

French as an African Working Language: Rethinking Business French Curricula for Intra-African Commercial Contexts

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Abstract

This review examines the evolving role of French as a practical working language within intra-African commerce and evaluates how Business French curricula can be redesigned to reflect the communicative realities of African markets. Using a critical review approach, the study synthesises scholarship on multilingual business communication, French for specific purposes, curriculum design, intercultural competence, experiential learning, digital pedagogy, work-integrated learning, and university–industry collaboration. The analysis shows that conventional Business French programmes frequently remain overly general, Eurocentric, grammar-centred, and insufficiently connected to the tasks, sectors, and multilingual environments in which African professionals operate. It further identifies growing demand for functional French across trade, logistics, banking, tourism, telecommunications, procurement, retail, customer engagement, and regional mobility. The review finds that more effective curricula should integrate authentic African commercial cases, sector-specific vocabulary, intercultural negotiation, task-based learning, virtual exchange, digital collaboration, and performance-based assessment. Institutional partnerships with employers, professional bodies, Francophone universities, and trade organisations are also shown to be essential for curriculum relevance, implementation, and graduate employability. The study concludes that Business French education in Africa should move from language instruction centred primarily on formal competence toward an Africa-centred model that treats French as an operational resource for commercial participation and cross-border cooperation. It recommends systematic workplace needs analysis, employer-informed learning outcomes, stronger lecturer development, regionally grounded materials, expanded experiential learning, and longitudinal research measuring proficiency, employability, and workplace transfer. Such reforms would strengthen the alignment between language education, continental economic integration, and the practical demands of an increasingly interconnected African marketplace. They would also support multilingual professional identities and inclusive participation in regional value chains.

Keywords: Business French; Intra-African Trade; Francophone Africa; Intercultural Communication; Curriculum Reform; Multilingualism.

1. Introduction

1.1 French in Africa's Commercial Landscape

French occupies a distinctive position in Africa's commercial geography because its value extends beyond formal state recognition into the routines through which firms, institutions and

professionals coordinate economic activity. Across substantial parts of West and Central Africa, French functions as a working language for contracts, procurement, banking, logistics, customer relations, regulatory engagement and cross-border negotiation. Its commercial significance lies not simply in the number of speakers, but in its capacity to connect actors operating across different linguistic communities and national jurisdictions. International business scholarship shows that language shapes communication, knowledge transfer, trust and organizational coordination, making linguistic competence an economic capability rather than a purely cultural attribute (Tenzer, Terjesen & Harzing, 2017).

This interpretation is consistent with evidence that linguistic proximity and communicative accessibility influence bilateral trade. By distinguishing native, spoken and official language effects, Melitz and Toubal demonstrate that language facilitates trade through channels extending beyond shared ethnicity, including direct communication, translation and interpretive capacity (Melitz & Toubal, 2014). In an African setting characterized by multilingualism, these mechanisms are salient. French may function as an official language, an acquired professional language and an interregional commercial medium. Consequently, a trader in an Anglophone or Lusophone economy dealing with partners in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon or the Democratic Republic of Congo may encounter French as an instrument for managing invoices, correspondence, negotiations, compliance documents and business relationships.

The economic relevance of this competence becomes clearer when language is treated as a transaction-cost variable. Major trade languages can reduce communication frictions, while linguistic distance may increase the resources required for negotiation, information verification and relationship management. French has demonstrated a meaningful role in international investment settings, indicating that its utility cannot be assessed solely against the global dominance of English (Selmier & Oh, 2013). For African enterprises seeking regional expansion, multilingual capability can become a strategic resource: firms able to operate professionally in French may gain access to suppliers, customers, regulators and institutional networks within Francophone markets instead of depending continually on intermediaries.

Language demand is also responsive to trade itself. Evidence indicates that commercial relationships can influence incentives to acquire foreign languages because learners respond to the economic usefulness of communicating with external markets (Ginsburgh, Melitz & Toubal, 2017). This reciprocal relationship is pertinent to Africa, where changing trade corridors, regional integration and the expansion of indigenous multinational enterprises are altering the communicative environments in which graduates work. Business French should therefore be understood within a demand-driven linguistic ecology: its relevance rises where commerce requires professionals who can move between local languages, English and French while retaining sector-specific communicative accuracy.

Product-level evidence further shows that both native and acquired language capabilities matter for international exchange, reinforcing the proposition that learned languages can generate practical commercial value rather than serving merely symbolic functions (Egger & Toubal, 2018). Within Africa, that distinction is crucial. French is not the mother tongue of most of its African users, yet it can still provide access to commercial institutions and networks. Its professional value depends on acquired proficiency and the capacity to deploy it appropriately in domains including finance, entrepreneurship, logistics, tourism, telecommunications and professional services.

African experience also demonstrates that the commercial visibility of languages is dynamic rather than fixed. Research on urban Rwanda documents changes in the linguistic landscape following policy shifts that elevated English, with corresponding changes in the visibility of French on commercial signs (Rosendal & Amini Ngabonziza, 2023). The Rwandan case illustrates how regional orientation and public policy can reshape the market value of working languages. It cautions against treating “Francophone Africa” as a linguistically static bloc and instead supports a differentiated understanding of multilingual African marketplaces.

At the macroeconomic level, language policy and education can interact with national development strategies, making alignment between linguistic capabilities and economic priorities an important policy consideration (Alhendi et al., 2021). For African higher education, this implies that the rationale for teaching French should be connected to commercial functions, regional mobility and employability. The question is no longer merely whether French retains historical importance, but whether learners can use it effectively within African value chains and professional environments.

