

# Teaching an African Language and Culture in a Changing European Environment: Achievements, Challenges and Perspectives

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## 1. Introduction: Changing Europe, INALCO's uniqueness and its Yorùbá program

Europe, the Old continent, is changing, and with it, many aspects of its socio-political and educational institutions, particularly the university system. The latter is presently undergoing an overhaul that will, in the long run, serve to harmonize the European Union's university system. No European public university will be left out of what is now called the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) all over the continent, or simply referred to as *Licence-Master-Doctorat* (LMD) in France. In the latter, from the renowned Sorbonne University to the less known provincial universities, LMD is not only in vogue but will henceforth become mandatory. The Paris-based *Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales* (INALCO), also fondly called *Langues'O*, the university where over 90 "rare" or less-commonly taught languages and cultures are being offered, is an institution whose historical role as one of Europe's foremost language-learning institutions is a good indicator of the impact of a changing European environment on the teaching and learning of 'rare' languages, in the last two decades.

One of the languages whose development at INALCO has coincided with recent changes in Europe is Yorùbá, a language of West Africa. Introduced shortly before the fall of the Berlin wall in the 1980s, and offered on a continuous basis for the last twenty years, INALCO's Yorùbá program is housed in the institution's Africa Department along with a dozen other African languages<sup>1</sup>. Although, unlike its British counterpart (London's School of Oriental and African Studies), INALCO (established in its present form shortly after the French Revolution) does not carry the term "Africa" in its title, this geographical area is an integral part of this unique French university's major areas of interest.

Interest in Africa at INALCO has been shown to date back to the end of the nineteenth century, by the end of which half of the African languages presently being taught at INALCO, were already on offer in the institution (Alao, 1999). The following mission statement (INALCO, 2005) recently gleaned from the Institution's website emphasizes this point:

*The National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations ...has, as its vocation, the teaching of the languages of Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, Oceania, Africa, the Aborigine populations of America, as well as the geography, history, institutions, political, economic and social life of the countries concerned.*<sup>2</sup>

No matter their geographical origin therefore, or the size of the population that speaks them, when compared with their position in similar institutions elsewhere (if they exist at all), languages taught

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<sup>1</sup> Amharic, Bambara, Berber, Comorien, Hausa, Malagasy, Pulaar, Soninké, Swahili, Tigrigna, Wolof, Yoruba and Zulu are the languages taught in the Africa Department. Except for Zulu (which is relatively new), Soninké, and the language of the Comoros, all the languages have programs running into advanced degrees.

<sup>2</sup>« Qui sommes-nous ? » in [http://www.inalco.fr/ina\\_gabarit\\_espace.php3?id\\_rubrique=3](http://www.inalco.fr/ina_gabarit_espace.php3?id_rubrique=3) ("L'Institut National des Langues et Civilisation Orientales (INALCO)... a pour vocation d'enseigner les langues de l'Europe Centrale et Orientale, de l'Asie, de l'Océanie de l'Afrique et des populations aborigènes de l'Amérique, ainsi que la géographie, l'histoire, des institutions, la vie politique, économique et sociale des pays concernés (décret statutaire 90-414 du 14 mai 1990).

and, or learned at INALCO have enjoyed an incomparable status. A uniqueness that has been expressed by one of the Institute's recent chancellors (INALCO, 2004) in the following terms:

*From its beginnings, Langues' O found herself endowed with a mission that singled her out among other higher institutions: her objective was not to be satisfied with purely academic or a university approach to other languages, other peoples, other cultures. Her primary purpose was, in the basic sense of the word, to know others, all our other interlocutors. Langues'O is an active witness of the richness and the diversity of the peoples of the world...By recognizing in each of these languages and cultures the same value, INALCO shows respect to all who speak and live them.*<sup>3</sup>

This "equal status" philosophy has been the guiding principle behind the number or choice of the languages taught at INALCO. An indication that, beyond all the geo-strategic considerations which usually underlie the choice of language programs in many Western countries, other additional criteria may contribute to the choice of recent languages taught at INALCO. While at a point in history it may have been strategically expedient for France to seek an in-road into one ethnic group or another, it is a generally held view that the idea of wanting to know the 'Other' has been the expressed driving force behind the over ninety less commonly taught languages being offered at INALCO.

