



Outstanding performers of the DELF examinations pose with their prizes during the Njogera Français awarding ceremony at Ecole International School Kampala. PHOTO/DAPHINE NAKABIRI

Experts seek ways to expand French learning in schools

Experts say more training, mentorship and adequate teaching resources will reduce the number of dropouts among French learners and teachers will be equipped to guide students through examinations.

BY DAPHINE NAKABIRI

Unlike in many secondary schools, where foreign languages are taught only in Senior One and Two before most learners drop them to focus on compulsory subjects, more than 200 students at Nabisunsu Girls' Secondary School are supported to continue with French as an optional subject each year.

In the new competency-based curriculum, there is growing emphasis for learners to pursue skill-based pathways that enhance both their academic development and future career opportunities.

As such, choosing foreign languages in a highly competitive job market not only helps learners build global communication skills, but also positions them to access wider opportunities in international education, employment and cross-cultural engagement.

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Alliance Française Kampala, through the Njogera Français Initiative in collaboration with the Embassy of France in Uganda, introduced a programme that sparks learners' interest in the French language among both students and teachers while providing access to internationally recognised DELF certifications.

Last year, through continued outreach and engagement with schools, the programme reached more than 37 schools across different regions of Uganda, enabling 888 learners to sit for internationally recognised DELF examinations, with 88 percent of primary-level pupils and 95 percent of secondary-level students passing.

Speaking during the Njogera Français awarding ceremony at the International French School of Kampala last week, Karim Cwinya'ay, the project coordinator of the initiative, explained that learners who sit examinations are assessed on four key language competencies which include listening, reading, writing and speaking.

He explained that while the written components test comprehension and expression, the speaking section requires learners to engage in a one-on-one oral examination with an assessor, which many initially find challenging.

However, Mr Cwinya'ay said with consistent guidance from their teachers, many learners gradually build confidence and can perform well in the assessments thus certifications.

"The results we are celebrating today reflect the efforts of learners and the dedication of teachers, who prepare them for the examinations," he said.

During the event, 23 outstanding students from different schools were awarded certificates and learning ma-

terials, including tablets, dictionaries and other academic resources aimed at motivating them to continue learning the language. Similarly, participating schools and teachers were also presented with laptops to support the teaching and learning of French.

Beyond providing access to examinations, the Njogera Français Initiative also strengthens the teaching of French in schools through teacher training programmes and provides digital learning resources and regular school outreach activities.

Since its launch in 2022, the programme has reached more than 60 schools and impacted over 3,400 learners, while more than 80 teachers have received training in French teaching methodology and DELF examination

preparation.

Certification expansion barriers

Despite the achievements of the Njogera Français Initiative, educators observe that there are still barriers that continue to limit the expansion of French certification in schools.

According to Samuel Wandera, a representative of universities on the Association of Teachers of French in Uganda, the association has registered about 430 teachers of French serving an estimated 60,000 learners studying the language at different levels across the country. Yet, while the interest in the French language exists among learners, many students drop the subject early in their academic journey.

He explained, "Very few continue with the language to Senior Three and Four and the numbers become even smaller at advanced level because the education system emphasises three principal subjects, which often pushes learners towards sciences."

Similarly, while the Diploma course usually require a fee, many learners, especially those in rural areas cannot afford to participate, causing them to miss out on the opportunity to earn certification.

He added that although French has been taught in Uganda for many years with support from partners, opportunities to pursue the language at advanced levels remain limited. That is because only Makerere, Kyambogo and Kabale offer advanced French programmes, while many other institutions of higher learning teach beginner courses mainly for tourism, hospitality and secretarial studies.

This trend highlights the critical role teachers ought to play in sustaining interest in foreign languages. Unlike subjects that rely heavily on theory, language learning requires consistent practice hence teachers are expected to take on a stronger mentorship role.

This includes engaging learners through conversation, reading exercises, cultural exposure, and examination preparation for international certifications such as DELF.

Teachers are also expected to guide students on career opportunities, identify scholarship possibilities, and provide continuous support to help learners build confidence and maintain interest in the language.

These responsibilities demand dedication, yet teacher commitment remains low in many schools due to limited support for professional development, inadequate resources, and a lack of incentives to sustain their engagement.

Firming teacher commitment

To address these challenges, Loïc Boivin, Director of Alliance Française Kampala, says the Njogera Français Initiative is prioritising measures not only to increase learner participation in certification, but also to strengthen teacher commitment and support across participating schools.

He emphasised that teachers are central to the programme's success, and their engagement directly affects learners' performance and interest in French.

"Providing training, mentorship, and adequate teaching resources is key to ensuring that teachers are motivated and equipped to guide students through the DELF examinations," Mr Boivin said.

The initiative is providing French teachers with access to professional development workshops, networks for sharing best practices, and opportunities to enhance their skills through international training programmes.

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Schools are also supported with digital tools and teaching resources to make language instruction more effective and engaging.

Further still, essential services are being distributed to ensure that teachers have the resources needed to work under good conditions, while the initiative continues to organise workshops and professional networks to build a strong community of French teachers.

"Some teachers will even have the opportunity to travel to France to acquire advanced professional skills, further enhancing the quality of instruction," Mr Boivin noted.

For learners, the programme aims to make DELF certification more accessible, with efforts including financial support for talented students, particularly those from underprivileged areas, as well as creating strategies to reduce costs, such as offering up to a 40 percent discount for learners in upcountry schools to bridge the rural-urban divide. The initiative is also seeking sponsors to provide scholarship opportunities for high-performing students who lack financial means.

Looking ahead, Njogera Français plans to open dedicated examination centres in the northern, eastern, and western regions of Uganda, allowing learners to take the DELF exams closer to home without having to travel to Kampala.

Ms Evelyn Angeyo, the head of human resource CFAO motors, thus encourages upcountry schools and French clubs to participate in the initiative as this will help to bridge the rural-urban divide in access to French language learning and certification.

While French is widely spoken in East Africa and countries such as Belgium, it serves as a bridge connecting people across cultures and promoting harmonious interactions. Proficiency in the language is also believed to boost trade with neighbouring countries.

In this context, Mr Wandera urged the government to reconsider limiting students to three principal subjects at A-level and restricting language study, and to support qualified French teachers by providing them with positions that match their expertise.

Schools which participated in the fourth edition of Njogera Français were Green Hill Academy, Hillside Primary School Naalya, Aga Khan Primary School, and Ambrosoli International Schools.

At secondary level, Nabisunsu Girls' Secondary School, Gayaza High School, Ndejje Secondary School, Taibah International Schools, Seven Hills School, Green Hill Academy Secondary, and Seeta High School Mukono.

Others included Seeta High School, Mount St Mary's Namugunga, St Peter's Girls' Secondary School Nsambya, Uganda Martyrs' Secondary School Namugongo and Bishop Cyprian Kihangire School.