Curriculum relevance must reflect the socioeconomic conditions confronting African households and labour markets. Nigerian evidence on changing breadwinner roles under economic pressure demonstrates how economic restructuring can reshape responsibilities and adaptive behaviour within everyday life (Ezeani & Sabboh, 2021). In this broader environment, employable linguistic competence may contribute to adaptability and access to wider markets. French thus deserves reconsideration as an African working language whose value is produced through trade relationships, institutional practice, mobility and multilingual interaction, providing a foundation for reorienting Business French curricula toward intra-African commerce.

1.2 Intra-African Trade and Language Demands

The expansion of intra-African commerce is changing the linguistic competencies required of professionals who operate across the continent’s increasingly interconnected markets. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) seeks to deepen regional integration by reducing trade barriers, enlarging markets and stimulating cross-border production and investment. Yet commercial integration is not achieved through tariff reform alone: transactions also depend on the capacity of firms, employees and institutions to communicate accurately across national and linguistic boundaries. As trade networks become denser, French acquires renewed practical significance as a working language linking Anglophone, Francophone and multilingual commercial environments (Songwe, Macleod & Karingi, 2021).

Language demands are especially visible at the transactional level, where misunderstanding can affect bargaining, customer relationships, product information and trust. Evidence from a multilingual Kenyan market demonstrates that traders and clients experience communication challenges arising from language choice and differing linguistic repertoires, illustrating how commercial exchanges are mediated by communicative competence as well as price and product considerations (Akaeze, Kirigia & Yieke, 2022). This reinforces the need for Business French curricula to move beyond decontextualised vocabulary toward interactional abilities applicable to negotiation, clarification, persuasion and relationship management.

For internationally oriented smaller firms, language choice is also a strategic resource-allocation decision. Research on international SMEs shows that firms weigh English-only approaches against multilingual strategies while considering external stakeholder preferences, resource sharing and the availability of linguistic competence (Talukder & Barner-Rasmussen, 2024). In

African trade, this tension suggests that French competence can expand organisational capacity to interact directly with suppliers, customers and partners in Francophone markets rather than depending routinely on linguistic intermediaries.

Cross-border commerce additionally requires workforce capabilities that function across distributed operations. Talent-development models emphasise systematic competency identification, continuous learning and workforce readiness within geographically dispersed supply chains (Falemi, Akhigbe & Akin-Oluyomi, 2020). Applied to language education, this perspective supports curricula that treat commercial French as an occupational capability embedded in logistics, procurement, sales and customer-facing activities.

Governance across geographically dispersed retail networks similarly involves coordination among actors confronting different operational and regulatory conditions (Akin-Oluyomi & Akhigbe, 2022). Business French instruction should therefore expose learners to authentic documentation and scenarios involving orders, invoices, compliance correspondence, distribution arrangements and professional negotiations across African jurisdictions.

Nigeria illustrates the strategic importance of such preparation. Evidence on the AfCFTA indicates potentially significant trade, revenue and welfare implications for the Nigerian economy, highlighting the commercial opportunities associated with deeper continental integration (Oyelami, 2022). For Nigerian graduates and enterprises engaging Francophone neighbours and wider African markets, linguistic preparedness can consequently complement technical and entrepreneurial capabilities. Curriculum redesign should respond by prioritising commercially functional French, sector-specific terminology, intercultural adaptability and realistic intra-African business tasks that mirror the communicative demands generated by continental trade. This shift makes language preparation central to employability, market access and the practical realization of African economic integration across diverse commercial sectors and regions.

1.3 Review Scope and Analytical Objectives

This review examines the position of French as a working language within the evolving architecture of intra-African commerce, with particular attention to the implications for Business French curriculum design. Its scope extends beyond conventional treatments of French as a foreign or diplomatic language by situating it within practical commercial environments where professionals negotiate, correspond, market products, manage supply relationships, interpret business documentation, and coordinate activities across linguistically diverse African markets. The discussion therefore considers the relationship between regional economic integration, multilingual workplace practices, professional communication, intercultural competence, and employability. Analytically, the review evaluates whether prevailing Business French curricula adequately reflect the communicative realities of African trade and professional mobility. It examines the extent to which existing instructional models incorporate sector-specific vocabulary, authentic business genres, transactional discourse, negotiation practices, digital communication, and culturally responsive commercial scenarios. Particular attention is given to the relevance of curriculum content for Anglophone learners seeking to operate effectively within Francophone and multilingual African markets.

The review also assesses pedagogical approaches capable of strengthening functional proficiency, including task-based learning, simulations, case-based instruction, digital platforms, and experiential engagement with realistic commercial situations. A further objective is to

identify institutional and curricular constraints that may limit the development of contextually relevant Business French programmes. Through this analytical framework, the review seeks to establish priorities for curriculum reform, university–industry collaboration, competency-based learning outcomes, and future research capable of supporting a more commercially responsive, Africa-centred model of Business French education. It further considers how curriculum reform can support cross-border entrepreneurship, regional mobility, customer engagement, and participation in emerging continental value chains.

2. African Business French: Context and Competencies

2.1 Francophone Markets and Commercial Communication

Francophone African markets are commercially significant not because they form a linguistically uniform bloc, but because French frequently operates as an institutional and transactional language across states characterized by extensive multilingualism. In border trade, formal enterprise, administration, banking and regional cooperation, commercial actors often move between French, national languages and other international languages according to audience, task and authority. Evidence from a Nigerian border-market context shows that French can facilitate bargaining, information exchange and cross-border interaction, underscoring its practical value where traders must negotiate across linguistic boundaries (Oriakpono, 2024).