Unlike many similar institutions, therefore, the size of student in-take, for example, is not the main determining factor in deciding whether a program will run or not at INALCO, and many full-fledged programs exist with a tenured faculty without necessarily always having a class with big numbers. African language programs (including Yorùbá) and some Asian language programs fall into this category. Our suggestion elsewhere (Alao, 1999) that, but for such uniqueness, a Yorùbá program, would not, under normal circumstances appear in the curriculum of a French university, must therefore be understood and appreciated in the light of the above-mentioned philosophy.

After twenty years of existence at INALCO, and at a time when the Yorùbá language is assuming a greater role at home in Africa and abroad, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the achievements, challenges and perspectives of an African language program (in this case the Yorùbá program) in a changing European environment. In order to facilitate such an assessment, we have chosen, in the first instance, to limit our considerations to three aspects: the Learner, the Teacher, the Methods and the Manuals that have been in use. Secondly, we shall examine what have been the positive points of the program and challenges that have faced and, or are facing INALCO's Yorùbá program in its two decades of existence. The third part of this paper will analyze the impact of transformations in Europe on a 'rare' or less commonly taught language such as Yorùbá. We conclude by suggesting possible perspectives and strategies for moving the Yorùbá program, or any other African language program for that matter, forward, in tomorrow's Europe.

## **2. The learner of Yorùbá at INALCO**

Four broad groups of types of learners have been identified. They are classified below on the basis of their motivation for enrolling to learn Yoruba at INALCO.

### *2.1. The Heritage Learner or Search for Identity*

The Heritage Language Learner (HLL), as commonly defined (Cho et al. 1997, Cho 2000, Carreira 2004), is among the traditional learners of Yorùbá at INALCO. The different types of HLLs range from individuals who are members of the Yorùbá community with linguistic roots in Yorùbá Heritage to learners who study Yorùbá in an effort to connect with their family or ethnic background, or even learners born in or out of France but raised in France and who may have little or no apparent skills in Yorùbá. Their origin is often generally traced to Nigeria, Benin or Togo. Some of the visible characteristics of the presence of heritage learners in the Yorùbá class have included the presence of learners bearing Yorùbá names or surnames, familiarity of some with Yorùbá culture and worldview and often, a knowledge of certain vocabulary, thus placing such learners in a position to help fellow classmates in certain group activities. Some Heritage learners are also at ease with, and can be helpful

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<sup>3</sup> "L'Inalco en bref..." in INALCO 2004/2005, Division de la scolarité et de la vie étudiante, Paris: Inalco, 2004, p.2

with tonal production, which have proved to be difficult for many learners of Yorùbá. This reservoir is tapped to the advantage of all learners.

Whether at INALCO or elsewhere, it is known that Heritage learners are not a homogenous cluster of learners but often a collection of different types of learners who share the characteristic of having identity and linguistic needs related to their family background (Carreira, 2004). It is for this reason that these needs are scrutinized and taken into consideration where relevant, while bearing in mind that Heritage language learning is not the same experience as First-language learning.

A second group of learners under this category is not entirely a Heritage learner group in the strict sense, as defined above but shares characteristics with it. These learners study Yorùbá, not on the basis of whether their language of study bears a strict genetic relation to their particular ancestry but simply on the basis of personal judgment (Carreira, 2004). They are often students of African or African Diaspora descent (Benin, Togo, Congo, Brazil etc.) who come to study Yorùbá because their native or representative African language is not offered at INALCO. Their hope is to fill an identity gap of some sort. Smitherman (1991) uses this same phenomenon to explain the rush by African American youths to identify with Swahili and other African languages in the 1970s and 1980s, in a bid to retrace their roots to Africa. Van Deusen Scholl (2003) has called this group the “learner with a heritage motivation” and Carreira (2004), the “next big thing” group. The typical INALCO example of a learner of Yorùbá, born in Madagascar to white French *coopérant* parents, raised in former Zaire and now living in Paris, suggests that this phenomenon may not be limited to only persons of genetic African descent.

