

Navigating the Digital Frontier: Transforming the Prospects of English-French Education in Nigerian Higher Institutions for a Connected World

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How to cite this paper: Adhuze, H. I., Adeuga, F. F., & Ademola, M. A. (2025). Navigating the Digital Frontier: Transforming the Prospects of English-French Education in Nigerian Higher Institutions for a Connected World. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 13, 426-434. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2025.1310024>

Received: August 6, 2025

Accepted: October 19, 2025

Published: October 22, 2025

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Abstract

This is an analytic research whose focus is the trends of English and French language education in the digital era, with particular reference to connection, collaboration, and diversity in the modern Nigerian higher education system. The secondary data collection method was adopted, with academic journals, libraries, and the internet as sources. The digital literacy learning theory was consulted to enrich the claims that digital technology can and has greatly influenced language education in contemporary Nigeria. The digital revolution has profoundly impacted language education, presenting both opportunities and challenges. This paper explores the future of English-French education in the digital age in Nigeria by examining the interplay between technology, pedagogy, and learner needs. The study underpins the following thematic areas: digital literacy and multilingualism, online language learning platforms and resources, collaboration, immersive learning environments, teacher training, and digital pedagogy. As language education adapts to the digital landscape, this paper argues that effective integration of technology can enhance learner engagement, accessibility, and outcomes. However, it also underscores the need for critical considerations of digital divides, language pedagogy, and the role of human interaction in language learning.

Keywords

English-French Education, Digital Age, Language Learning, Technology Integration, Pedagogy, Multilingualism

1. Introduction

That the world is now a global village is no longer news, especially in the 21st century. Today, we live in a society that is more connected than before, thanks to information technology. According to Olatoye (2007: p. 53), “modern society is facing a formidable challenge of navigating a transition to a sustainable world... to flourish in this context; the society must be able to respond effectively to social changes to meet sustainability goals.” Osisanwo (2003: p. 17) says, “no nation is an island to herself... the whole world is now in the age of computer which has turned it to a global village, certainly there is need for genuine global interaction.” For any nation to record considerable progress in this competitive world, there must be collaboration, unity, and cooperation with other nations. Africa is no doubt still developing. Seizing every opportunity to improve socio-economic progress is now very necessary.

Iyamu and Iyama (2007: p. 40) both agree that “education is a vehicle for social transformation”. Education, being one of the keys to socio-economic emancipation, should be a serious concern in Africa. According to Ekanem (2007: p. 224), “Education is a major tool for the quick transformation of any nation... Nigeria has rightly adopted education as instrument per excellence for effecting nation development.” Therefore, using the available information and communication technology to improve every aspect of education, especially the teaching of languages, should be accorded serious attention by African leaders, language being the only tool for communication and interaction.

In an increasingly globalized world, the ability to communicate in multiple languages is a valuable asset. In Nigeria, a West African country surrounded by francophone, anglophone, lusophone countries, and the rest, and where English serves as the official language and French is recognized as a second language, the need for effective bilingual education is paramount. The objective of the article is based on the indisputable fact that technology has become a very essential part of development in the modern and globalized world of today. Technology has become so impactful in the education sector that language educators cannot afford to ignore or underutilize it. This essay explores the digital approach to English-French education in Nigerian tertiary institutions, examining the benefits, challenges, and potential strategies for implementation. By leveraging technology, educators can enhance language acquisition, improve learner engagement, and prepare students for a multilingual workforce.

2. Theoretical Background

The Digital Literacy theory was adopted to support this study. Pragmatically, digital literacy is the skill needed to effectively access and manage digital information. “Digital literacy is the ability to effectively operate and use software or any digital device while including a large variety of complex cognitive, motor, sociological, and emotional skills” (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004).

The term “digital literacy” was popularized by Paul Gilster in his book *Literacy*

for the digital age (1997), where he described it as the ability to understand and use information from different sources in multiple formats. The concept has evolved through the 20th to the 21st centuries from a technical definition of skills and competence to a broader comprehension of interacting with digital technologies.

