

French Language and Francophone Culture in Sub-Saharan Africa -- Interdisciplinary Reflections on Multilingualism and French Language Education

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Abstract

This article, a qualitative research study based on an informal survey, examines the role and significance of French as a global and local language around the world, especially within the multilingual context of Sub-Saharan Africa, and their impact on language teaching, learning and use. Issues include building awareness and appreciation of the global role of French and the diversity of the Francophone world, accessibility, affordability, and advocacy, as well as the role of online education in supporting both accessibility and affordability. Future needs include program and curriculum creation, teacher training, development of learning materials, as well as funding for learners. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

Index Terms -- Africa, Francophone, French, French language

1. Introduction

In considering French language learning and use, it is important that French language educators, supporters, and advocates build awareness of the global nature of French and develop accessible and affordable programs and opportunities to learn and use French, highlighting the diversity of the Francophone world. It is especially important that we look to Africa, home to half the world's Francophone population, where French has flourished within a multilingual context, and learn from their cultures and experience.

It is essential that students of French learn about French in a globalized world, especially in its role as a widely used language within the multilingual and Francophone context of Africa, home to half of the French speakers worldwide and appreciate the diversity of the Francophone world. In order to accurately represent the full scope of the French presence around the world and here at home, it is necessary to adopt a global perspective as we learn, use -- and teach French. French is an official language in over 20 African countries (Chutel, 2018). In Africa, French both serves as a *lingua franca*, enabling communication among local communities and across borders, and its evolution has been influenced local languages (OIF, 2018).

French is both a global and a local language, spoken by over 300M on 5 continents, half of whom are in Africa, and by 33M in the Americas (OIF, 2014; OIF, 2018; Nadeau, 2021). Yet many US students are relatively unaware of the global reach of French language and Francophone culture beyond France and of the local reach of French language and

Francophone culture in the US and in the Americas. It must also be remembered that French is among the most important languages for international business (Bloomberg, 2011), one of the most influential languages in the world (Chan, 2016), and one to the languages most in demand in the US workplace (NAE, 2017; ACTFL, 2019).

Africa is important both globally and locally. US trade in imports and exports each exceeds well over 20B per year (Census, 2021.). On a global level, economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa is essential to Africa's success in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with increased African international engagement and participation in international trade needed (Meltzer, 2016). In brief, "Africa shows every sign of being the world's next big growth market. It is home to more fast-growing economies than any other region" (Leke, Chironga, & Desvaux, 2018), and "the business potential of the continent is tremendous in various sectors, including energy, infrastructure, agriculture, natural resources, and information and communications" (Dangote, 2019). In addition, "increasing two-way trade and investment between the United States and Africa is a U.S. national security priority" (CSIS, 2021). Furthermore, "Africa matters to the United States and the rest of the world, but if approached as a partner, Africa can be a positive contributor on the global stage" (Ray, 2021). Lastly, the United States is committed to partnering with Africa on a wide range of issues, and to celebrating the diversity of Africa, its rich heritage, and the deep cultural connections between Americans, Africans, and people throughout the diaspora" (State, 2021). Over 2M Africans live in the US, and their number is increasingly rapidly (Anderson, 2015; Echeverria, C & Batalova, 2019). It is important that, as we are discussing French language and Francophone culture, we include Africa in the conversation as we teach French.

2. The Qualitative Research Study, an Informal Survey -- Rationale, Research Questions, and Results

Following several discussions with peers concerning the importance of Africa, specifically Sub-Saharan Africa, in the Francophone world and in French language education in the United States, the corresponding author conducted an informal qualitative survey of colleagues with personal and professional experience in the region, with a request for each to write a brief reflective essay with the goal of both reflecting on their experience and on its potential impact on motivation and curriculum in French language learning in the US.

The research question, with several parts, was the following -- "What is the role and importance and French language and Francophone culture within the multilingual context of Sub-Saharan Africa? Is French language and Francophone culture in Sub-Saharan Africa important in French language education, especially in the United States, and if so, why and how?"

