



# The Main Contents of the French Vocational Language Planning and Its Reference for the Implementation of the “Chinese + Vocational Skills” Education System

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## Abstract

The French vocational language planning is an important part of its overall language policy, which imposes restrictions on the use of vocational language by employees of French enterprises, and has formed multiple implementation subjects, including legislation, enterprises and training institutions. At present, the “Chinese + vocational skills” education system is in the exploratory stage, and it is necessary to establish institutional guarantees and relevant implementation measures for the system. This article will sort out the various measures taken by France in the process of implementing vocational language planning, and evaluate the effectiveness and rationality of these initiatives from both positive and negative sides, so as to provide reference for the further implementation of the “Chinese + vocational skills” education system in China.

**Key words:** French vocational language planning; reference; “Chinese + vocational skills”

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As one of the countries with the most distinctive language policies in Europe, France’s language policy involves all aspects of social life, and the French vocational language planning is one of its key components. The vocational language planning imposes restrictions on two subjects: one is for enterprises, which cover all the foreign enterprises operating in France and the overseas institutions of French multinationals; Second, for workers, it clarifies the language regulations that the workers need to follow at work and their rights and obligations in relation to those regulations. With regard to the implementation of the vocational language planning, France has established a multi-subject implementation system including the government, enterprises and language training institutions, which can be summarized in three aspects as “guarantee by legislation, promotion by enterprises and support by training institutions”, all of which jointly ensure the implementation of the French vocational language planning.

At present, with the continuous improvement of China’s education opening up, the “Belt and Road” initiative has been deepening and substantiating, and China’s enterprises speed up the pace of going abroad; language is the basic carrier for enhancing mutual understanding between countries and individuals, and it is also an indispensable and important foundation for effective international cooperation under the new situation (Meng and Shang, 2022). Based on the above two important growth points, international Chinese education is accelerating the integration of language education and vocational education. Through the implementation of the “Chinese + vocational skills” education system, international Chinese Language Education and vocational education are promoted to go global synergistically, which will enhance their global adaptability and the overall

international influence of Chinese education brand. It is of great significance to boost the economic and social development of countries around the world and promote people-to-people exchanges and mutual learning between civilizations.

At present, the “Chinese + vocational skills” system is in the exploratory stage, and it is urgent to establish institutional guarantees for the system and related implementation measures. This article will specifically review the various initiatives taken by France in the process of implementing vocational language planning, and evaluate the effectiveness and rationality of its initiatives from both positive and negative aspects, so as to provide reference experiences and lessons for the further implementation of the “Chinese + vocational skills” education system in China.

## 2. LEGISLATIVE GUARANTEE FOR VOCATIONAL LANGUAGE PLANNING IN FRANCE AND THE STATUS OF ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Since the adoption of the constitutional amendment in 1992, which established French as the official language of the French Republic, legislation has become the main instrument for the French government to protect the French language and establish its status (Li, 2006). Subsequently, in 1994, the French Parliament adopted the Toubon Law (La Loi Toubon), also known as the “Law on the Use of the French Language”, drawn up by the General Delegation for the French Language and Languages of France. This law is the standard and legal system formulated by the French government regarding the French language, spelling, and its applications, regulating the use of language in various fields of the economy and society, including explicit provisions on the use of occupational language in France (Conseil Constitutionnel, 1994.):

Article 1: the French language is the language of education, work, exchanges and public services.

Articles 6-9: All labor contracts and internal documents that need to be known by workers must be written in French, internal documents include employee obligations, employee benefits, employee management system, etc.; if there is no corresponding French word for the content of the contract, foreign words may be used for interpretation; If the employee’s native language is not French, the employee’s mother tongue may be used to translate the labor contract and other documents, but the French version of the document must be provided at the same time.

Article 10: Prohibits the publication of any job advertisements containing non-French text in any public publication or media platform.

As can be seen from the above articles, the Toubon Law establishes the status of French as the core vocational language, while protecting the rights and interests of workers, especially non-native French-speaking workers, in the use of the professional language. However, the core of the Law remains to establish a vocational language system with French as the absolute dominant language.

At the same time as legislation, the French government has multiple institutions responsible for implementing and supervising the enforcement of language laws, of which the most authoritative and representative is the General Delegation for the French Language and Languages of France (DGLFLF). Created in 1989, it is part of the Ministry of Culture and is Directedly led by the Prime Minister of France, and its main function is to oversee the promotion and use of the French language on French territory. From 1997 to 2017, the agency published an annual Report on the Use of the French Language each year, providing feedback on the results of the monitoring and surveys on the use of the language in France during the year. Among them, the government attaches great importance to the use of vocational language, with an independent section devoted to feedback on the situation of vocational language use each year. After studying the sixteen consecutive years of the Report on the Use of the French Language (2002-2017), the author summarizes two features of the implementation of the laws related to the vocational language (Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France, 2002-2017):

Firstly, most French enterprises do not enforce the Toubon Law and other professional language laws and regulations effectively, with many instances of neglecting or even violating relevant laws and regulations. For example, most French enterprises have not formed formal rules on the use of the vocational language in order to implement the relevant provisions of laws and regulations such as the Toubon Law, but are more often unwritten language rules based on the principle of pragmatism. On the other hand, business owners or managers have little knowledge of the occasions on which the use of French is mandatory under the Toubon Law.