The commercial role of French is especially visible in markets where formal institutional communication coexists with locally embedded linguistic practices. In Senegal, research on commercial signage demonstrates that French retains prominence in formal public space while business proprietors also draw on other languages to signal identity, accessibility and market positioning (Shiohata, 2012). Such patterns challenge curricula that present commercial French as a self-contained metropolitan norm. Learners preparing for African markets require competence in standard professional French alongside an understanding of multilingual adaptation, audience sensitivity and the pragmatic choices that shape everyday commerce.

Communication with customers further illustrates why linguistic responsiveness matters commercially. Research among multilingual audiences in Ghana shows that language preference influences attention, message processing and responses to advertising, with language blends capable of enhancing communicative appeal (Yeboah-Banin, 2023). For Business French education, this suggests that commercial communication should encompass more than grammatical accuracy. Students need practice in customer-facing discourse, persuasive messaging, brand communication and register selection for audiences whose linguistic repertoires may extend well beyond French. The same principle applies inside firms. Multinational corporations operate as multilingual communities in which headquarters and local units may rely on different functional languages, requiring deliberate language arrangements to sustain coordination and knowledge exchange (Luo & Shenkar, 2006). Comparative evidence likewise shows substantial variation in language competencies, policies and practices across multinational corporations, indicating that corporate language requirements are shaped by organizational origin, location and strategic configuration rather than by a universal model (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013). Francophone market preparation should therefore expose learners to communication across subsidiaries, suppliers, regulators and multicultural teams.

Language barriers can also generate measurable organizational friction. Empirical research demonstrates that linguistic differences may slow decision-making, increase communication costs and encourage organizations to adopt solutions ranging from language training and code-

switching to common corporate languages (Harzing, Köster & Magner, 2011). More adaptive strategies can create a shared “company-speak” through which multilingual employees bridge gaps while retaining context-sensitive linguistic resources (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). These findings are pertinent to African firms operating across Francophone and Anglophone commercial corridors, where rigid monolingual practices may constrain relationship-building and operational responsiveness.

Commercial communication also depends on the stability and capability of the workforce responsible for executing organizational processes. Integrating employee systems with productivity metrics highlights the strategic importance of aligning human-capital capabilities with operational performance (Falemi, Akhigbe & Akin-Oluyomi, 2023). Within Business French curricula, linguistic competence should consequently be framed as a workplace capability linked to sales, procurement, logistics, customer service and managerial coordination. Francophone-market readiness requires curricula grounded in authentic African commercial genres: quotations, invoices, tenders, professional emails, negotiations, complaints, marketing messages and regulatory interactions. Such an orientation positions French as a functional resource for navigating commercially diverse African environments rather than merely an academic language learned independently of the markets in which graduates are expected to operate. Assessment should likewise evaluate whether learners can complete realistic commercial tasks under multilingual conditions, interpret culturally situated meanings and adjust communication to different stakeholders. This would align instructional outcomes with communicative pressures encountered in contemporary African enterprises, rather than rewarding decontextualized lexical recall alone.

2.2 Workplace Language Needs Across African Markets

African workplaces increasingly operate through layered linguistic repertoires rather than a single corporate language. Formal communication may be conducted in English or French, while negotiations, customer interaction, team coordination and problem-solving frequently draw on indigenous languages and lingua francas. This plurality means that workplace language competence should be understood as the ability to select and adapt linguistic resources according to professional purpose, audience and institutional setting. Evidence from Francophone African logistics and supply-chain professionals shows that French remains dominant in communication with French-speaking colleagues, clients and suppliers even where English is valued for dealings with international partners, showing that multilingual capability is embedded in commercial practice (Sacco & Ohin-Traoré, 2022). Requirements vary across sectors and employment structures. Research in Ghana demonstrates that the linguistic profile of work differs markedly between formal and informal employment, with multilingual repertoires remaining economically relevant even where education policy privileges English (Reilly et al., 2023). Business French curricula for African markets should therefore avoid assuming that graduates will operate exclusively within standardized corporate environments. Learners require competence for correspondence, meetings and reporting, but also for customer engagement, sales interactions, supplier relations and field-based communication. Workplace multilingualism is also dynamic because employees adjust language choice to communicative conditions. Studies of multilingual workplaces show that organizational policy does not fully determine actual practice; workers often adopt pragmatic language strategies according to participation structures, relationships and task demands (Angouri, 2014). This distinction is particularly important for African cross-border

commerce, where French may coexist with English, Arabic, Portuguese or indigenous languages within the same transaction. Corporate-language policies can further create differences between official communication and the language employees actually use to accomplish work. Research on multinational organizations distinguishes the formal “frontstage” corporate language from backstage practices, illustrating why functional workplace proficiency cannot be reduced to standardized language testing (Kankaanranta, Karhunen & Louhiala-Salminen, 2018). Business French education should consequently emphasize intelligibility, pragmatic appropriateness, occupational vocabulary and interactional competence.

The Nigerian workplace context similarly demonstrates the organizational value of professional communication capabilities. Research among university secretaries identified communication skills, interpersonal competence and teamwork among attributes associated with effective organizational functioning (Onche, Adenekan & Sabboh, 2021). These competencies provide a relevant basis for positioning professional French as part of workplace readiness.

Language needs must also respond to changing workforce configurations. Frameworks addressing staffing volatility emphasize skill availability, workforce deployment and capability alignment across procurement, production, logistics and distribution functions (Falemi, Akhigbe & Akin-Oluyomi, 2023). For African Business French curricula, needs analysis should therefore be sector-sensitive and role-specific, identifying the communicative tasks graduates are expected to perform across banking, logistics, tourism, retail, manufacturing, telecommunications and regional trade networks. Such alignment would shift curriculum design from generic linguistic attainment toward demonstrable professional communicative capability.