The following sections, contributed by the authors of this article in answer to the research question, provide both interdisciplinary reflections on the role of the French language in the diverse multilingual and multicultural context of Sub-Saharan Africa as well as future pathways for research and pedagogy. These sections describe and discuss the evolving role of French in Africa and the significance of French language and Francophone culture in Africa and in the world, as well as linkages between French as a global language and French language learning in the US and beyond. Beginning with "Surrounded. A tale of Ghana, a 'language-locked' country," followed by "Language Learning and the Peace Corps in Africa," and "Arguments and Resources for Francophone Africa and Sub-Saharan French," these narrative responses provide not only a demonstration of the power of both multilingualism and French language and Francophone culture in Africa and in the US, but also provide insights on directions for future research and practice, as well as a pathway to the future of French language learning and use.

3. Surrounded: A Tale of Ghana: A "Language-Locked" Country Mensimah Thompson Kwaffo and Franco Gandolfi

Language is an aspect of culture that significantly defines a country and its people. Inasmuch as language serves as a unifier, language also acts as a barrier especially in cases where a common language is not shared among a group of people. This article focuses on the linguistic peculiarities of Ghana, a multilingual country in sub-Saharan Africa, with English as her official and administrative language. We explore her rather interesting geographic location in relation to her neighbouring countries, and the peculiar relationship that the Ghanaian populace have with the French language.

3.1 "language-locked" country

The term "language-lock" is informally derived from the analogy of the compound word, *land-lock*. A land-locked country is one that is completely surrounded by land, rather than water bodies. Land-locked countries like Botswana and Zimbabwe in the southern part of Africa, do not touch open seas. In the same vein, we chose the term "language-lock" to represent a country that shares no common official or administrative language with its neighbouring states and remains somewhat isolated because of an absence of a shared language.

Ghana is described here as a language-locked country since all her three neighbours are French-speaking; namely, Burkina Faso to the north, Togo to the east and La Cote d'Ivoire to the west. Ghana is also bordered in the south by the inhabitable Gulf of Guinea.

This peculiar geographic and linguistic location somewhat paints the picture that Ghana may have a significant number of her population fluent in the French language, as it is assumed that this linguistic proximity could rub off on the Ghanaian populace.

According to the 2010 population census of Ghana, it was recorded that 74.1% (12,892,787) of the population, 11 years and older, were literate and had undergone some form of formal education, thus being able to communicate in English. Out of this number, only 0.3% (56,951) were recorded as being fluent in both English and French (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012), representing quite a minute percentage for a country with francophone neighbours. This somewhat confirms the assumption that the proximity of Ghana to French speaking neighbours has very little to no effect on the Ghanaian population's ability to communicate in French. Whilst this is true, Ghana's proximity to French neighbours still has an effect on the importance that Ghanaians place on the French language.

In the following paragraphs, we examine the place of French in the educational system of Ghana, as well as some government interventions that could influence national bilingualism in the future. We also look at the importance of the teaching and learning of the French language, as well as challenges associated with it.

3.2. The status of the French language in Ghana

The French language has recently been named as one of the most popular languages spoken by the African population. In fact, out of 15 states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), of which Ghana is a member, eight are French speaking. For this reason, as well as reasons concerning globalization, transnational trade relations, international cooperation, and Ghana's proximity to francophone countries, Ghana has seen the necessity for the integration of the French language in her educational system.

It is recorded that the teaching and learning of the French language began in Ghana as early as the late 1800s, where the then colonial government saw the need to introduce the foreign language to some selected schools (Owusu, 2014). Gradually, the language gained popularity in other schools, and eventually spread to all parts of Ghana.

Presently, French is the only international language, after English, taught in almost all Ghanaian schools from the basic through to the secondary and the tertiary levels. The government of Ghana, with support from the French Embassy, continually ensure the presence of French in Ghanaian schools, albeit in different capacities. At the primary school level, French is a core course and compulsory for all students. French is usually introduced in the basic level by grade 4 and by the final years of basic education, which is grade 9, students sit an examination called the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), where students are examined on a number of subjects including French (Asiedu, 2019). Students who go on to sit the final exam in French must have had more than 5 years of learning the language.