## 2.2. *Double Cursus: Learning and researching Yorùbá*

These are generally learners who, being registered into another of Paris University’s undergraduate or graduate programs, benefit from what we call the “double enrolment or admission policy.” They study a language and culture at INALCO while being enrolled to study a different course in another Paris university. The learners in this category usually are involved in a program that leads them into one form of research or professional diploma or another. For this category of learners who form the majority of Yorùbá learners at INALCO, when the time for fieldwork comes, the choice of a Yorùbá speaking environment (mainly Nigeria, Benin Republic or Togo) becomes almost natural. History, Anthropology, Art, Sociology, Mass communication, Political Science and Musicology are some of the commonest subject areas from where this category of learners comes into the Yorùbá class. The implication of such a wide range of subject areas is the diversity of the needs of learners as far as vocabulary and areas of interest for Yorùbá language and especially culture, are concerned.

## 2.3 *Music-loving learners of Yorùbá*

This group of learners is attracted into the Yorùbá class by the popularity of Yorùbá music, be it traditional, popular or contemporary. But this category needs to be differentiated from the double-registration learners mentioned above who may also love Yorùbá music but are generally students of ethnomusicology. Musical compositions of such ‘ambassadors’ of Yorùbá musical culture as Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Ebenezer Obey, Sunny Ade, Haruna Isola and Hubert Ogunde, are the main magnetic forces that pull such learners into the Yorùbá class. They end up not only learning the language but also the culture that these musicians seek to propagate. While it is true that the language class is not a music class, the Yorùbá program has become attentive to such demands to the point that every class has had one genre or another of music infused into it, not only to liven the language and culture classes or to teach Yorùbá language, but also in order to meet the specific needs of these music-loving learners.

## 2.4. *Potential Learners for the Foreign Service*

Since the late 1990s, the French Foreign Affairs Ministry has listed Yorùbá as one of the “oriental” languages in which candidates for diplomatic positions as Embassy Secretaries or Cultural and Linguistic Advisors can choose to take written and oral examinations, apart from the professional diplomacy examinations in their specific field. Candidates are required to have a good grasp of the

language and culture of the country or region where they could be posted. Yorùbá is one of the available options for positions in Nigeria or in the West African region. What this phenomenon has led to has been the attraction into the Yorùbá class, of candidates preparing such Foreign Service examinations. Although not many INALCO Yorùbá learners belong to this category, they represent a recent addition to the list of learners of Yorùbá and constitute a potentially highly motivated group of learners.

### 3. Teaching Yorùbá at INALCO

One factor that has worked in favor of the Yorùbá program has been the relative stability of the pedagogical team. For instance, the French Linguist who initiated the program in 1985 was still coordinating it twenty years later. Apart from her highly recognized and appreciated pedagogical qualities and devotion to research, her pleasant personality and easy contact with learners and close collaboration with teaching or graduate assistants, also helped to promote and valorize the program. However, for the program's first decade, budgetary constraints and inadequate facilities were not lacking and it was not uncommon to have native-speaker graduate students or teaching assistants who were recruited to handle the practical courses, having difficulties with the language laboratory and practical classes, and how to get learners to really practice the language. Besides, while the tenured faculty's position assured certain continuity for the program, the non-tenured Graduate or Teaching Assistant's status required a renewal of immigration papers every year. The native speaker Assistants thus found themselves under pressure, given that it implied that the existence, continuity and vitality of the program depended, to some extent, on his own academic success. Four changed hands between 1989 and 1995. This was particularly visible during the program's first decade. The recruitment of a second tenured faculty who had the added advantage of being a native speaker provided a more suitable solution to this problem, as from 1996 and added stability and vigor to the program.

### 4. Manuals and Methods: Following Global Trends

INALCO's Yorùbá program has followed global trends as far as methodological approaches to language teaching, language learning and material development are concerned. During its early years, the practical language courses were built around such early manuals for non-native speakers as *Yorùbá Basic Course* (YBC), *Teach Yourself Yorùbá* (TYY) and *Yorùbá Dùn un So* (YDS). The first, published by the US State Department's Foreign Service Institute in 1963, adopts the audio-lingual approach and its "Army method." Its use was not encouraged because of the incalculable drills and grammar-oriented exercises, which restrained the learner's progression. However, its accompanying audiotapes were tools used in the language laboratory where INALCO's first generation of Yorùbá learners spent endless hours, at least during the first year, repeating pre-recorded dialogues. Unfortunately, when these learners found themselves in real life situations, they were not comfortable with speaking Yorùbá.