2.3 Intercultural Competence in African Business Communication

Intercultural competence is central to African business communication because commercial interaction across the continent rarely occurs within culturally or linguistically homogeneous environments. Professionals routinely negotiate differences in language, hierarchy, time orientation, relationship-building, persuasion and non-verbal behaviour while operating across national and regional boundaries. In Nigerian business settings, non-verbal cues such as eye contact, silence, gesture, tone and interpersonal distance can influence how intentions are interpreted during negotiations, demonstrating that linguistic proficiency alone does not guarantee communicative effectiveness (Okoro & Day, 2013). For Business French curricula, this implies that learners must be prepared to interpret both verbal meaning and culturally situated interactional signals. Intercultural competence also requires attitudes and capabilities that permit individuals to respond appropriately when familiar communicative assumptions are disrupted. A widely used framework conceptualises such competence through openness, respect, cultural self-awareness, knowledge, listening, observation, interpretation and the capacity to adapt behaviour in intercultural encounters (Deardorff, 2006). These elements are particularly relevant for African professionals using French across Francophone, Anglophone and multilingual markets, where communicative expectations may vary between institutions, industries and communities. Curriculum design should therefore combine linguistic accuracy with reflective cultural learning and contextual judgement.

Workplace evidence from South Africa reinforces the organisational importance of this capability. Employees in a culturally diverse university reported inconsistencies in how intercultural communication was managed, indicating the value of more deliberate frameworks for guiding interaction across cultural differences (Mushaathoni, 2024). In commercial settings,

comparable gaps can affect teamwork, customer relationships and coordination with partners. Business French training should consequently develop learners' ability to recognise difference without reducing African cultures to fixed stereotypes.

This caution is supported by research on multicultural teams, which shows that cultural diversity can generate both process gains and process losses depending on the mechanisms through which difference is managed (Stahl et al., 2010). Intercultural competence should therefore be treated as a practical capacity for converting diversity into collaboration rather than as memorisation of national cultural traits. Learners need opportunities to analyse ambiguity, repair misunderstandings, negotiate meaning and adjust communicative strategies.

Negotiation provides an especially important application. Cross-cultural bargaining research demonstrates that communicative sequences and negotiation behaviours vary across cultural contexts, affecting how parties exchange information, influence counterparts and progress toward agreement (Adair & Brett, 2005). Sales-oriented research similarly indicates that negotiation style is shaped by national, organisational and individual cultural factors, while intercultural communication competence supports adaptation to different customers and markets (Chairsakeo & Speece, 2004). For intra-African commerce, these insights require Business French curricula to integrate culturally complex simulations involving supplier meetings, customer complaints, contract discussions, partnership formation and cross-border sales. Effective negotiators require more than specialised vocabulary; they need intercultural literacy that enables them to interpret expectations, manage misunderstanding and communicate strategically with culturally different partners (Helmová, 2017). Such preparation would make Business French more responsive to African commercial realities by developing professionals capable of combining French-language proficiency with cultural sensitivity, adaptive interaction, respectful relationship-building and contextually informed commercial judgement. Assessment should evaluate adaptive performance through authentic encounters, not rely exclusively on isolated grammatical testing.

3. Rethinking Business French Curriculum Design

3.1 Limitations of Conventional Business French Curricula

Conventional Business French curricula often inherit the architecture of general foreign-language programmes: grammatical sequencing, thematic vocabulary, scripted dialogues and examinations that privilege formal accuracy. While these components remain important, they can become restrictive when insufficiently connected to commercial work. Languages for Specific Purposes scholarship shows that professionally oriented curricula require distinctive design, materials and implementation because learners must be prepared for identifiable occupational purposes rather than generalized competence (Basturkmen, 2012). For African learners, this limitation is consequential where French functions in cross-border trade, logistics, banking, tourism, procurement and customer-facing activities. A second weakness is inadequate alignment between course content and the language actually required after graduation. Research among economics graduates in France found professional demand across reading, writing, listening and speaking, while also revealing difficulties in meeting workplace expectations, especially in oral communication (Taillefer, 2007). Conventional Business French programmes that concentrate on lexical knowledge about companies, markets and finance without systematically developing meetings, negotiation, presentations, telephone interaction and professional writing may therefore produce learners who know commercial terminology but cannot perform commercial

tasks effectively. The problem is intensified when curricula are designed without robust workplace needs analysis. Evidence from Hong Kong demonstrates a gap between business-language courses and the communicative requirements encountered by professionals, including spoken and written tasks that employees find difficult (Chan, 2014). In an intra-African context, needs analysis should similarly identify the language used in supplier engagement, regulatory correspondence, cross-border sales, complaints management, payment discussions and partnership formation. Without such evidence, Business French risks remaining institution-centred rather than market-responsive. Conventional materials may also be too generic or culturally distant from learners' target environments. A practical language-for-business case involving German banking professionals illustrates the value of flexible syllabi, authentic materials, role plays and learner tasks derived from occupational needs rather than dependence on prefabricated coursebooks (Edwards, 2000). African Business French programmes that rely on metropolitan French textbook scenarios may consequently underrepresent the sectors, institutions, currencies, commercial practices and multilingual interactions characteristic of African markets. Pedagogical limitations are equally important. Case-based instruction in business-language education can reproduce realistic decision-making, but its effectiveness depends on appropriate preparation, learner motivation, authenticity, assessment alignment and careful adaptation to non-native speakers (Almagro Esteban & Pérez Cañado, 2004). Where conventional curricula emphasize teacher explanation and controlled exercises, students receive insufficient opportunities to negotiate uncertainty, interpret documents, resolve customer problems or make commercially meaningful decisions through French.