After making the required passes for the BECE exams, students are admitted to the Senior High School (SHS). At the SHS level, French is usually taught as an elective course in most schools, where students may choose French as part of a bouquet of courses, depending on their specialties (Csajbok-Twerefou et al, 2014). A student who therefore studies French in the secondary level for 3 years should thus have had an encounter with French for roughly 8 years by the time he or she enters the tertiary level.

In some tertiary institutions, French is taught as a compulsory course for disciplines such as tourism and hospitality management, international relations, and business administration. French is also taught as a major in some universities. This goes a long way to confirm that some level of importance is placed on the acquisition of the language in the Ghanaian educational system. Any individual who is formally educated through this system should at some point in his or her academic life, have studied some French along the way. It is therefore surprising how very few individuals in Ghana attain fluency in the language even after being exposed to it for so long.

3.3. Government interventions towards the advancement of the French Language

The Ghanaian government has for so long tried to change the narrative to allow for more Ghanaians to be somewhat fluent in the French language, which in the long run could lead to a lot more Ghanaians being fluent and competent in the language. As stated earlier, French was introduced gradually into the educational system since the time before Ghana gained her independence from the British in 1957. Since then, a couple of notable government reforms have championed the teaching and learning of French at different levels. In this section, we discuss some of these reforms that were implemented with the help of the French embassy.

According to Owusu (2014), the government of Ghana, between 1970 and 1995, with the support from the French government, recognized the need to establish Regional Centres for the Teaching of French (CREF) in all ten regional capitals at the time. The establishment of these centres was aimed at increasing and encouraging the teaching and learning of French through frequent workshops and in-service programs for the French teachers. This was deemed necessary to allow teachers to continually upgrade their skills and learn about the latest methodologies for teaching French as a Foreign Language (FLE).

French has since then, gradually become an integral part of formal education in Ghana. The President of Ghana between 2000 and 2008, John Agyekum Kuffour, in an address to the parliament during the State of the Nation Address (SONA) of February 2003, mentioned how he wishes he could do without translators and interpreters whenever he had to travel within the West African sub-region. This, he opined, was a handicap that he did not wish on any Ghanaian child. As he made these remarks, he announced that his government was dedicated to the advancement of the teaching and learning of French in Ghana and one of the ways they intended to help was by gradually increasing the numbers of Teachers Training Colleges that train teachers in developing the knowledge and skills in the teaching of FLE (Ghana News Agency, 2003).

In 2006, the John-Agyekum-Kuffour-led administration ensured that Ghana became a member of the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), which is a body that unifies countries that have the French language in common. Ghana was one of the few Anglophone countries that was admitted directly to the associate member status without first having to serve under the observer status. Ghana has therefore been an associate member of OIF since the 11th Francophonie Summit in Bucharest in September 2006 (Graphic Online, 2018). Since then, Ghana has been eager to do all it takes to transition to the Full member status in the OIF.

Presently, the government of Ghana, under the leadership of President Nana Addo Danquah Akuffo Addo is gradually pushing for French to become the second official and administrative language after English (Asiedu, 2019; Entsie, 2020). The government hopes to achieve this by ensuring that the country's educational sector is reformed to promote and inculcate the active teaching and learning of French in the basic schools and across all the other levels (Entsie, 2020). In a speech delivered in October 2018 at the 17th La Francophonie Summit, held in Erevan, Armenia, Ghana's president echoed the benefits of the Ghanaian population gaining an interest in the learning of the French language. He states:

Our goal is to live, one day, in a bilingual Ghana, i.e., English and French, together with our own indigenous languages... History tells us that this is the best route to general progress and prosperity. With the help of digital technology, we can then accelerate economic growth, create the much-needed jobs for our youth, and take advantage of the vast potential of Africa's young population. (Akuffo-Addo, 2018).

