

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNING OF 21st CENTURY NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

The increasing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education has transformed language learning globally. However, its application to French language learning and pedagogy in Nigeria's education sector remains constrained. While AI-powered tools such as intelligent tutoring systems, chatbots, and adaptive learning platforms offer innovative solutions for personalized and interactive language instruction, their effectiveness in Nigeria is hampered by recurrent systemic challenges. This study, therefore, critically examines the application of AI in the study of French, highlighting challenges such as infrastructure deficiencies, inadequate funding, resistance to technological adoption, and curriculum misalignment, as well as sociological factors that complicate learners' engagement with the language. This paper, based on a qualitative literature review of existing frameworks and case studies, highlights the applications, prospects, and challenges of AI in French pedagogy. Key challenges include insufficient teacher training, low digital literacy, and an unreliable power supply, collectively limiting the seamless implementation of AI-driven language programs. Conversely, AI presents opportunities for scalable, cost-effective language practice, enhanced accessibility, and data-driven instructional improvements. To bridge these gaps, the study proposes strategic interventions for policymakers, educators, and technology developers. Targeted investments in digital infrastructure, AI-oriented teacher professional development, and curriculum reforms aligned with AI-enhanced language learning are therefore recommended to address existing challenges. By addressing these limitations, French language teachers can harness AI to strengthen French language education, promote multilingualism, and enhance global competitiveness for sustainable economic development, aligning with global best practices in the Nigerian education landscape.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), French Language Learning, Pedagogy, Nigeria Education Sector, Technology Integration.

Introduction

In a global context in which knowledge is increasing and the digitalization of language production is transforming human relationships, artificial intelligence is emerging as a viable lever for existential narrative change. This increase in knowledge is not unusual to religious scholars, as the Holy Scripture states that a time will come in the history of humanity when knowledge will increase (Dan. 12:4). The increase in knowledge foretold includes both spiritual and technological advancement (AI).

Artificial intelligence, as defined by Makanjuola and Idakwoji (2023:1), is the branch of science concerned with the design of intelligent devices that exhibit features characteristic of human intelligence. They further stated that artificial intelligence can be regarded as machines designed to act like humans in reasoning and processing. Otegbale (2025) supports the above submission, emphasizing the computational methods used to improve students' research reporting. This implies that although these machines are not human, they nevertheless perform tasks that humans can. Examples of such machines are robots. This artificial intelligence device supports language and image processing, among other capabilities. It is noteworthy that AI has recently occupied a major space in academic discourse because it has become a significant part of human life; hence the need to investigate it. Today, all spheres of human existence are powered by AI; the health sector,

agriculture, religion, politics, academia, and other domains are not exempt from AI involvement. According to Ngonso, Egielewa, Egenti, et al (2025:5) AI is "that domain of information and communication technology used to describe something created or manufactured by humans as opposed to existing naturally; it usually serves as a copy or stand-in for something natural hence it is termed ‘artificial’" (2025:5). To Mafara and Abdullahi (2024: 106) AI refers to the science and engineering of making intelligent machines for human use; it possesses the ability to think, automate task in real time and surpass ordinary human levels of intelligence. Examples include, but are not limited to, computer programs, humanoid robots, web-based chatbots, and online platforms. These AI tools can be classified into categories such as student-focused, teacher-focused, and institution-focused AI. Across different definitions of artificial intelligence (AI), they share a common aim: to make teaching and learning less cumbersome for both learners and teachers, thereby promoting global best practices in education.

It is therefore imperative that teachers in French language studies remain aware of the potential of AI tools, which are now the norm in education. The need for a repositioning of French language teaching and learning through intersecting approaches and the digital humanities becomes evident. The Nigerian education sector owing to the rapid rise of AI in the current educational ecosystem and in the world at large, has therefore deemed it fit to include digital humanities as a course of study into the current university core curriculum minimum academic standard (CCMAS), this is to buttress the role of AI in the teaching and learning of French studies in Nigerian tertiary education sector. However, the emergence of AI in French language education warrants serious concern about its effects on learners and teachers. This paper, therefore, aims to review how AI can make the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language more stimulating, engaging, and interactive for students, and to promote holistic opportunities for AI in French language studies. Additionally, it identifies challenges associated with the use of AI in a French-language class.

