

**BOKO HARAM INSURGENCE IN THE LAKE CHAD AXIS: THE ROLE OF
FOREIGN LANGUAGES (FRENCH AND ENGLISH) IN CURBING THE CRISES**

BY

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Abstract

When one takes a look at what Boko Haram caused in the Region of Lake Chad, most especially Nigeria, the torment, the atrocities, killing of innocent souls, heinous crimes it committed on citizens most especially Northern Nigerians states like Bornu, Yobe and Niger and Tchadians towns near Nigeria Border and even in Cameroun for more than a decade despite all Military measures taken by countries concerned, it is high time, we look into other means of combating the insurgence. This paper is set to look into the role of foreign languages like French and English could play in helping to put a stop to the insurgence.

Keywords: *Boko Haram, Atrocities, Killing of innocent souls and Heinous crimes*

Introduction

Book-Haram, a term derived from Hausa and Arabic words “Boko” in Hausa means Western Education and “Haram” in Arabic means “sin”. Alao (2015) and from Obinna (2011) and Sanni (2011) cited by Alao (Op.cit), the term Boko Haram, which means Western Education is bad started in 2012 as a small sect of political thugs imported into Nigeria (Bornu and Yobe states) from Niger and Tchad republics all French speaking countries shearing borders with the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the North. The brand of the Political thugs was then led by one Mr. Mohamed Yusuf.

The member of the group later felt aggrieved having realized that the politicians used and dumped them after the governorship re-election of 2003 of the then Governor of Bornu (Sherif). In retaliation to what the political class did to them, the group left the political scene and

metamorphosed to Armed Robbers and started terrorizing innocent people due to sophisticated arms in their possession. After going unchecked by the governments in power both state and federal, the group later graduated to what is today known as Boko Haram and under the watch of both State and Federal Governments and through the backing of some foreign countries, Boko-Haram gain strength and gather enough power to spread its tentacles in Lake Tchad region by killing, bombing, abduction, destruction of public and private properties and even making an attempt to gain more ground and spread their teachings. If not for prompt intervention of security forces in Nigeria, they would have gained ground in other places of Nigeria.

It should be noted that the group is not only against the Christians, but also against the Muslims and this could be seen from many Mosques burnt by the group and many Muslims killed by the group. And from Kanjuni (2017), today due to many obvious reasons, Boko-Haram's activities have escalated to an unmanageable proportion thereby causing serious sleepless night".

Objective

This paper is set to put forward vital roles French and English as foreign languages could play in solving Boko Haram insurgence in Lake Chad region.

The Presence of French Language in Africa and in Nigeria

According to Kwofie (2008), the presence of French language in Sénégal in 1624, follow by that of Madagascar in 1643 and Reunion formerly known as (l'Ile de Boubon) in 1663, marked the beginning of French language in Africa.

France already had six colonies in West Africa namely: Dahomey now Republic of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Guinea Conakry, Mauritania and Niger Republic and from there French started gaining ground and Benin Republic was regarded then as Quatier Latin en Afrique (Latin quarter in Africa).

As regard to the presence of French language in Nigeria. From Adelekan (1983) cited by Araromi (1996:226). The presence of French language in Nigeria goes to year 1859 and it was

among the earliest subject taught in the first secondary school established in Nigeria in the year 1859. Also, when the Western High School and Training Institution was established in Lagos, French language was one of the modern languages taught in that school.

From Araromi (Op.cit), the 1961 conference on foreign languages held in Yaoundé, Cameroun by experts on modern languages in Africa where it was recommended that a second European language should be introduced into our schools after ascertain that our students had acquired sufficient knowledge of their country official language and by implication English language has to be introduced in French speaking countries while French in English speaking countries. This directive helped in making French language to be popular and taught in schools in Nigeria.

The Presence of English Language in Neighboring French Speaking Countries

English language, a language spoken in Great Britain as mother tongue and an official language in all ex-colonies of the Great Britain is a language with a long history. According to Adebajo (2010), English language has passed through a period of about 1,500 years and the original speakers of the language were the angles. Like any other language, English has gone through at least two major different stages before reaching its modern form. From Adebajo (Op.cit), the stages are:

- i. The Old English period from 450A.D. to 1150AD. A period sometimes described as a period of “full inflections” as most of the ending of adjectives, nouns and verbs were preserved during most of this period.
- ii. The Middle English period: 1,150 to 1,500. A period also called a period of “low level inflections” as the inflections, which began to break down towards the close of the old English period became highly reduced.
- iii. The Modern English Period: 1,500 till the present. A period known also as a period of “Lost inflections” as a large part of the original inflection system of English language disappeared during this period.

According to Kwame (2017), English language through missionary activities and through colonization got to many part of the world including Africa and from Stephen (2015) among

countries that first witnessed the present of English in Africa are the present Liberia, where the exslaves from America were dumped. The present Sierra Leon, Ghana and South Africa.

In French speaking countries in Africa like Niger, Tchad, Benin, English language is regarded as a foreign language taught only in schools (from secondary school upward) while in Cameroun, it is regarded as an official administrative language side by side with French language because Cameroun is a bilingual nation.