This statement by the head of state appears to confirm the government's dedication and determination in ensuring that Ghana adopts the French language as its second language in the foreseeable future.

Since this decision to make Ghana a bilingual state, some major reforms are being put in place, in conjunction with the French Embassy, to accommodate the pending status. Some of these activities include the drafting of specialized textbooks for primary and middle schools, supporting future French teachers at the tertiary teaching level, creating language labs in the teaching colleges, and ensuring the continuous training of French teachers at the Regional Centres for the Teaching of French (CREF). These reforms point towards the strengthening of the presence of the French language in Ghana. In this regard, the Linguistic Pact between the Francophonie organisation and the government of Ghana was signed in May 2018 to ensure the development of high-quality teaching and learning of French in Ghana at all educational levels. (Ghana Education News, 2021).

Furthermore, the government seeks to make French a compulsory course for all senior high school students to increase communicative abilities of Ghanaians in the French language by the time students are ready to enter tertiary institutions (Emmanuel, 2017). The government had also introduced a bilingual classroom project at the basic education level where certain subjects can be taught both in English and French (Graphic Online, 2018).

3.4. Importance of studying French in Ghana

One may begin to wonder why the government has for many years promoted and encouraged the acquisition of the French language by the Ghanaian populace. Ghana's geographic location with respect to her neighbours is one good reason for this emphasis because a common language could translate into closer ties with neighbouring countries, francophone countries in the sub-region and ECOWAS member states. This in turn could encourage economic gains in the form of trade, tourism, and employment among others.

Indeed, French as an additional language for Ghanaians would mean more Ghanaians being multilingual, that is, having an ability to speak English, French, and their respective indigenous languages. Ghana can therefore reinforce her links with direct neighbours and those in the sub-region, thus encouraging the continual development of regional integration.

Since Ghana is a member of La Francophonie, she can benefit greatly in trade and investment cooperation among member states, which will in turn will propel socio-economic development among the 84 member states of the body. This cooperation could also accelerate economic growth, whilst creating the much-needed jobs for Africa's young population (Graphic Online, 2018).

Today, the ability to develop competence and fluency in the French language at a proficiency level opens a lot of economic doors for an individual. This, of course, is not confined to Ghana. For a Ghanaian, this could translate into having reasonable employment opportunities within the sub-region and globally. An individual's ability to speak French propels him or her into international communities as they are able to communicate with a cross section of individuals sharing a common language (Bangnia, 2020).

3.5. Challenges in the teaching and learning of French in Ghana

It goes without saying that a lot of measures have been put in place and are still being implemented for the promotion of the French language in Ghana by the government. Though a lot of advancement has been made in this regard, there are setbacks that prevent the total success of the reforms for the smooth teaching and learning of the French language.

One major setback has to do with the mind-set of the Ghanaian population, in the sense that there appears to be no public support of the aim to make French the second official and administrative language of Ghana. Some say the government tends to favour the advancement of a foreign language over Ghana's indigenous languages, some of which are on the verge of dying (Asiedu, 2019; Akpanglo-Nartey & Akpanglo-Nartey, 2012).

There is also a limitation to the teaching and learning of French when it comes to infrastructure, learning materials, and the availability of French teachers (Entsie, 2020). In a study conducted by Kwaffo (2020) on the teaching and learning materials of French in the central region of Ghana, it was revealed that there was a general limitation to materials available. Class sizes were found to be too large to accommodate the communicative nature of teaching French, logistics like projectors, laptops, and loudspeakers were absent, and as such teachers were impaired when it came to incorporating multimedia and innovative technology in the teaching and learning of French.

