept at bay while non- threats are permitted to come into the country (Lamptey, 2013).

The level of insecurity observed at the Nigerian borders with Francophone neighboring countries of West Africa calls for concern among stakeholders in security matters in Nigeria. The failure of Nigerian government to manage effectively the borders affect domestic and international economic activities and also constitutes threats to national sovereignty and the security of the country. Nigeria border with four French speaking countries in West Africa who are former colonies of France and who adopt French language as language of communication due to their past colonial experience. The French speaking countries are Republic of Benin, Cameroun, Niger Republic and Republic of Tchad. Trans- border activities involving the use of colonial languages such as English and French is very significant for security purpose most especially Nigeria security personnel at the border who neither speak nor write French language effectively.

However, some of the factors responsible for high level of insecurity at the Nigerian borders are illiteracy, poverty and corruption which pose security threats due to activities of illegal immigrants, smugglers, drug and traffic in persons and Jihadist and terrorist movement which constitute major security challenges for many nations in West Africa Sub- region including Nigeria. Trans- border crimes are difficult to alleviate because of the porosity of the borders that are mere geographical expressions and artificial. Linguistic nomenclature in West Africa sub- region which is a conglomerate of both Anglophone and Francophone countries further compounded the problem of insecurity. Cross – border crimes entails illegal and notorious activities perpetrated by various groups for financial, socio- political and religious

considerations. Some other noticeable trans-border crimes at Nigerian borders include money laundering, arms smuggling leading to local proliferation of small arms and light weapons as well as build of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive materials. Illegal oil bunkering and illicit trafficking in mineral resources business fraud. All these activities going on unabated at the borders pose serious security threats to the life of citizenry and national sovereignty of Nigeria. North- Eastern border is the most volatile among the borders and has highest concentration of border communities and the most backward due to most difficult terrain, high level illiteracy and intense poverty rate and massive unemployment. This region has the highest cases of border-related crimes and high concentration of Boko Haram terrorist group ravaging the three North Eastern state of Yobe, Borno and Adamawa. Nigeria porous border gave room for proliferation of light weapons which found their way into the country from Maghreb following the political uprising from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'ivoire, Mali and Lybia. ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons. Goods and services further created outlets for the criminals to operate across the border. South- East border with Cameroun also favored trafficking in persons most especially small children over the years, these children are mostly transported on the sea to their destinations which include Gabon, Cameroun and Equatorial Guinea where they work as prostitutes or slaves.

**(C) Constitutional roles of Nigeria armed forces on security matter**

Nigerian Army is part of Nigerian armed forces and it is one of the largest in West Africa. It was established in 1960 coinciding with the independence day of Nigeria. Nigerian army is in charge of land warfare operations including

the land borders, most literature on border security focus on finding and training of officials, inter-agency collaboration, corruption and trans-national organized crime as factors affecting border security (Anning & Pokou, 2017, Onuoha, 2013, Akhigbe, 2019, Esan, 2013, Anning and Pokoo, 2017). Nigerian is known for its stance in curbing insurgency by Boko Haram terrorist group who had a mission of unleashing terror and death on innocent Nigerian citizens. The duties of the Nigerian army include the following among other:

1. They lay their lives for the citizens by protecting the lives of the citizens.
2. They train, equip and organize new officers
3. They respond to crisis promptly. They are strategically organized and equipped to respond quietly to natural or man instigated crisis within and outside Nigeria.
4. They shape the Nigerian security environment. They protect Nigeria's sovereignty.
5. Protect and dominate Nigerian territories. Right from the border to the very heart of the nation and they guide against external forces.
6. They defend our natural resources, historical sites and other places of high importance. Historical sites and places of high importance include but not limited to ASO Rock, Zuma rock and places enemy forces usually target.
7. The Nigerian army step in during the times of insurrection. They at times step in when the internal conflicts are too much of a task for paramilitary. Examples include the Boko haram war, Biafran war, war against militant.



8. The army provides supports for the allies of Nigeria in peace keeping mission. Nigerian army took part in the UN, ECOWAS deployment in Angola Rwanda, Somalia and Sierra Leone.

**(D) Significant roles and values of language proficiency in security matters**

Border security requires clear communication between all official travelers and border community indigenes. This is particularly crucial as a border is a piece of territory that straddles two jurisdictions often with different administrative norms (Asiwaju, 2016). Folarin et al (2015) said that official modes of communication in West Africa sub- region of over 300 million citizens comprising five Anglophone countries, nine Francophone countries and two Portuguese. However, Adeniran, (2012) & Ayamga, (2014) argued that French/ English speaking states have experienced tensions that weakened the prospects of integration in the region. The language barrier ensues because the neighboring countries' speak different official languages and their border security officials are not proficient in the use of the language of neighboring countries across the border (Betek et al, 2018). The relegation of crucial linguistic skills to the background contributes to the recruitment of Nigeria border security officials who are unequipped with linguistic skills to carry out their duties (Aduloju, 2017)

**(E) Importance of French language in Nigeria**

Karo, (2020) enumerated benefits of learning French language in Nigeria as follows:

1. French for healthy community with francophone neighbors.

2. Working knowledge of French
3. French as the second official language in Nigeria
4. French for regional and global integration
5. French, a career subject for youths
6. French for specific purposes in Nigeria
7. French, a language for job market
8. French, very important to Nigeria as a language of culture
9. French as a language of tourism
10. French as a language of higher education
11. The French language, as avenue for French government scholarship/grants
12. The French language as a factor of Franco-Nigerian linguistic cooperation and national development
13. French for promoting trade and commerce, political, economic and diplomatic relations with the international community
14. The French language for lobbying in the international scene

### **Conclusion**

We have considered the value and importance of French language proficiency among Nigerian armed forces in curtailing insecurity at the border communities. We enumerated the exceptional case of Nigeria as an Anglophone country surrounded by four main francophone countries who operate artificial frontiers with Nigeria. Movement of people and small arms and weapons into the country through the border portend a dangerous security posture to the nation and its citizenry. Trans -border communication barrier among the security agents who lack proficiency in French language calls for

concern. Nigerian have suffered immensely in the hands of illegal immigrants who turned themselves into terrorists, bandits, kidnapers, Fulani herds men who persistently launched attack on innocent Nigerians. We affirmed that Nigerian government should look beyond logistics and equip the members of the armed forces with proficiency in French language to be able monitor the activities of criminal elements at the border.

### **Recommendations**

1. Special French language teaching and learning centers should be established in the six geo- political zones to enroll members of the armed forces to learn French language and the centers should be equipped with modern facilities and seasoned French teachers.
2. The government should make French mandatory for all members of the armed forces and it should be one of the criteria to earn promotion in the ranks and files of the Nigeria armed forces.
3. The government should deploy only officers that are highly proficient in French language to the border communities to provide adequate security.
4. The government should establish a bilateral and diplomatic tie between Nigeria and the neighboring Francophone countries in the area of exchange programmes for language training programmes for officers and men of the Nigerian armed forces
5. Government should intensify effort in managing the porous borders and equip the various borders security agents with all necessary gadgets to fight insecurity. Borders should not only be

managed as revenue collection centers but defense should be mounted against external aggression.

6. Nigeria defense Academy should revise its curriculum to incorporate French for special purpose. Glossaries and security terminologies should be codified in French language for the use of the Nigerian armed forces.

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