Enogiowan (2024) posits that language is constantly modified and frequently adapts to reflect changes over time, and that these changes are evident across different educational levels. Thus, French language teaching and learning in the face of digitalization is not left out of this change. Ojibun and Otegbale (2024) state that, if French language studies are to thrive amid digitalization, the use of blended learning in French language classes must be prioritized to keep pace with technological advancements. The integration of technology into the traditional classroom has revolutionized the teaching and learning of French worldwide. Nwaokocha and Ozaveshe (2024: 181) corroborated the above, stating that leveraging artificial intelligence to advance French-language learning in Nigeria can effectively engage francophone communities, thereby contributing to socio-economic development and cultural exchange at the regional and global levels.

The Place of the French Language in the Nigerian Education Sector

French language studies, according to Ayeleru (2019:6), date back to 1859, when the language was introduced as an optional subject at Wesleyan College and later at King's College in 1909. The aim, according to Tijani (2024:4), is to inculcate some knowledge of French culture and civilization into the education sector. This, he noted, was evident in the teaching methodology, which emphasized the development of reading competence rather than training individuals to speak the language fluently. Tijani further reiterated that, during the era of colonization in Nigeria, British colonizers regarded the teaching of the French language as a threat to their political and economic interests. However, the official policy on the teaching and learning of French dates back to 1960, following Nigeria's independence.

The policy, however, met with some setbacks until the 1961 and 1967 conferences at Yaoundé and Cotonou, respectively, where the following recommendations were made:

A second European language should be considered not only as a means of communication between English and French - speaking countries in Africa but also as an international language with a wide purpose which, jointly with the first European language, would enable Africa to communicate with other countries throughout the world (UNESCO 1983:39)

Ayeleru (2019:7) further stated that owing to the importance of the French language, France has supported and promoted the teaching and learning of the French language by establishing bodies like Alliance Française, Institut Français, Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD), IFRA, and also supported the establishment of the Nigerian French Language Village in Badagry for the teaching and development of French studies in Nigeria. Mokobia (2019:2) notes that the importance of the French language cannot be overstated, as it is a major world language and the only language, besides English, spoken on all five continents. As an important world language, Adejo (2012) asserts that the French language enjoys an extraordinary international reputation, recognition, and attention. This is because the French language has played and continues to play vital roles in world history and international relations: politically, economically, educationally, socially, and in diplomacy. Nigeria shares borders with neighbouring countries in which French is the official language. In the West, Nigeria is bounded by Benin; in the North, by Niger; and in the East, by Cameroon. Given mutual coexistence and business ties, it is evident that Nigeria should learn and speak French. Laditan (2023:29) explains that under the regime of Nigeria's former head of state, General Sani Abacha, the French in Nigeria attained prominence to the point that some even considered it as the nation's second official language in 1996 due to its international status and value, as well as its potential to boost the country's image and influence. Ojo (1990: iv) remarks:

Le développement du français au Nigeria est en plein essor, avec le changement de politique du gouvernement nigérian sur le statut du français. En décidant de faire du français la deuxième langue officielle du pays, notre gouvernement a pris une décision iconoclaste qui permettra aux Nigériens de bien s'armer d'un outil linguistique leur ouvrant des portes jusqu'ici fermées et faisant d'eux les citoyens d'un monde devenant de plus en plus un village global grâce aux moyens de communication qui se perfectionnent de jour en jour. (iv)

Sonaiya, Mojola, et al. (2017:5) state that the policy helps position Nigeria within the global community and among neighbouring countries, including Togo, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal.

Deploying Some Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools in French Language Classes

This section discusses how selected Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools could be deployed by both teachers and learners in a French language classroom to enhance various components of learning. These components range from lesson- and course-content preparation to interactive practice, assessment, and administrative support. These tools are both learner and teacher-focused.