Kuupole et al (2012) also made mention of the teaching methodologies used in Ghanaian schools, which seem not to meet the communicative needs of learners. As mentioned earlier, it is surprising that a greater number of the Ghanaian population are not fluent in French, given the number of years dedicated to its study in the Ghanaian educational system. Kwaffo (2020) also revealed in her study how teachers rarely incorporated audio-visuals and other multimedia while delivering content. This can somewhat explain why students are not able to effectively communicate in French even though they have encountered and studied it for many years. It is also observed that generally the emphasis seems to be on the reading and writing aspects of learning French and not much of the listening and speaking (Appiah-Thompson, 2015). Focusing on the oral aspect of French learning could go a long way to increase the number of fluent French speakers each year.

3.6. Concluding Thoughts

In this article we have discussed how Ghana's proximity to francophone countries is insufficient in obtaining French fluency among its population. However, it at least appears sufficient to encourage the active teaching and learning of French to individuals at schools. This is necessary as the acquisition of such an international language has a myriad of economic and non-economic benefits for Ghana.

Despite the many reforms instituted by the government over the years, one quickly realizes, moving along the streets of Ghana, the minute percentage of the population that can communicate competently in French (Asiedu, 2019). It is therefore imperative that new and improved strategies for the teaching and learning of French be considered to accommodate more of the oral aspects of French learning.

Ghana is on the right path with regards to her relationship with the francophone world although we believe there is a lot more to be done in this regard. The ambitious aim of the Ghanaian government is to have a bilingual Ghana. To be able to achieve this, all stakeholders must play their part seamlessly and well. Eventually, we all look forward with much anticipation to a Ghana where the average individual can carry out a decent conversation beyond "*Bonjour! Comment ca va?*".

4. Language Learning and the Peace Corps in Africa

The U.S. Peace Corps began in the fall of 1961. I received my BA degree in 1962 and immediately joined the 1st Peace Corps group of volunteers to Liberia, West Africa. One of the principal objectives of the Peace Corps has been to offer needed services to developing communities around the world. My volunteer group consisted of teachers from elementary school through college. During our two-year commitment to teaching we replaced Liberian teachers so that they could receive upgraded teacher training. Another goal of the Peace Corps has been to learn about another culture from the people in the host country and to bring that knowledge back to the U.S. to enrich our understanding of other cultures.

Learning the language of a host country or region within a country has been essential to training Peace Corps workers throughout the world.

In the very early years volunteers going to French speaking African countries, such as Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea were trained in the French language and those going to English speaking countries, such as Liberia, Ghana, and Nigeria, were generally given only minimal training in a pigeon version of English. Specific local volunteer assignments may not have been known ahead of arrival in a host country and local tribal language teachers may not have been available so learning a local tribal language may not have been possible in the early years.

I was assigned to teach elementary school in a remote village among the Kpelle speaking people. I did not know my assignment until I arrived in Liberia, and did not learn any Kpelle while training in Pittsburgh, PA. While I could teach children all subjects in English, most children and almost all adults in the village only spoke Kpelle. I was able to convince some older children to teach me Kpelle, but it was quite basic. Over the two year period of my time in the village of Kpaiyea, I had taught enough students English and had learned enough Kpelle to be able to function within the culture, but I always felt I was missing important aspects of the village culture by not having a mastery of the Kpelle language.

As the Peace Corps grew, language training became more of an essential component of all training programs and included not only national country languages, but those of regions, districts and particular tribes.

I became a director of the Peace Corps program in Yap, Micronesia in 1968. Yap island and the outer islands in Yap District at that time were part of the U.S. Trust Territories and English was nominally the island language. Most people did not speak or understand English, however, and there were several different island languages in addition to Yapese. I was able to create a training program within the island community to train incoming volunteers in Yapese, Ulithian, Woleian, and Satawalese. The volunteers became fluent in the local languages during their two -year service. This was one of the first Peace Corps training programs not held on a U.S. college campus and one of the most successful language training programs for the Peace Corps during that time.

Language training has always been included as part of the Foreign Service preparation for overseas assignments, but because most Foreign Service officers do not live at a local level among townspeople and villagers, the requirement for learning local languages is not as important as it is for Peace Corps volunteers. Also, for most work interactions and transactions a knowledge of a national lingua franca is sufficient and there are always translators available. This would be the case for some Peace Corps volunteers as well, but for many who are in local towns and villages throughout Africa, having knowledge of local languages is essential.