Digital literacy was initially all about digital skills and stand-alone computers, whose scope later spread to mobile devices with the popularity of the internet and diverse social media. According to Heitin (2016), “it is an individual’s ability to find, evaluate, apply, and communicate information through typing, electronic or digital media platforms.”

The objectives of the theory include promoting the ability to connect and collaborate with others in a digital environment, imparting basic ICT skills and knowledge relevant to information management through a variety of activities, while encouraging informal, privately-driven and student-centered learning through available digital tools and, most importantly, generating interest, attention, and motivation for both teachers and learners of the digital age.

The relevance of the theory in this study is the promotion of diverse styles and tools for both the teacher and the learner in a technological era. The theory emphasizes adequate investment, active participation, knowledge integration, and social collaboration in the process of learning.

3. Enhancing Bilingual Education in Nigeria: Prospects, Challenges, and Strategies

Nigeria is a linguistically diverse country with over 500 indigenous languages. English, as the official language, is used in government, education, and business, while French is increasingly recognized as a critical language for international relations and trade, particularly within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Adebayo, 2018). The ability to communicate in both English and French opens up numerous opportunities for Nigerian graduates, including access to international job markets, participation in regional integration efforts, and engagement in cultural exchanges.

Despite the importance of bilingual education, traditional methods of language instruction in Nigeria often fall short. Many students struggle with language acquisition due to a lack of resources, insufficient exposure to native speakers, and limited opportunities for practical application. A digital approach to English-French education can address these challenges by providing innovative tools and resources that enhance language learning.

Historically, Nigeria’s educational system has been predominantly English-focused. However, recognizing the importance of French, the Nigerian government introduced French into the secondary school curriculum in the 1960s. This initiative is aimed at fostering regional integration and cooperation within West Africa. Currently, many tertiary institutions offer French as part of their arts and humanities programs, but its integration into other fields remains limited. Eco-

conomic, diplomatic, educational, and diverse socio-cultural prospects are embedded in English-French education if Nigeria can commit enough investment into it.

The economic prospects of English-French education in Nigeria are substantial. Nigeria's geographical positioning, surrounded by Francophone countries like Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, presents unique opportunities for trade and diplomacy. Bilingual graduates can bridge communication gaps, facilitating smoother transactions and negotiations. As the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) gains momentum, bilingual proficiency becomes an asset, enhancing Nigeria's competitiveness in the regional market.

Diplomatically, Nigeria plays a key role in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which includes both Anglophone and Francophone countries. English-French education can strengthen Nigeria's diplomatic influence, enabling more effective participation in regional policy-making and conflict resolution. Integrating French into the curriculum at tertiary levels can enrich Nigeria's educational landscape. Bilingual education promotes cognitive flexibility, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Students exposed to both English and French literature, philosophy, and history gain a broader perspective, fostering intercultural understanding.

Moreover, bilingual graduates are better positioned for global opportunities. Proficiency in both languages opens doors to international scholarships, research collaborations, and cultural exchanges. Institutions like the Alliance Française in Nigeria support these endeavors by offering cultural programs and language courses, reinforcing the value of bilingual education.

Despite its prospects, implementing English-French education in Nigerian tertiary institutions faces several challenges. One significant hurdle is the shortage of qualified French teachers. Many institutions struggle to recruit and retain educators proficient in French, impacting the quality of instruction. Additionally, there is often inadequate funding for language programs. Resource constraints limit access to modern language laboratories, multimedia tools, and up-to-date teaching materials. These limitations can hinder effective language acquisition and reduce student engagement.

Another challenge is the perception of French as a less critical language compared to English. Many students prioritize fields perceived to offer immediate economic benefits, such as engineering and technology, over language studies. This trend can be addressed by demonstrating the practical applications of bilingual proficiency in various professional contexts.

To overcome these challenges and harness the prospects of English-French education, several strategic measures can be implemented. First, increasing investment in language education is crucial. This includes allocating funds for teacher training, curriculum development, and language resources. Establishing partnerships with Francophone countries and organizations can provide additional support and expertise.