E. C Rowland's *TYY* (1969) did not live up to its name in the eyes of INALCO's learners of Yorùbá because of its emphasis on Grammar, and especially Translation exercises. This means that instead of being a 'teach yourself' manual for beginners, it is a manual more adapted for the use of advanced English-speaking learners of Yoruba interested in exercising themselves in Yoruba-English translation. For obvious reasons therefore, the Yorùbá-English-Yorùbá translation exercises were not appropriate for the French-speaking environment in Paris. Besides, the manual hardly prepares the learner to communicate in Yorùbá.

The most recently published manual for non-native speakers at the Yorùbá program's inception in 1985 was *YDS* (1984). The document had been prepared and tried in Nigeria on volunteer non-native speakers. The latter reason, and the proposal of different real-life dialogues and communicative possibilities as well as well-graded exercises are some of the immediate advantages of *YDS*. It is not surprising that it became a more widely accepted manual by learners and teachers involved in the INALCO program. *YDS* was the manual in use until 2000 when *Yorùbá Wuyi* (YW), a revision of *YDS*, was published. The new manual's major contribution can be summarized in the authors' (Barber and Oyetade, 2000) words:

*[...] in this edition, we [...] include short explanations about culture (àṣà) of the Yorùbá whenever such words and expressions that need be understood with reference to beliefs and customs of the people are used. The significance of this is to make the student conscious of the interrelationship between the language and the culture of the Yorùbá.*

Indeed, learners appreciate the idea of explanations on culture, but for French-speaking environment like the one at INALCO, the fact that these cultural notes are all written in English still makes it frustrating for many.

## 5. American Input into the Teaching of Yorùbá in Europe

The 1990s represent a period when professional associations connected with teaching of less commonly taught languages in America were advocating for the integration of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) methods into the curricula, and the adaptation of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (NSFL Project 1996) into language programs. Hitherto, these approaches had been limited to the learning and teaching of the more commonly taught languages such as French, Spanish, Italian and German. Groups such as the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL), the African Languages Teachers Association (ALTA) and the National African Language Resource Center (NALRC) at Madison, Wisconsin spearheaded the fight for change, especially in the approach to the learning and teaching of African languages.

At INALCO, the recruitment during this same period of a second tenured faculty whose area of interest included SLA and Pedagogy facilitated a close contact and collaboration (participation in conferences, training workshops and summer institutes) with the above-mentioned US organizations. One of the immediate results was not only the integration of teaching approaches learned at the various training workshops and training institutes but also the adoption of such contemporary pedagogical materials as Antonia Schleicher's JE KA series.<sup>4</sup> These are among the first manuals to integrate the communicative functional-notional approach into the teaching and learning of Yorùbá. From then on, the Yorùbá learner was not only exposed to authentic material (including cultural ones) but also to the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking which were practiced, with the accompanying CD-Roms. The latter help the learner to eliminate or reduce the absence of learner autonomy or the lack of progression. It is worth noting that in a French-speaking environment like that of INALCO, the adoption of the JE KA series from 1996 helped learners overcome or at least reduce the hitherto predominantly Anglophone context that pervaded Yorùbá manuals.

Another American influence (this time indirect) on the Yorùbá program at INALCO was the integration into the class from 2002, of a US-based website: [www.abeokuta.org](http://www.abeokuta.org). While not being the only available cultural site, and although it is not a pedagogical site in the strict sense of the word, it does perform this function in the INALCO Yorùbá class as it does in many US Yorùbá classes. Popularly known as "Radio Abeokuta", the site presents many items pertaining to contemporary Yorùbá culture: different genre of music, audio and video news and press reviews, talk shops, religious broadcasts, folklore, drama, films, etc. These all serve as a reservoir of authentic materials used in different class situations. Some of the commonest activities include transcriptions, translation and interpretation, listening and written comprehension, and reading. The exposure to materials recorded involving native speakers other than speakers learners are familiar with, is particularly rich and challenging for learners in a location such as Paris, which unlike major British cities, does not have a large Yorùbá community to create a 'near-natural Yorùbá environment' for learners. The feedback received from many INALCO Yorùbá learners is that they have found the Radio Abeokuta experience helpful.