Of the original countries receiving Peace Corps volunteers in 1961, none required French language training. All were English and Spanish speaking countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Since then there have been Peace Corps programs in over 60 countries in Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Central America and Mexico, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, Pacific Islands, South America. Peace Corps volunteers have also served in Francophone Africa, to include Cameroon, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal and the Ivory Coast. Most of the volunteers who have been assigned to these former French colony countries had French language classes in college and underwent additional intensive French language training before going overseas. These volunteers also needed to learn various regional or local languages in their host African country.

While foreign language learning in U. S. high schools and colleges is essential to broaden students' knowledge of other cultures, there is no other program like the U.S. Peace Corps which provides the necessary language and culture training, plus two years of in situ experience to help shape global citizens for the future.

5. Arguments and Resources for Francophone Africa and Sub-Saharan French

5.1. Introduction

The need for French-speaking professionals in global business, philanthropy, diplomacy, education, and the military has never been greater. French blankets the entire African continent from Morocco to Madagascar and from Senegal to Djibouti. Seventy percent of world's total of French-speaking people live in Africa (*World Atlas*, 2021). The country with the highest French-speaking population is not France with 67 million) but the Democratic Republic of Congo with 77 million). Because of high birth rates, 85% of French speakers could live in Africa by 2050 according to the International Organization of La Francophonie and ODSEF.

French-speaking Africa is home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies (Mitchell, 2019) and French president Emmanuel Macron calls Africa "the continent of the future" (BBC News, 2019). Goldman Sachs, McKinsey, The Brookings Institute, and the Council on Foreign Relations concur. These projections are excellent news for French instructors and their programs. Despite McWhorter's claims (McWhorter, 2014) that French is no longer an important language, the business world, the U.S. military, and a half billion French-speaking Africans disagree.

English has been touted as the lingua franca of international business (Fixman, 1990; Crystal, 2003; Feely & Harzing, 2003; Bono & Vey, 2005; Neeley, 2012; Kelm, 2014) but a multilingual franca workplace (French and English) is the current situation for multinational corporations operating in French West Africa (Sacco, 2019). In his 2018 study, Sacco found that, in 20 multinational corporations, 66 managers and executives reported that French was spoken in the workplace between 26% to 95% of the time. Consequently, U.S. companies and multinational corporations operating in Africa need French-speaking and culturally astute managers, engineers, and agronomists. Even within multinational corporations where English is the official language of global business, French is still, and will continue to be, widely spoken among managers and workers as they are often stationed in-country where they need to work and live successfully in French.

Africa will continue to be a world leader in raw materials, which will attract the attention of future corporations who will also need French-speaking employees. French-speaking countries such as Chad, the DRC, Cameroon, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Gabon, and Rwanda produce lithium, diamonds, uranium, bauxite, manganese, gold, iron ore, and nickel. French-speaking Africa is an attractive emerging market for many industries, from technology to transportation and from agriculture to alternative energy. French-speaking countries such as Morocco and Algeria have emerged as world leaders in green energy sources such as wind and solar power (Afrobarometer, 2021).

More and more green-energy companies will flock to Francophone Africa in the future. Recycling waste that clutters the cities, beaches, roadsides, and agricultural lands will create new jobs and business opportunities. Engineering classes at my university in Ivory Coast employ project-based learning (students can't afford textbooks) to create green-energy inventions to solve the massive problem of plastic bottles and shopping bags. Students and professors partner to convert plastics and agricultural waste into construction materials, cement, road materials, biogases, and fertilizers. One of my clients converts millions of coconut shells into clean-burning charcoal, creating thousands of opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

Militarily, the U.S., through its Africa Command (AFRICOM), partners with African countries to “counter transnational threats in order to advance its national interests, and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity” (AFRICOM, 2021). AFRICOM needs French-speaking officers and enlisted men who also possess a sophisticated knowledge of the cultures of 31 French-speaking countries (Ball, 2021). The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) is currently addressing the acute need for military language experts by offering five-year, \$3 million grants to K-12 districts offering JROTC to strengthen world language programs in 40 critical languages. French is one of the critical languages.