Second, integrating French language studies across diverse disciplines can enhance its relevance. For example, incorporating French into business, law, and international relations programs can illustrate its practical applications, attracting more students.

Third, leveraging technology for language learning can address resource constraints. Online language learning platforms like Duolingo, Busuu, Babbel, and virtual exchanges with Francophone institutions can supplement traditional classroom instruction, providing students with immersive language experiences. For instance, short lessons and quizzes could be adopted from Duolingo and other language learning apps for a hybrid learning approach whereby the students can engage in personalized learning and receive feedback from native speakers of the French language, virtually and in real time.

4. The Relevance of Technology to Language Education

Technology has transformed the landscape of education, offering new possibilities for teaching and learning. In the context of language education, digital tools can facilitate interactive and engaging learning experiences. The use of technology in English-French education can take various forms, including online courses, language learning apps, virtual classrooms, multimedia resources, and others.

Online Courses and E-Learning Platforms: Online courses have gained popularity in recent years, providing learners with flexible access to educational content. Platforms such as Coursera, edX, and Duolingo offer courses in English and French that cater to different proficiency levels. These platforms often incorporate multimedia elements, such as videos, quizzes, and interactive exercises, which can enhance learner engagement and retention (Hockly, 2018). In Nigerian tertiary institutions, the integration of online courses into the curriculum can provide students with additional resources to supplement their classroom learning. For instance, universities can partner with established e-learning platforms to offer accredited courses in English and French, allowing students to learn at their own pace and convenience.

Language Learning Apps: Mobile applications have revolutionized language learning by making it accessible anytime and anywhere. Apps like Babbel, Memrise, and Busuu offer interactive lessons, vocabulary exercises, and pronunciation practice. These apps often utilize gamification techniques to motivate learners and track their progress (Godwin-Jones, 2018).

In Nigeria, where smartphone penetration is increasing, language learning apps can serve as valuable tools for students studying English and French. By incorporating these apps into their study routines, learners can reinforce their language skills outside the classroom and engage in self-directed learning.

Virtual Classrooms and Online Collaboration: The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of virtual classrooms, highlighting the potential of online learning environments. Platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Classroom enable educators to conduct live classes, facilitate discussions, and

share resources with students (Baker, 2020).

In the context of English-French education, virtual classrooms can provide opportunities for real-time interaction between students and instructors, as well as peer collaboration. For example, language exchange programs can be organized where Nigerian students connect with native French speakers for conversational practice. This exposure to authentic language use can significantly enhance learners' speaking and listening skills.

Increased Accessibility: One of the primary advantages of a digital approach to language education is increased accessibility. Students in remote areas or those with limited access to traditional educational resources can benefit from online courses and digital tools. This democratization of education can help bridge the gap between urban and rural learners, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to acquire English and French language skills.

Enhanced Engagement and Motivation: Digital tools can make language learning more engaging and enjoyable. The use of multimedia resources, interactive exercises, and gamified learning experiences can capture students' attention and motivate them to participate actively in their education (Deterding et al., 2011). By incorporating technology into the classroom, educators can create a dynamic learning environment that fosters enthusiasm for language acquisition.

Personalized Learning Experiences: Technology allows for personalized learning experiences tailored to individual learners' needs. Adaptive learning platforms can assess students' proficiency levels and provide customized content that addresses their specific challenges (Kerr, 2018). This personalized approach can enhance language acquisition by ensuring that students receive targeted instruction that aligns with their learning goals.

Opportunities for Cultural Exchange: This can be achieved through an immersive learning environment created by Virtual Reality (VR) technology on Duolingo, Busso, and other language learning apps. This digital approach to English-French education can facilitate cultural exchange and global collaboration. Through online platforms, students can connect with peers from different countries, participate in virtual exchange programs, and engage in cross-cultural discussions. This exposure to diverse perspectives can enrich learners' understanding of the languages and cultures they are studying.