Prospects and Gains of French and English in Curbing Boko Haram Crises in the Lake Chad Axes

Language according to Lyons (1981) is purely humain and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotion and desire by means of voluntarily produced symbols”. From Hall (1968) point of view on language, language is “the institution whereby human communicate and interact with each other by means of habitual used oral – auditory symbols”. According to Njoku (2004) “l’importance majeure de la langue, c’est la communication entre les hommes”. That is, the major importance of language is communication among people. While Adebisi (2012) observes that throughout history, from the early stages of man’s existence, communities existed and the people interacted among themselves though the use of language.

Ajani (2015) notes that all kind of conflicts around the world as at today wouldn’t have happened if there is no brake down in communication due to the inability to understand each other. In recent time, the Lake Chad region that comprises part of Northern Nigeria (Borno and Yobe States), Southern part of Niger and Tchad and part of the North East of Cameroon, Boko Haram insurgence has come to occupy the centre stage of world affairs due to various activities involving killing of thousands of Nigerians ranging from brutal killing of citizens of Nigeria and citizens from Niger and Tchad, kidnapping and destruction of properties since the beginning of Boko Haram insurgency, Nigerian government and various government (Tchad and Niger) have been putting their best to see that a stop is put to Boko Haram insurgence.

According to Ero (2006), the Inter-African force set up in 1981 to monitor the civil war in Tchad ended up in failure due to inadequate plans, confusion over the mandate, absence of OAU now A.U (African Union) command and control structure. From Adebisi (2012) underlining all factors pointed out by Ero (Op.cit) as what led to the failure of Inter-African force set up in 1981 to monitor civil war in Chad is the importance of the relevant language in the circumstances. What it means is that without the service of language for effective communication, no any act of military could be successful in putting an end to any violence like the case of Boko Haram insurgency.

On the prospects and gain of French and English languages in finding solution to Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad region, it should be noted that both languages occupied a special place in view of the fact that globally the two languages are the most widely spoken languages in the world. While English language is spoken in 52 countries in the world, French is spoken in 37 countries of the world. Ajani (2014) also, stated that three out of the four countries that formed Lake Chad region are French speaking countries namely, the Republic of Tchad, the Republic of Niger and the Republic of Cameroon that is a bilingual nation (French and English) and all these countries share borders with Nigeria namely, Cameroon in the East, Niger in the North and Tchad in the East. And Nigeria the forth member of Lake Chad region that is an English speaking country.

Going by Yemi (2010), “language is a very vital instrument which the society needs and which society depends much upon it” and going by Adebisi (Op.cit: 79) that “the knowledge of foreign language is an asset to individual and society” there is no doubt that French and English both foreign languages occupies a special place in helping to put a stop to Boko-Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad region taking into consideration that:

i. The four countries that formed Lake Chad region have French and English as their official and administrative languages. While Niger, Tchad have French, Nigeria has English language and Cameroun has both English and French languages as her official languages hence for effective discussion on security so as to confront Boko-Haram insurgency, officers and men of all countries involved in Boko-Haram insurgency need to be able to communicate fluently

with the two languages and this will go along way in understanding the operation of each other in regard to Boko Haram insurgency.

ii. For the insurgency of Boko Haram to come to an end, there is need for strong regional cooperation among countries. Looking at the way Boko Haram is operating, it involves two regions in Africa namely, the West Africa sub region and the central Africa. In both regions, both French and English occupy a special place in view of the fact that in West Africa, out of fifteen countries that formed West Africa, while Eight are French speaking countries, five are English speaking countries. In Central Africa, all the countries that formed Central Africa region are French speaking countries. However, Cameroon remains both English and French country.

iii. For insurgency of Boko –Haram to come to an end, there is the need for global attention and the two most widely world spoken languages are French and English which means that the two languages have a crucial role to play and the implication of this is that the two languages need a lot of attention in countries where they are not official languages. The two languages need to be learnt by security persons across countries that formed the Lake Chad region. Taking the case of Nigeria as an example, for the learning of French as pointed out by Sabo (1958): “To say that officers and men of the Nigerian Armed forces should be proficient in French does not mean that they should all acquire a B.A. (Hons) French.” All that is required according to Adebisi (Op.cit, 77) is that every member of the Armed Forces should at least acquired a proficiency knowledge of French / English in order to meet international obligation when the need comes up.

iv. Good negotiation requires effective language for communication and bargaining. It has been demonstrated in few occasions that the insurgency group end up later in calling of a negotiation and without a good communication, there could not be a good negotiation, hence English and French language are very important. Tchad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon, it means that negotiating team.

vi. Some of those that involve in Boko-Haram insurgency are citizens from francophone countries that surrounded Nigeria. Ability to communicate with them will in most cases lead to proper location of their domain and their sponsors who are outside Nigeria and reside in francophone countries surrounding Nigeria.

Conclusion

In recent time, the Lake Chad basin comprising the Northern part of Nigeria, the southern part of Niger and Tchad and the North Eastern part of Cameroon is seriously facing the insurgence of Boko-Haram and from Iroko (2011) cited by Alao (2015) point of observation, we cannot be sure of what will happen tomorrow, based on series of killing and kidnapping carried out so far by Boko-Haram in the region.

The implication of the above is that all necessary machineries must be put in place to see that Boko-Haram insurgence is totally eradicated. This paper therefore concludes that the current high level of military intervention to solve Boko-Haram insurgence English should be backed up with high level of French understanding in Nigeria that is Anglophone country and high level of French in countries that are francophone countries (Tchad and Niger).

This will go a long way in making communication to be easier not only among the citizens of the countries involved but also among military personnel fighting the Boko-Haram set.

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