Sectoral specificity is another persistent deficiency. Professional discourse differs across industries, and language education that treats "business" as a single domain can obscure these variations. Research on hospitality communication demonstrates that frontline service encounters contain recognizable procedural, interpersonal and linguistic patterns that require targeted preparation (Blue & Harun, 2003). Comparable distinctions exist across aviation, banking, retail, telecommunications, logistics and manufacturing. Business French curricula for Africa therefore require sector-sensitive pathways rather than a uniform vocabulary-driven model.

Evidence from China further shows that business-language students may perceive programmes as insufficiently responsive to vocational requirements when teaching materials and course structures do not adequately integrate business knowledge, practical skills and communicative application (Dai & Liu, 2016). Professional language competence develops at the intersection of linguistic knowledge and domain understanding. For African learners, teaching French without embedding commercial reasoning, document literacy and workplace conventions can create competence that remains academically measurable but professionally fragile.

African evidence exposes additional structural limitations. In Ghana, barriers to effective French education include weak curriculum arrangements, limited access for students in career-oriented programmes and policy discontinuities across educational levels, prompting calls for stronger alignment between French learning and socioeconomic development (Fiagbe, Fiadzawoo & Agbo, 2023). Such conditions show that curriculum reform cannot be confined to classroom methodology; institutional pathways must also make professionally relevant French accessible to learners whose careers are likely to involve regional commerce.

Career relevance ultimately affects how learners interpret the value of educational programmes. Nigerian research on career decision-making illustrates that educational and social influences contribute to how students form occupational choices and future orientations (Ezeani, Ogu

&Sabbah, 2023). Business French curricula should therefore make career pathways visible through authentic African commercial cases, employer-informed learning outcomes, internships, simulations and sector-based assessments. A curriculum demonstrating how French supports employability and commercial mobility can effectively connect linguistic study with the realities of intra-African economic participation.

3.2 Africanising Content, Cases, and Learning Outcomes

Africanising Business French curricula requires more than adding African names, maps, or isolated cultural references to materials originally designed for European commercial settings. It entails repositioning African markets, institutions, communicative practices, and professional realities as the organising context of learning. In Nigeria, French pedagogy has long been shaped by policy ambitions, geographical proximity to Francophone states, and persistent instructional constraints, reinforcing the need for approaches that connect language learning more directly to regional diplomatic and commercial realities (Wende et al., 2023). Africanisation should therefore be understood as curricular reorientation rather than cosmetic localisation. This orientation is especially important under continental integration, where graduates may move between linguistic zones and require curricular experiences mirroring the commercial environments in which French is actually mobilised for work.

This principle is consistent with arguments that Africanised curricula should reconsider whose knowledge, experiences, and social realities are treated as educationally valuable. A curriculum located on the continent should enable students to interpret knowledge through African histories and contemporary conditions while remaining capable of engaging global systems (Le Grange, 2014). For Business French, this means shifting the centre of gravity from predominantly metropolitan scenarios toward commercial situations involving Dakar, Abidjan, Cotonou, Lomé, Douala, Kigali, Lagos, Accra, and other interconnected markets. Learners should encounter African enterprises, currencies, trade corridors, regulatory institutions, consumer practices, and multilingual workplaces. Such reform must also address deeper questions of curriculum ownership and representation. South African scholarship on decolonial curriculum transformation stresses the importance of centring African subjects and recognising plural epistemic positions rather than preserving inherited Eurocentric assumptions as neutral standards (Govender & Naidoo, 2023). Applied carefully to Business French, this does not require rejecting established French linguistic conventions. Instead, it requires teaching those conventions through cases that acknowledge African agency, locally generated business knowledge, regional entrepreneurship, and the linguistic hybridity characterising commercial interaction. Case design offers a practical mechanism for achieving this orientation. Business cases can generate meaningful discussion and writing when linguistic objectives remain explicit and cases are appropriately adapted to learner proficiency (Ulrich, 2000). Africanised materials could therefore ask students to negotiate distributor agreements, respond to customer complaints, prepare quotations, evaluate market-entry options, or conduct supplier meetings within realistic intra-African settings. Authenticity should nevertheless be pedagogically constructed rather than assumed: task-based research demonstrates that learners can engage with authentic target-language activities when tasks reflect plausible uses beyond the classroom and are designed around their contexts (Kessler et al., 2021).

Commercial cases should additionally represent the operational complexity of African enterprises. Supply-chain leadership research emphasises strategic alignment among sourcing,

transportation, distribution, finance, marketing, and enterprise objectives (Akin-Oluyomi& Akhigbe, 2023a). These domains provide rich foundations for Business French scenarios because learners can practise specialized vocabulary while making decisions that resemble genuine managerial communication. Similarly, analytics-oriented supply-chain frameworks foreground forecasting, bottleneck identification, data interpretation, and responsive decision-making (Akin-Oluyomi& Akhigbe, 2023b). Such content could support French-language tasks involving interpreting dashboards, explaining delays, presenting forecasts, and recommending corrective actions. Learning outcomes must finally articulate what students can perform, not merely what vocabulary or grammar they have covered. Constructive alignment requires intended outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment to converge around demonstrable performances (Biggs, 1996). An Africanised Business French curriculum could therefore specify outcomes such as negotiating a cross-border transaction, drafting culturally appropriate correspondence, interpreting Francophone commercial documentation, delivering a market briefing, mediating multilingual customer interaction, and responding to supply-chain disruption. Assessment would then use simulations, portfolios, case presentations, role plays, and professional documents aligned with those outcomes. Through this approach, Africanisation becomes a disciplined curriculum-design process that connects linguistic proficiency with regional commercial knowledge, intercultural judgement, professional action, and the practical demands of intra-African economic participation.