Second, the government’s regulation of vocational language violations has been declining and the number of arbitrations has been decreasing. Taking the data from the 2016 and 2017 French Language Use Reports, which are the most recent, as an example, the government conducted 364 arbitrations regarding vocational language in 2015, while in 2016 this number was 222, hitting a new historical low, fully demonstrating that government departments have further relaxed supervision over the use of vocational language.

In addition, for the Report on the Use of the French Language itself, the French government has not launched the report since 2017. This coincides with the first term of Macron, the current President of France, in which Macron

has been committed to promoting the process of European integration, while the Report on the Use of the French Language, which is aimed at defending the dominance of the French language, is obviously inconsistent with his political philosophy, which to a certain extent reflects France’s instability in the formulation of many policies, including language planning.

### 3. THE ROLE OF ENTERPRISES IN FRENCH VOCATIONAL LANGUAGE PLANNING

As mentioned above, rather than following relevant laws and regulations, French enterprises are more inclined to formulate their own vocational language rules and regulations based on their own practical needs. Through data collection and interviews with some employees, the author sorted out the use of vocational language by French multinational enterprises in China (Wang and Wang, 2017), which shows the following three overall characteristics:

First, the widespread use of English as a professional language has undermined the core position of French. As the most widely used international language in the world, English is regarded by more and more French companies as their working language, and many French companies have made English proficiency a necessary requirement and an important basis for employee recruitment. English is considered indispensable in the international communication of enterprises, and the proportion of its use keeps growing.

Secondly, enterprises generally attach importance to the language training of employees, and the training is mandatory. Many French enterprises list language training as a mandatory training program for employees and stipulate minimum training hours. For example, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Ile-de-France requires that companies provide no less than 275 hours of language training per year for employees and interns. Language training is mainly in French and English, while French companies in China also include Chinese in their training programs to facilitate communication.

Third, language training is highly profitable for employees. Although there is no clear written regulation to quantify the correlation between language training and job promotion and remuneration, according to the regulation, when an employee is identified as a key candidate for cultivation for a management position, the company’s senior management will have a clear and high demand for his/her language skills. Meanwhile, the revenue-oriented also strengthens the motivation of the employee’s language training, and the employee, in order to be promoted, will subjectively pay extra attention to the training of language skills.

### 4. THE ROLE OF TRAINING INSTITUTIONS IN FRENCH VOCATIONAL LANGUAGE PLANNING

As mentioned above, training institutions play an important role in the enterprise language training, and for French language training, the most important training institution is the Alliance Française ((hereinafter referred to as the AF). With a mission to promote the French language and spread French culture throughout the world, the AF’s main function is teaching French as a foreign language, and it is also concerned with French proficiency tests and cultural activities.

The AF is not only an important medium for promoting the French language and expanding France’s international influence, but also an important body for France to implement its vocational language planning. It undertakes a large number of French training tasks for employees of various types of French enterprises and organizations. The author has studied the 2020 annual report issued by the Fondation of the Alliances Françaises, which shows that in 2020, a total of 76,000 people learned French through vocational language training courses jointly organized by the Fondation and enterprises and institutions, which accounts for 20.2% of the total number of trainees that year (Fondation des Alliances Françaises, 2021).

Under the impact of the covid-19, the language training of the AF has suffered a major impact. In 2020, the global French courses of the AF have trained a total of 376,000 people, 24% lower than that in 2019, and the number of courses has also decreased by 24%. During the epidemic period, the normal language level certification examination could not be arranged, and the number of people obtaining certificates has decreased by 57%. At the same time, in order to cope with the impact of the epidemic, the AF has also shown new language training and publicity features, as follows:

First of all, online courses are developing rapidly. In 2020, the number of online courses of the AF increased by 116%, and the number of online students increased by 700%; at the same time, under the impact of the epidemic, the cultural activities related to language training have been reduced significantly, but some of the activities and promotional content have been transferred to online platforms, which still gained good communication results. In 2020, on the basis of its quarterly magazine and news excerpts, the AF increased the number of multimedia promotional contents such as pictures, audio and videos on its official website, and the total number of visitors to the AF’s global website reached 2.2 million per month; what’s more, the AF has made efforts to build a popular social platform and enhance its own publicity “heat” with the help of the Internet. As of July 2021, the number of subscribers to the AF’s Facebook account has reached 4.6 million, and the total number of views of its videos

on the Youtube platform has exceeded 3.4 million; lastly, the proportion of public welfare in language training has increased, and the career needs of learners have also been taken into account. For example, in response to the wave of unemployment brought about by the spread of the epidemic, the AF has launched public welfare language training courses in a timely manner, or cooperated with enterprises and institutions to launch more targeted language induction training, with enterprises and organizations subsidizing the tuition fees of the trainees, so as to alleviate the financial pressure on the learners and, at the same time, enhance their professional competitiveness.