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<sup>4</sup> Professor Schleicher, author of *Je ka so Yoruba*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993 and its accompanying Cd-rom, *Je ka ka Yoruba*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998 and its accompanying Cd-rom, and *Je ka gbo Yoruba* (cd-rom), is also past president of African Languages Teachers Association (ALTA), and the National Council Of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL), and presently Director of the National African Languages Resource Center (NALRC). She is not only an embodiment of the interconnection between these organizations; her materials also reflect the aspirations she has championed within these organizations.

## 6. Achievements and challenges of the Yorùbá Program at INALCO

After twenty years of existence, and in light of all that has been said above on the INALCO Yorùbá program, its learners, teachers and the manuals and methods used, the following can be considered a summary of the program's achievements:

- i) The very continued existence of the program since its inception in 1985 to date is a major achievement. Given that Yorùbá language and culture as spoken in Nigeria does not belong to the traditional "fishing ground" of French influence, to have created, supported and even strengthened a Yorùbá program continuously for twenty years within a university which in itself is unique in its equal respect for all languages, no matter which they are, is noteworthy.
- ii) Although the annual enrolment hardly exceeds a dozen<sup>5</sup> learners, the very high level of motivation of the learners of Yorùbá enrolled has determined not only the continued existence of the program but also its respectability and renown. For the various categories of learners, the *double cursus* status (studying for two diplomas at the same time) of most, the motivation of all and the high personal interest of the heritage learners, makes involvement in the program a win-win situation for such learners.
- iii) The gradual shift of the teaching methods used in the INALCO Yorùbá program from traditional manuals to more recent and more effective pedagogical tools has transformed the learning and teaching environment of the Yorùbá class in Paris. This has placed the INALCO Yorùbá program in a comparatively *avant-garde* position as far as many other Less Commonly Taught Languages at Langues'O are concerned.

However, what may appear to be a positive growth and development should not mask the key areas where challenges remain for INALCO's Yorùbá program. They include the following:

- i) The need to develop Yorùbá manuals specifically meant for Francophone Learners.<sup>6</sup> This will reduce the hitherto monopoly of manuals developed just for English-speaking audiences and which have been in use since the program's inception.
- ii) The need to find ways and means of increasing enrolment as well as encouraging research in a European environment where there is less interest in Africa-related issues. There is the need to bear in mind that factors that have hindered both bigger enrolment and research activities have included the declining interest for the African continent in Europe, a drastic reduction in funding at all levels and a neglect, until recently, of their languages and cultures by Africans in Diaspora.

## 7. Changes in Europe and their impact on Yorùbá language instruction

As mentioned in our introduction, INALCO's Yorùbá program's existence has coincided with a period of numerous past and on-going developments within the European Union where the language is being taught. We shall now turn our attention to the impact of such transformations on Yorùbá language instruction in Europe, and specifically in INALCO. It is important to stress that the impact can be classified as negative or positive, depending on the angle from which one examines it.

### 7.1 Educational mobility in Europe

As stressed above, the collapse of the Berlin wall and the end of the Cold War led to enlargement within the EU and the Council of Europe with more and more policies being drawn up to encourage European integration and harmonization. As far as university education is concerned, much has been done lately to encourage mobility among European students and teachers with the introduction of programs such as ERASMUS and SOCRATES where funds are made available for faculty and students to participate in study and teaching programs outside their home countries, but within the

<sup>5</sup> For the period 1992-2002, official INALCO statistics put the average at around 13.

<sup>6</sup> This issue was addressed in a recent paper: George Alao "Addressing Francophone learners' need for a modern Yoruba manual", Seventh National Conference of the National Council of Organizations of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL), University of Wisconsin- Madison, 30 avril – 2 mai 2, 2004.

European Union, irrespective of their fields of interest. These laudable Europe-based initiatives that allowed learners from universities that do not offer Yorùbá in countries such as Austria, Finland and Germany to be enrolled at INALCO for one academic year. Faculty and students from INALCO have also honored invitations in the opposite direction. While this is a positive development, such enrolments are so few and far between that one wonders why European learners do not take advantage of the uniqueness of INALCO and the language and culture programs on offer. Besides, while it may be possible for learners and teachers to circulate within the EU, there is no such opportunity for travels to Africa, for example, within the framework of the present EU assistance and exchange programs.