1. Curriculum Assistant
2. Content Creator
3. Resource Scraper & Translator

Summary Table

Task	Recommended AI Tools	Function
Curriculum Assistant	Education Copilot, ChatGPT (Plus), Curipod	Generates structured outlines, lesson plans, and essential questions.
Content Creator	Diffit, MagicSchool.ai, ChatGPT, Claude, Twee	Differentiates texts, creates activities, and generates examples.
Resource Scraper & Translator	Google Lens, Microsoft Edge Browser (AI), ChatGPT Plus	Extracts and translates text from images, PDFs, and websites.

Curriculum Assistant: Generates curricula, programs, lesson plans, and lesson outlines for teachers. It is an AI tool that serves as a thinking partner for structuring courses and lessons, thereby reducing teachers' workload. The following tools are some of the AI tools that can be deployed:

Education Copilot: This is an AI tool specifically designed for educators. It provides one-click generation of more than 10 lesson plan templates, project outlines, student handouts, and even PowerPoint structures. You enter your subject area and topic, as well as the student's grade level, and it provides a ready-to-customize framework. It's a direct Curriculum Assistant.

ChatGPT (Plus with GPT-4) or Claude: These are advanced large-language AI tools suitable for language teachers, such as French. ChatGPT (Plus with GPT-4) helps language teachers generate and restructure text. They are viable tools for creating a detailed curriculum, breaking it down into weekly units, or drafting lesson outlines that include objectives, activities, and assessments. It operates on a prompt; therefore, the prompt must always be well-crafted to avoid ambiguity.

Curipod: This is an interactive lesson-delivery platform with built-in AI creation capabilities. While known for delivery, CuriPod can generate a lesson. It is also a user-friendly curriculum assistant that provides both structure and interactive content.

Content Creator: Builds readings, exercises, and dialogues

Diffit: This is a tool for instantly differentiating reading materials. This is a powerful AI tool for French language teachers, as it facilitates the creation of French content for learners. You can give it any topic, a YouTube video from the YouTube website, or an article; it will generate a summarized reading passage at any chosen reading level, e.g., Niveau AI-Niveau C2, along with vocabulary lists, multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, and open-ended questions.

Text Leveler Tool: Similar to Diffit.

MagicSchool.ai: This is a comprehensive site with over 60 AI tools specifically for teachers.

Vocabulary List Generator: Contextualizes terms.

Example Generator: Provides clear examples of concepts for students.

Dialogue Generator: Creates conversations for language practice or historical re-enactments.

Twee: An AI tool built specifically for language teachers, but useful for French language teachers and learners. It excels at creating text-based exercises. It can generate reading passages, create questions (open-ended and multiple-choice), start discussions, find interesting facts, and even create homework tasks on any topic. Its primary focus ensures high-quality output. French language teachers can use this tool to teach French at all levels.

Resource Scraper & Translator: These tools help you grab real-world content and make it accessible to your classroom.

Google Lens: An image recognition tool. This is the fastest way to create text from the physical world. Point your phone's camera at a page in a book, a sign, a document, or a worksheet, and it will extract all the text. You can then copy that text into a translator or another AI tool to adapt it. It is ideal for copying a paragraph from a library book that you do not have in electronic format.

Microsoft Edge Browser (with built-in AI features): This web browser includes integrated Copilot. When you find an online article or resource, you can use Edge's Immersive Reader mode to simplify the page and read it aloud. More powerfully, you can use the sidebar Copilot to ask it to "Summarize this article to suit the reader's level. It can also translate from English to any language, such as French.

The integration of AI in the French language classroom promises a more efficient, engaging, and personalized learning experience for students and a more streamlined workflow for educators. By leveraging these advanced tools, we can create a dynamic environment that fosters deeper understanding and greater proficiency in French. Tools: ChatGPT, Claude, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini.

AI is a powerful assistant, but it cannot replace the human connection, cultural nuance, and spontaneous empathy of a skilled teacher. The goal of the application of AI tools in the teaching and learning of the French language is to make the teaching-learning process interactive and innovative. It is therefore pertinent to note that the best use of AI tools lies in the prompt, as no AI tool can operate without one. Other common AI tools a French language teacher can deploy include Deepseek, MetaAI, chatbot and etc.