Given this assessment on the role of French in Africa, it would be advantageous to create a Francophone Africa curriculum for French programs nationwide. French instructors are ingenious developers of classroom materials in whatever subject they decide to address, but in the next section I will propose funded resources that facilitate the incorporation of Francophone Africa and Sub-Saharan French into current French K-16 programs. These resources include in-country training and materials development.

5.2. Resources to include Francophone Africa in French programs

5.2.1. The Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad Program

The U.S. Department of Education's Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad (GPA) Program is designed to prepare K-16 instructors to incorporate elements of Francophone Africa in one's world language curriculum. Essentially, GPA supports month-long training, research, and curriculum development projects in French-speaking Africa. The U.S. Department of Education divides these programs into two: short-term seminars and short-term curriculum development (DOE, 2021).

Short-term seminars are designed to “help integrate international studies into an institution's or school system's general curriculum” (GPA, 2021). Future AATF-sponsored seminars would be housed at a French-speaking African university where the university's instructors would teach elements of language, literature, culture, and area studies. Local families normally house participants. GPA pays for all in-country costs such as round-trip airfare, in-country transportation, lodging, and food. Upon their return home, the 15-25 participants are expected to integrate knowledge from the seminar into existing curricula and share information at local, regional or national conferences.

I personally have directed four short-term seminars to Ecuador (1993), Mexico (1997), Chile (2001) and Cameroon (2009). In Cameroon, one of my favorite activities was to hire a griot in every village where we stopped and paid them to tell stories which we used in high school classes back home.

In the GPA Short-Term Curriculum Development Program, a curriculum development team, composed of several faculty members or teachers or administrators, would spend four to six weeks in a French-speaking country acquiring resource materials which may include “artifacts, documents, books, educational films, museum reproductions, recordings, and other instructional materials” (GPA, 2021). The project must demonstrate a systemic use and dissemination in the US. of the acquired materials such as at the AATF’s annual convention. This is the ideal program for an applicant to develop a Francophone Africa curriculum.

Any university or organization like the AATF is eligible to apply for the Fulbright-Hays Programs. In fact, applicants can apply for both the Short-Term seminar and the Short-Term Curriculum Development Program simultaneously. Applications can also come via a high school district and a university partnership which is what I did for my F-H program to Chile.

5.2.2. The U.S. Department of Education’s International Research & Studies Program

The International Research & Studies (IRS) Program supports the development of instructional materials to “improve and strengthen instruction in modern foreign languages, area studies, and other international fields” (IRS, 2021). Funded at around \$175,000 per award, the IRS Program is the ideal vehicle to develop courses and materials on French-speaking Africa.

One of my favorites would entail collecting dozens of samples of African storytelling and adapting the stories pedagogically. “The role of the African storyteller is to perform, entertain, inspire, and educate their audience. They know how to captivate the audience with more than just words. They use gestures, singing, facial expression, and impersonations to arouse the audience” (Utley, 2008). Octavia Utley’s site “Keeping the Tradition of African Storytelling Alive” describes how she uses storytelling in her classes.

5.2.3. Conclusion

There is no need to “pretend” that French is important. It is. The need for French-speaking professionals in Africa has never been greater despite McWhorter’s claim. Careers abound in global business, philanthropy, diplomacy, education, and the military.

To prepare our students for this opportunity, we need to pivot and develop a Francophone Africa curriculum focusing on language, cultures, history, geography, religion, the arts, and business practices. The goal of the Francophone Africa curriculum is not to replace the current France-focused curriculum but to work in tandem with it. Grant programs will fund our efforts.