### 7.2. *European Credit Transfer System*

Another education-related EU project geared towards greater integration and harmonization and which is impacting the university system is the European Credit Transfer System (or *LMD* for the French) which has been instituted with the objective of not only overhauling the university system but also to set up a single system in all member countries with universities running similar programs and issuing BA, MA and doctorate degrees of the same value in all member countries. One immediate impact of such a project is the elimination of doubts as to the worth of non-national university certificates. Within the INALCO institution, the application of this reform would be two-fold:

- a. Either solely or in partnership with other departments in or outside of INALCO, each department is preparing full-fledged viable first, second and doctoral degree programs tailored according to strict EU criteria. The Africa department, where the Yorùbá program belongs, has proposed course content for all the language programs it is hosting. The implication for the Yorùbá program is that, from the 2007 academic year, a learner with a Baccalaureate (school leaving certificate) could study Yorùbá language, culture and society within a ‘West African Studies program’ from beginner level to doctorate degree.
- b. It should henceforth be possible for a University-based learner anywhere in Europe to take credits in courses in Yorùbá or any other language offered at INALCO or any other European University or universities, and have such credits transferred to, validated at or recognized in other institutions. This will go beyond the present system where only students involved in the ERASMUS program, and only within the period they are involved in it, do enjoy such privileges.

This reform seeks two advantages of value: recognition and visibility on the one hand and intra-European mobility on the other. But, while it may be argued that hitherto “rare” and “unrecognized” programs are henceforth probably going to gain European recognition, questions as to whether the student constituency that hitherto opted for double-enrolment will now be willing (given new administrative constraints being imposed on students to stick to programs within one university) to take single degrees in ‘rare’ courses such as Yorùbá, and whether such potential single degree holders would easily find employment, or even whether European learners would be willing to seize the opportunity of this reform, remain unanswered.

### 7.3. *Common European Framework of Reference*

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF) is a document; a sort of Language Policy launched by the Council of Europe and meant to coordinate efforts being made to harmonize the learning, teaching and assessment of languages on the continent. In order to know which languages are concerned by this document and thus appreciate its impact, if any, on non-European languages like Yorùbá, one would need to hear it summarize its own functions:

*The Common European Framework provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively.* (Common European Framework 2001:1)

If the above lines explain the CEF project, they do not answer the key question, to wit, which specific language or languages are being referred to? Things become clearer on the next page where the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe recommends that:

[...] *it is only through a better knowledge of European modern languages that it will be possible to facilitate communication and interaction among Europeans of different mother tongues in order to promote European mobility, mutual understanding and cooperation, and overcome prejudice and discrimination.*

(Common European Framework, 2001:2)

No doubt these and other references to “European modern languages” and “modern languages” are indications that the CEF is a European project concerned with only European languages, to the exclusion of all others. For an institution like INALCO, the very definition of “European modern languages” would be problematic since one cannot be sure which of the languages in the university’s Europe Department would qualify to be called “modern” and which would not. As for INALCO’s African languages such as Yorùbá, they were certainly not on the minds of the originators of the Common European Framework. Here again, the issue of the uncertain status of the so-called “rare” languages in Europe is clearly demonstrated. If the CEF can be compared with the *National Standards for Foreign Languages* in America, then it may be appropriate to suggest that, just like colleagues in America are adopting the ‘National Standards...’ to the teaching and learning of various Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs), teachers in Europe would need to adapt the CEF to suit their own purpose.

#### 7.4. *Tightening immigration laws and recent Diaspora identity reactions*

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the tightening of immigration laws in Europe has served to discourage the influx of immigrants into some countries within the European Union. Given that the immigrant population and especially their descendants constitute a large percentage of the learner constituency of African languages on offer at INALCO, this political move has had an adverse effect on enrolment figures. Recently, the converse effect has been a noticeable *withdrawn attitude* of the Diaspora communities in various European urban centers like Paris, London and Berlin. This has contributed to the formation of cultural associations along ethnic lines.