Prospects of AI Application in French Language Pedagogy

The use of AI tools in the education sector has led to significant innovations. This is evident in the shift from traditional pedagogical approaches to blended learning. According to Onaolapo and Onifade (2023: 7), the use of AI tools has enriched the teaching and learning process in Africa, thereby contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. According to Owan, Abang, Idika, Etta, and Bassey (2023:3), AI tools have the capacity to enhance teacher productivity, as teachers can now explore diverse teaching methods in the classroom. Furthermore, Nwaokugha and Abiakwu (2023: 182) added that Artificial Intelligence aids teacher/learner productivity in that it helps with quick answers to issues while enhancing administrative efficiency and productivity. For contemporary French language teachers and students, artificial intelligence has facilitated cultural connectivity. Through AI tools, French students can connect with their counterparts in France from the comfort of their homes, thereby gaining access to native speakers. With AI tools such as Duolingo, learning French is made easier. It helps learners with French grammar and pronunciation. Ojebun and Otegbale (2024:189) reemphasized what Nwaokugha and

Abiakwu (2023) stated above: that artificial intelligence enables self-paced learning, allowing French students to review French grammatical rules, vocabulary lists, and cultural contexts at their convenience.

Interventions for the Effective and Sustainable Implementation of AI in French Language Pedagogy within Nigerian Tertiary Education

For the effective and sustainable integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools into the teaching and learning of the French language in the Nigerian tertiary education sector, a multi-faceted intervention strategy is imperative. The following critical areas require deliberate consideration and action:

1. Development of AI-Oriented Faculty

A foundational pillar for successful implementation is the cultivation of a teaching workforce proficient in AI applications. The 21st-century French language instructor must attain a level of digital literacy that extends to the operational and pedagogical use of AI tools. Effective integration is contingent upon instructor competence; without a comprehensive understanding of these technologies, their potential to enhance pedagogy remains unrealized. Therefore, targeted and continuous professional development programs are essential to equip educators with the necessary skills to leverage AI for curriculum delivery, student assessment, and personalized learning pathways.

2. Curriculum Reform for AI-Enhanced Learning

The existing French-language curriculum requires a systematic revision to align with the opportunities and requirements of AI integration. A curriculum designed without cognizance of digital transformation inherently obstructs the effective application of educational technology and or compliance with global best practices. Reform must focus on embedding AI tools not as supplementary gadgets but as core components that redefine learning objectives, teaching methodologies, and evaluative techniques. This entails designing course content that promotes interaction with AI for conversational practice, grammar acquisition, automated feedback, and access to authentic cultural and linguistic materials.

3. Investment in Digital Infrastructure

The deployment of AI-driven educational tools is predicated on the availability of robust and reliable digital infrastructure. Tertiary institutions must prioritize significant investment in technological upgrades. This includes the provision of high-bandwidth internet connectivity, stable power supply, modern computing facilities, and the development of digital libraries and learning management systems. This infrastructural ecosystem is a non-negotiable prerequisite, as it establishes the fundamental conditions necessary for digital pedagogical tools to function optimally and equitably for all stakeholders.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of Artificial Intelligence represents a narrative shift in pedagogical approaches, offering transformative potential for foreign language education, such as French studies. Its application to the acquisition of French, with proficiency levels ranging from personalized learning to authentic linguistic immersion, positions it as a gateway rather than a mere supplement. For educators and students in the Nigerian context, the adoption of these tools is pivotal to fostering the competencies required in the 21st-century global educational ecosystem. However, the path to effective implementation is fraught with significant impediments. As this study has outlined, systemic challenges, including infrastructural deficits, curricular misalignment, inadequate funding, and a shortage

of digitally proficient educators, pose considerable risks to sustainable integration. Furthermore, potential pitfalls such as algorithmic bias, over-reliance, and the diminution of human-centric learning must be strategically mitigated. Therefore, realizing the full potential of AI in the French language classroom necessitates a concerted, multi-stakeholder approach. It mandates committed policy reform, strategic investment in digital infrastructure, comprehensive teacher training, and the development of a robust AI-informed curriculum. Ultimately, the goal is not to displace the educator but to empower them to leverage AI to create a more dynamic, effective, and equitable learning environment for the French language in Nigeria.

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