5. Challenges of Implementing a Digital Approach

While the benefits of a digital approach to English-French education are significant, several challenges must be addressed to ensure successful implementation.

Digital Divide: The digital divide remains a pressing issue in Nigeria, with disparities in access to technology and the internet. Many students, particularly those in rural areas, may lack the necessary devices or reliable internet connectivity to participate in online learning (Ogunleye, 2020). Addressing this divide is crucial to ensure that all learners can benefit from digital resources.

Teacher Training and Support: The successful integration of technology into

language education requires adequately trained educators. Many teachers may lack the skills or confidence to effectively use digital tools in their teaching practices (Ogunleye, 2020). Professional development programs focused on technology integration and digital pedagogy are essential to equip educators with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate the digital landscape.

Quality of Online Resources: The quality of online resources can vary significantly, and not all digital tools are equally effective for language learning. Educators must carefully evaluate the resources they incorporate into their teaching to ensure that they align with best practices in language education (Hockly, 2018). This evaluation process may require additional time and effort on the part of educators.

Maintaining Student Engagement: While digital tools can enhance engagement, there is also the risk of students becoming distracted or disengaged during online learning. Educators must employ effective strategies to maintain student motivation and participation in virtual classrooms (Baker, 2020). This may include incorporating interactive activities, fostering a sense of community among learners, and providing regular feedback.

6. Recommendations

To maximize the benefits of a digital approach to English-French education in Nigerian tertiary institutions, several strategies can be employed:

Infrastructure Development: Investing in infrastructure is essential to address the digital divide. Nigerian institutions should prioritize improving internet connectivity and providing access to devices for students. Collaborations with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private sector partners can help facilitate these efforts.

Curriculum Integration: Digital tools should be integrated into the existing curriculum rather than treated as standalone resources. Language educators and specialists in curriculum development can design blended learning experiences that combine traditional classroom instruction with online components. This approach allows for a more cohesive learning experience and ensures that students can apply their digital skills in real-world contexts.

Professional Development for Educators: Ongoing professional development programs should be established to support educators in effectively integrating technology into their teaching practices. Special directorates should be established in tertiary institutions in the country to organize regular workshops, webinars, and training sessions to provide teachers with the skills and knowledge they need to leverage digital tools for language education.

Collaboration and Partnerships: Sponsored collaboration between institutions, both locally and internationally, can enhance the quality of English-French education. Partnerships with universities in French-speaking countries can facilitate student exchanges, joint programs, and collaborative projects that enrich the learning experience. This could be funded through the Tertiary Education Trust

Fund (TETFund) and alumni associations of various universities in Nigeria.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Regular monitoring and evaluation of digital initiatives are essential to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Institutions should gather feedback from students and educators to inform future decisions regarding technology integration in language education.

To achieve the listed recommendations above, the Ministry of Education and the relevant departments and agencies in the Ministries of Foreign and Internal Affairs, and other Non-Governmental Organizations such as the International Organization of French Language Development, Alliance Francaise, Institut Francais du Nigeria (French Institute of Nigeria), French Education Network, and others have major roles to play in the implementation and supervision of English-French Education in Nigeria.

7. Summary and Conclusion

A digital approach to English-French education in Nigerian tertiary institutions holds significant promise for enhancing language acquisition and preparing students for a multilingual workforce. By leveraging technology, educators can create engaging, accessible, and personalized learning experiences that foster language proficiency. However, addressing challenges such as the digital divide, teacher training, and resource quality is crucial for successful implementation. With strategic planning and collaboration, Nigerian institutions can harness the power of technology to transform English-French education and equip students with the skills they need to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

The prospects of English-French education in Nigerian tertiary institutions are promising, with potential benefits spanning economic, diplomatic, educational, and cultural domains. While challenges exist, strategic investments and innovative approaches can enhance bilingual education, preparing Nigerian graduates for a more interconnected and competitive global landscape. By embracing bilingualism, Nigeria can strengthen its regional influence and unlock new opportunities for its citizens.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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