The Yorùbá are particularly active in what seems to be an act of self-preservation and identity. In Paris, although for reasons already mentioned, the Yorùbá community is small when compared with the Diaspora of other West African communities and associations in France, many Yorùbá associations are active in publicizing Yorùbá culture through concerts, exhibitions, dances, parties and teaching of children. Of late, they have also contacted the Yorùbá program at INALCO, and made enquiries on possible areas of collaboration. One of these associations recently accepted a Yorùbá MA student to do her research on its activities. The descendants of these Yorùbá immigrants who have been born or raised in France are part of what we have referred to above as potential heritage learners. It would therefore appear as though a tightening of immigration laws has had the effect of drawing the Yorùbá Diaspora to her cultural heritage and sensitizing her to the need for an active participation in the propagation of Yorùbá language and culture.

#### 7.5. *Multilingualism and Multiculturalism*

The double concept of Multilingualism and Multiculturalism well summarizes Europe’s new approach to language learning and teaching. The Multilingual approach is said to emphasize *the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact* (Common Framework, 2001:4). The implication of this is that Europe is moving away from a monolingual and monolithic national outlook to a pluri-dimensional approach to the teaching and learning of languages and cultures. It is in support of this orientation that an INALCO-based research team named *Pluralité des Langues et des Identités en Didactique : Acquisition, Médiation*, (with the acronym PLIDAM) to which this author belongs, was recently<sup>7</sup> approved by the French Ministry of

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<sup>7</sup> Under the leadership of Professor Genevieve Zarate, PLIDAM was approved as a research team in January 2006. Its first international conference (Paris, July, 3-5, 2006) explored the subject of “Commonly and less commonly

Education and Research. The team advocates that henceforth, teaching and learning of languages and cultures should no longer be approached from the sole viewpoint of one language or one culture, but rather that these issues be addressed from an angle that takes into consideration the fact that Europe is changing, in all aspects, even in its ethnic and cultural composition, and therefore needs to adapt her perspective to this reality. The clarion call is therefore for a *plurilingual* and *pluricultural* approach.

## 8. Conclusion: Strategies and Perspectives

The assessment of the Yorùbá program at INALCO has been a good opportunity to examine the status of a “rare” or less commonly taught language and culture in Europe. As part of the perspectives and strategies for the future, a series of meetings<sup>8</sup> recently organized at Leiden (Holland) and elsewhere in Europe, by European university teachers of less commonly taught languages, provides what may be an indicator to the way forward. These meetings organized under the auspices of the *European League for Non Western Studies* (ELNWS), among others, at which INALCO has participated, are aimed at interuniversity cooperation and the setting up of a continental network of university teachers of the so called “rare” languages that would push for some form of official European recognition of, and support for the field. Given the role that these languages and cultures are playing and will be called to play in a continent where cultural diversity, integration of immigrant populations, *plurilingualism* and *pluriculturalism* are becoming key words, the encouragement of communication in and the promotion of these languages and cultures, would seem to be part of the way forward.

Besides, imagining new strategies and integrating new technology into the creation of pedagogical tools, particularly in the area of the teaching and learning of African languages in Europe, is another perspective to explore in the years ahead. This will also imply borrowing ideas and strategies already in use by Second Language Acquisition experts for the more popular languages. And, since there is talk of the danger facing “rare” African languages abroad, it may not be out of place to consider a perspective that would involve the search for solutions along the lines of involving the continent's representatives abroad: African Embassies in Europe and the African Diaspora in Europe. If African governments, through their embassies, as well as the Diaspora, through their Associations, are made to understand the role they can play for the survival of the teaching and learning of their languages and cultures abroad, this may also go a long way to give a greater impetus to language programs such as INALCO's Yorùbá program.

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taught languages in a didactics of *plurilingualism* and *pluriculturalism*. Models and experiences” <http://www.fle-inalco.com/>

<sup>8</sup> Since December 2004, Leiden University in The Netherlands has been spearheading a network of European Universities under the title *European League for Non-Western Studies* (ELNWS) to explore possibilities for co-operation and to form a network of European universities teaching less commonly taught languages. As at the time of writing, fourteen institutions are listed as members on the league's site: <http://www.elnws.leidenuniv.nl/index.php3?m=1&c=3&garb=0.9880206063214526&session=>

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edited by Olaoba F. Arasanyin  
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