Francophone Africa’s economic future means that American companies and multinational corporations will be looking for professionals with language and culture expertise. The same holds true for the U.S. military, which will continue its mission for years to come. Non-governmental organizations seek and will continue to seek language qualified professionals. John McWhorter may be a world-class linguist but he is unaware of the power of French in Africa—“the continent of the future.”

6. Conclusions and Future Directions -- Analysis of the Informal Survey Results and Beyond

The results of the informal survey are clear -- Africa is multilingual and diverse, as is the United States, and an understanding and appreciation of this diversity can only strengthen both motivation and curriculum in French language education in the US. Limitations of this survey include the number of participants, although their experience reinforces the value of their insights. Additional research and curriculum development are indicated in order to provide the foundation for additional analysis.

In a globalized world, it is important that our students no longer think of French as only a European language, but rather as one that transcends national borders and geographic regions. As educators, we can adopt a transnational approach including authentic texts in our teaching and incorporate language and culture from throughout the world in our curriculum and materials. Reflecting the global Francophone presence, In 2018, the French government launched a worldwide campaign for French, highlighting the global and multilateral nature of the French presence, and in 2021, published an online dictionary, including words and expressions from around the world (Willsher, 2018; New French Dictionary, 2021; Francophony, 2021).

As we have seen, it is important that French language educators, supporters, and advocates work together to build awareness of the French language and Francophone culture around the world and develop opportunities to learn, use, and teach French. It is essential that these programs be accessible and affordable, offering funding and the flexibility of online learning to students. There is much to be learned from the role of French in Africa, home to half the world's Francophone population, where French has flourished within a multilingual context.

French is an important language globally and locally. French is a prevalent language in Sub-Saharan Africa, and in addition to its economic and political importance, Africa plays a significant role in the US, deserving of inclusion in our national story (Ray, 2021). Over 2M immigrants of Sub-Saharan Africa live in the US, with their percentage of the total number of immigrants on the increase (Echeverria-Estrada & Batalova, 2019; Anderson, 2017). These new Americans and their families deserve the opportunity to develop and maintain their family language and heritage, including French language skills and knowledge of Francophone culture. If we are to ensure the future of French in the US, it is important to focus both on our French and Francophone heritage and on our newest Americans who speak French in the home, as well as on the economic and strategic importance of French as a language in Sub-Saharan Africa. These are all powerful reasons to include -- to an even greater degree than ever before -- French language and Francophone culture in Sub-Saharan Africa in interdisciplinary and joint programs, as well as in French programs at all levels (MLA, 2019).

In addition, knowledge of languages and cultures is a significant asset in the workplace and in our lives as citizens both locally and globally (NAE, 2017; ACTFL, 2019). Reflecting the role of French as a global language, the importance of Africa in the global conversation, and the Francophone presence in Sub-Saharan Africa, Sub-Saharan French language and Francophone culture need to be included in French language programs, curricula, and teaching materials.

7. Concluding Thoughts

The time to act is now. Advocacy and leadership among French language educators and supporters are needed in order to increase awareness of the impact of French language and Francophone culture and to develop the academic programs, teacher training, curriculum, and materials needed (Daly, 2011; Northouse, 2013). In addition, in order to expand opportunity to all interested learners, these programs, training, and material need to be accessible and affordable, with funding available both for study abroad, internships, and experiential learning, and for the development of online virtual programs for those who may not be able to travel for career, family, financial, and other reasons.

Next steps include integrating Sub-Saharan French language and Francophone culture in our French language teaching, creating curriculum materials and teacher training, developing experiential learning within local Francophone communities and businesses, and expanding opportunity for study abroad. In addition, we need to develop career pathways, not only to demonstrate the usefulness of knowledge of French language and Francophone culture in Sub-Saharan Africa, but also to offer professional opportunities to use these skills and this knowledge. Most importantly, we need to highlight for our students the diversity of the global Francophone culture.

As a global language, French is part of the global skills set of the 21st century global citizen, and forms the foundation for the future of French in the United States and around the world.

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