4. Pedagogies for Intra-African Commercial Communication

4.1 Experiential, Digital, and Task-Based Learning

Experiential, digital and task-based learning provides a powerful pedagogical architecture for repositioning Business French as a practical African working language rather than a predominantly classroom-based academic subject. The central principle is that learners develop professionally useful competence when language is mobilised to accomplish purposeful activities resembling those encountered outside formal instruction. Within Business French, this requires a movement away from curricula dominated by grammatical exposition, vocabulary memorisation and predetermined dialogues towards tasks in which learners analyse commercial information, solve problems, interact with stakeholders and produce authentic professional outputs. Task-based language pedagogy is particularly compatible with digital technologies because technological environments can extend access to information, interaction and multimodal communication when those tools are selected according to pedagogical purpose rather than technological novelty (Lai & Li, 2011). African Business French courses can consequently organise learning around activities such as responding to procurement enquiries, evaluating Francophone suppliers, preparing quotations, resolving customer complaints and presenting market-entry recommendations.

Online task-based instruction further illustrates that purposeful communication can be sustained even where learners and interlocutors are geographically separated. Research on online foreign-language classrooms demonstrates that task-based structures can generate meaningful interaction, collaborative participation and language development, although successful implementation requires careful sequencing and instructional support (Lai, Zhao & Wang, 2011). This principle is highly relevant to intra-African language education. Universities in Anglophone countries could collaborate with institutions in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Cameroon or other Francophone environments to create cross-border tasks in which students must communicate

through French to accomplish shared commercial objectives. A simulated buyer–supplier interaction, for example, could require teams to exchange product specifications, negotiate delivery schedules, clarify contractual terms and prepare written follow-up communication.

The African higher-education environment also demonstrates the importance of designing task-based programmes around the characteristics and constraints of learners. Evidence from Ghanaian higher education suggests that mature learners can respond positively to task-based language teaching and perceive improvements in participation and linguistic capability, while challenges involving time, participation and classroom circumstances remain important considerations (Adjei-Mensah, 2024). Business French curriculum reform must therefore reconcile pedagogical ambition with realistic institutional conditions, including large classes, differing proficiency levels, limited contact hours and uneven access to technological resources. Tasks should progress from highly scaffolded activities towards more independent professional performances, with clear linguistic preparation, defined roles and assessment criteria that reward successful communication as well as accuracy.

Digital environments can substantially enhance this progression because Business French increasingly needs to prepare students for commercial work that itself takes place through digital channels. Emails, videoconferencing, instant messaging, collaborative documents, customer-management platforms and digital presentations now structure many professional relationships. Synchronous computer-mediated communication is particularly valuable because research indicates that digitally mediated interaction can support second-language development while enabling learners to negotiate meaning and receive interactional feedback in real time (Ziegler, 2016). Business French learners might therefore participate in online sales meetings, customer-service encounters, supplier negotiations or management briefings that reproduce the communicative pressures of contemporary distributed enterprises. Recording such activities would additionally permit reflective review of pronunciation, register, turn-taking, persuasive strategies and errors affecting intelligibility.

Virtual exchange extends digital pedagogy beyond simulation by creating opportunities for sustained interaction with geographically and culturally distant partners. Its evolution from telecollaboration towards structured virtual exchange has established a framework through which international and intercultural learning can occur without requiring physical mobility (O'Dowd, 2018). This model is especially suitable for Africa, where financial, logistical and visa constraints can restrict student mobility despite the continent's increasing economic integration. Intra-African virtual partnerships could connect Francophone and non-Francophone learners for semester-long commercial projects. Students might jointly investigate consumer behaviour, compare distribution systems, design regional advertising strategies or develop business proposals using French as an operational language. This would allow students to experience language choice, misunderstanding, clarification and intercultural adjustment under circumstances that approximate cross-border professional collaboration.

African evidence provides a practical basis for such an approach. Virtual exchange involving university students in Morocco has demonstrated potential for strengthening linguistic, cultural and digital capabilities through structured international interaction (Machwate et al., 2021). Applied to Business French, these environments can expose learners to contemporary Francophone African communication rather than relying exclusively on textbook representations developed outside the continent. Authentic digital materials could include company websites, commercial advertisements, trade documentation, professional correspondence and market

information originating from African contexts. Learners could analyse these materials before interacting with peers or practitioners, thereby integrating receptive language development with productive commercial performance. Such exposure is particularly important because intra-African commercial French is embedded within multilingual environments where speakers frequently bring diverse linguistic repertoires to professional encounters.

Meaningful digital transformation, however, requires more than the availability of technological platforms. Organisational research emphasises that successful technology adoption depends strongly on employee readiness, including skills, adaptability, acceptance and the development of capabilities required to engage constructively with technological change (Akhigbe, Falemi& Akin-Oluyomi, 2024). This insight is relevant to Business French curriculum reform because both lecturers and students must be prepared to use technology effectively. Introducing virtual simulations, digital collaboration or online exchanges without developing confidence and competence can produce superficial participation rather than pedagogical transformation. Institutions should therefore assess digital readiness, provide targeted training, support peer learning and select platforms appropriate to available infrastructure. Technology implementation should be accompanied by continuing capability development rather than treated as a one-time acquisition of software or equipment.

Teacher capability constitutes an especially important part of this readiness. Online language instruction requires pedagogical competencies that extend beyond basic technical literacy. Effective tutors need progressively developed abilities in platform use, online facilitation, community building, language pedagogy and creative exploitation of digital environments (Hampel & Stickler, 2005). Business French lecturers therefore require professional development in designing authentic digital tasks, moderating multilingual collaboration, providing online feedback and assessing digitally produced professional outputs. They may also need closer relationships with businesses and professional organisations so that simulated activities remain aligned with contemporary workplace practice. A lecturer who understands both language pedagogy and the communication patterns of banking, logistics, tourism, retail or telecommunications is better positioned to design credible task-based experiences.

Experiential digital learning can additionally widen participation among students who have historically had limited access to international exposure. Research involving rural South African university students participating in voluntary international virtual exchanges found that learners associated these experiences with relationship building, knowledge development and personal or professional growth (Breshears & du Plessis, 2024). This has important implications for African Business French education because regional competence should not be available only to students able to finance travel or study abroad. Properly designed virtual collaboration can provide geographically disadvantaged students with sustained contact across borders, helping to democratise internationalisation while developing the collaborative capabilities required in distributed workplaces. Such demanding pedagogies must nevertheless remain attentive to learner resilience. Experiential tasks involve uncertainty, public performance, negotiation and repeated exposure to error, all of which can challenge students accustomed to tightly controlled classroom exercises. Nigerian evidence among undergraduates in Ibadan demonstrates relationships between academic buoyancy and factors such as self-efficacy, engagement and connectedness, drawing attention to the resource's students need to manage routine educational challenges successfully (Yusuf, Sabbah&Asiyanbi, 2023). Business French programmes should consequently use formative feedback, rehearsal, peer support and progressive task complexity.

Students might initially complete structured information exchanges before advancing towards spontaneous negotiations, crisis-management exercises or multilingual commercial projects. Errors should be treated as diagnostically useful within iterative cycles of performance, feedback and improved performance.

5. Strategic Priorities and Future Directions

5.1 Institutional Partnerships and Curriculum Implementation

Institutional partnerships are fundamental to implementing an Africa-centred Business French curriculum because commercially relevant language competence cannot be developed through university teaching in isolation from the environments in which graduates will use French. Effective implementation requires structured relationships among language departments, business schools, employers, chambers of commerce, professional associations and Francophone partner institutions. International experience with business Languages for Specific Purposes shows that sustainable programmes benefit from institutional structures and external networks connecting language study with international business education and professional objectives (Fryer, 2012). For African universities, partnership design should begin with shared responsibility for curriculum relevance. Nigerian evidence on polytechnic–industry collaboration indicates that employers should contribute to curriculum development and review, participate in teaching where specialist expertise is required, and provide workplace exposure for students and lecturers (Otache, 2022). Applied to Business French, banks, logistics firms, exporters, tourism operators, telecommunications companies and cross-border traders could identify recurrent communicative tasks and professional genres. Curriculum committees could translate these requirements into learning outcomes, materials and assessments responsive to intra-African commerce. Partnerships should also extend beyond bilateral university–employer arrangements. South African work-integrated learning scholarship proposes a multi-stakeholder model in which students, educational institutions, business and government share responsibility for connecting academic learning with workplace experience (Wait & Govender, 2016). This approach suits Business French because language use in intra-African trade is shaped by firms, customs agencies, trade ministries and regional institutions. Implementation could therefore include coordinated internships, practitioner-led simulations, trade-documentation workshops and cross-border projects supported by several stakeholders.

Institutional collaboration must nevertheless be designed deliberately. Evidence from Australia identifies communication, shared motivation, social capital, strategy, policy and relationship management among factors influencing successful university–industry collaboration (Awasthy et al., 2020). Business French partnerships consequently require clear agreements concerning responsibilities, student supervision, practitioner participation, scheduling and evaluation. Universities should establish advisory boards with Francophone-market expertise and periodically determine whether external engagement is improving professional language learning rather than functioning as a ceremonial affiliation.

Curriculum reform also depends on internal academic ownership. Australian evidence on implementing employability strategy shows that curricular transformation becomes more viable when institutional priorities are translated into collegial dialogue, local champions and context-sensitive programme changes (Dean et al., 2024). Business French reform should therefore involve language lecturers, curriculum specialists, international offices and business faculty in jointly redesigning modules and mapping employability outcomes. Faculty development and

workload recognition are especially important where new activities require employer engagement or cross-border coordination.

University–business cooperation can encompass curriculum development, mobility, lifelong learning and research, although different modes require different organisational conditions (Pavlin, 2016). African Business French programmes could use practitioner residencies, industry-sponsored projects, professional short courses, visiting lecturers and exchanges with Francophone institutions. Such diversification reduces dependence on one partnership model and permits institutions with different resources to adopt feasible combinations while serving students, professionals and enterprises seeking regional expansion.

Community and workplace engagement can further strengthen implementation by creating reciprocal partnerships. Languages for Specific Purposes research demonstrates that community service-learning can connect course content with real-world applications through structured reflection while requiring institutional support across academic boundaries (Lear, 2012). Students might support enterprises preparing French-language promotional materials, conduct supervised research with Francophone customers, or assist entrepreneurship centres serving cross-border traders. These activities provide authentic communicative practice while producing tangible value for participating organisations. Implementation should also be tied to measurable employability outcomes. Nigerian evidence indicates that work-integrated learning can positively influence graduate employability and that digital literacy can mediate this relationship (Adegbite, 2024). Business French partners could jointly define indicators such as conducting professional meetings, preparing commercial correspondence, interpreting trade documents and collaborating digitally with Francophone counterparts. Internship feedback, employer evaluations and performance assessments could then guide module revision and identify competencies requiring additional attention. Finally, curriculum partnerships require governance connecting capability development with institutional strategy. Organisational frameworks integrating human-resource strategy and operational analytics demonstrate the value of aligning workforce capabilities, performance information and adaptive decision-making rather than managing them as isolated functions (Falemi, Akhigbe & Akin-Oluyomi, 2024). Universities can similarly monitor enrolment, proficiency progression, placements, employer feedback and partnership performance. Evidence-informed governance would allow Business French curricula to evolve alongside changing trade corridors, technologies and labour-market requirements, making institutional collaboration an enduring mechanism for commercially responsive curriculum implementation across Africa and regional mobility.

5.2 Research Priorities for African Business French

Research on African Business French should move from broad assertions about French's value towards an empirical account of where, how and for what commercial purposes the language is used. A first priority is systematic mapping of language demand across trade corridors, sectors and occupations. Existing Languages for Specific Purposes scholarship stresses that future inquiry must engage with changing professional practices, institutional settings and interdisciplinary methods rather than treating specialised language as a stable body of terminology (De Rycker, Buyse & Vangehuchten, 2011). African research therefore needs comparable datasets on French use in banking, logistics, tourism, telecommunications, retail, manufacturing and professional services across Francophone and Anglophone markets.

Needs analysis should form this agenda's empirical foundation. Research on French for Specific Purposes during professional placements demonstrates the value of learner evidence with workplace observations and employer perspectives to identify formal and informal communication situations, intercultural difficulties and gaps in functional competence (Delalande, 2021). Similar studies across African enterprises should examine authentic tasks such as negotiation, customer service, procurement, documentation, virtual meetings and regulatory communication. Longitudinal designs should test whether curriculum reforms transfer into workplace performance. A second priority concerns multilingualism. French should not be researched as though African commerce occurs through isolated monolingual channels. South African work on French within a multilingual ecology demonstrates the importance of plurilingual perspectives that recognise learners' existing linguistic resources and the social contexts in which additional languages acquire value (Ferreira-Meyers & Horne, 2017). Future studies should investigate code-switching, mediation, translation practices and language choice in cross-border business, while comparing the communicative functions of French with English, Arabic, Portuguese and African lingua francas. Research must also strengthen the evidence linking course design to occupational specificity. A needs-analysis study of French for Indonesian police officers identified speaking, listening, vocabulary and intercultural communication as profession-dependent priorities, illustrating how target roles can generate distinctive linguistic profiles (Al Farisi, 2019). African Business French scholarship should develop comparable occupational profiles and validated competency frameworks rather than assuming that one generic business syllabus can serve every sector.

Materials research is equally necessary. Work on French coursebook development for hospitality students shows how systematic needs analysis can inform objectives, content, learning activities and specialist materials (Arsiyana & Amalia, 2021). African studies should evaluate locally produced cases, simulations, corpora and digital resources against imported textbooks, measuring development, authenticity, engagement and employer relevance.

Programme-level comparative and longitudinal evidence is required. International surveys of Languages for Specific Purposes programmes demonstrate the value of tracking institutional provision, enrolment, partnerships, programme formats and reasons for expansion or discontinuation (Long & Uscinski, 2012). Comparable African mapping could reveal where Business French is offered, which institutions collaborate with industry, and which implementation models produce sustainable outcomes.

The broader research agenda should also examine how specialised-language education evolves under globalisation, interdisciplinarity and changing professional expectations. Scholarship on the continuing evolution of LSP identifies opportunities for deeper integration between language, culture, disciplinary content and professional education (Grosse & Voght, 2012). African researchers should accordingly investigate digital commerce, artificial intelligence-assisted communication, virtual exchange, assessment validity and employer-recognised credentials without allowing technological innovation to eclipse sociolinguistic realities.

Finally, research should become more data-driven and geographically comparative. Multi-site performance frameworks illustrate the analytical value of standardised indicators, continuous monitoring and cross-location comparison for identifying variation and directing improvement (Akin-Oluyomi & Akhigbe, 2023). Adapted cautiously to curriculum research, this logic supports common indicators for proficiency progression, task performance, employability, employer satisfaction and cross-border mobility. Multi-country studies could then compare outcomes while

preserving local linguistic ecologies, creating an evidence base capable of guiding curriculum investment and establishing African Business French as a coherent field of applied research.

Conclusion

This review has demonstrated that French should be understood not merely as a legacy language of diplomacy or formal education in Africa, but as a functional working language whose relevance is increasingly shaped by intra-African trade, professional mobility, multilingual workplaces and cross-border commercial interaction. The study met its objectives by examining the commercial position of French, identifying workplace and intercultural communication demands, evaluating weaknesses in conventional Business French curricula, and proposing pedagogical and institutional directions better aligned with African economic realities.

The analysis shows that current curricula are often constrained by generic language content, limited workplace needs analysis, insufficient exposure to African commercial contexts, and weak integration of authentic professional tasks. In contrast, an Africa-centred approach requires sector-specific language, realistic commercial cases, intercultural competence, digital collaboration and task-based learning that reflects how French is used in logistics, banking, tourism, retail, telecommunications, procurement and regional trade. Experiential and virtual learning further expand access to authentic interaction, while institutional partnerships with employers, professional associations and Francophone universities strengthen curriculum relevance and employability. The review also establishes that curriculum reform must be supported by systematic implementation and evidence-based evaluation. Universities should therefore develop employer-informed learning outcomes, embed work-integrated and digitally mediated activities, strengthen lecturer capacity and create sustained partnerships across linguistic regions. Assessment should prioritise demonstrable professional performance rather than decontextualised grammatical knowledge alone. Future research should map language demand across African trade corridors, compare sectoral communication needs, evaluate multilingual practices and measure the employment outcomes of redesigned programmes. Multi-country and longitudinal studies are especially necessary to determine which pedagogical models produce durable professional competence. Overall, Business French education in Africa should evolve towards a commercially responsive, contextually grounded and institutionally supported model capable of preparing graduates to participate confidently and effectively in an increasingly integrated continental economy and support inclusive regional economic cooperation sustainably.

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