## **5. ASSESSMENT OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF INITIATIVES RELATED TO THE VOCATIONAL LANGUAGE PLANNING IN FRANCE**

Above, the author reviews the role of legislation and judiciary, enterprises and language training institutions in French vocational language planning. In general, the three have their respective characteristics. With regard to the role of legislation, the example of France shows that it is possible to rely on the enactment of laws and regulations to establish the status of a language quickly and effectively and to ensure the smooth implementation of a language policy. However, it should also be clearly seen that, due to the adjustment of government policies, the implementation and supervision of the laws related to language planning in France have not been effective in recent years, making some of the laws and regulations a mere formality and failing to “ensure that laws are observed and strictly enforced”. On the other hand, as the main entities responsible for vocational language use and planning, enterprises and other employers need to take more responsibility and play a more important role. However, in the actual operation process, because the legal provisions and the actual language use situations faced by enterprises are far apart, enterprises are confronted with greater difficulties in complying with the relevant laws. For the consideration of their own development, the willingness to strictly follow the law is low, which, to a certain extent, has caused a disconnect between the French occupational language laws and regulations and the actual language policies followed by enterprises.

In terms of the role of enterprises, many French enterprises have established vocational language norms based on their own development needs. The most important content is the recognition, in the form of rules and regulations, of the responsibility of the enterprise’s employees for language training and the benefits of such training, which objectively strengthens the mandatory

force of language training in enterprises and subjectively mobilizes the employees to participate in language training. At the same time, however, the core training language of French enterprises is English, which impacts the status and importance of French, the mother tongue. In today’s international exchanges, English is still the most important language medium, which is inseparable from the strong economic strength and cultural influence of English-speaking countries such as the United States and Britain.

As for the role of training institutions, the most typical one in France is the AF. Affected by the Covid-19, its traditional offline language courses and cultural activities have been severely reduced, but at the same time, the online courses have developed rapidly, and the scale of training has grown exponentially. The promotion of French culture has also shifted to the Internet, especially social and video platforms, which cater more to the habits of the younger generation in obtaining information, and have reaped better results in cultural publicity. On the other hand, the AF also assumed part of its social responsibility during the epidemic, launching public welfare courses independently or in cooperation with enterprises.

## **6. THE REFERENCE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FRENCH VOCATIONAL LANGUAGE PLANNING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “CHINESE + VOCATIONAL SKILLS” EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Based on the implementation measures and characteristics of the relevant subjects in the French vocational language planning sorted out above, the author tries to summarize its reference significance for the implementation of the “Chinese language + vocational skills” education system:

(a) In light of the development of Chinese-funded enterprises and the actual situation of language use by foreign employees, laws and regulations concerning the use of language by foreign employees of Chinese-funded enterprises should be formulated at an appropriate time. Both the government and enterprises shall take joint responsibility to implement relevant laws and regulations, so as to effectively guarantee the status and importance of the Chinese language in the language use by Chinese-funded enterprises.

(b) The majority of Chinese-funded enterprises should fulfill the main responsibility by formulating positive rules and regulations on occupational language within the enterprise, and establishing sound safeguard measures for the language rules and regulations, such as organizing regular Chinese training or “Chinese + vocational skills” training, and setting up an incentive mechanism to award foreign employees with excellent results in training or

linking the effectiveness of language training to career development such as promotion and salary increase.

(c) Confucius Institutes and other Chinese language training institutions need to change their teaching modes and ideas in time, and actively promote the development of online courses and “online-offline” integrated courses against the background of the regular epidemic prevention and control. At the same time, the publicity of Chinese language and Chinese culture should also expand new positions, and not only stop at holding cultural experience activities. Instead, they should make full use of social media, video platforms, short videos and other means popular among “Generation Z” to promote Chinese language and culture.

(d) All subjects should cooperate fully. In addition to the government and enterprises taking joint responsibility for enforcing laws and regulations, enterprises and training institutions such as Confucius Institutes should also communicate well, and jointly develop a curriculum system that combines language and professional knowledge adapted to the development of enterprises, and at the same time, strive to open up the development channel of “from students to employees”, as well as set up special job fairs for Confucius Institute students, so as to further enhance the trainees’ enthusiasm to learn Chinese language and understand Chinese culture.

Finally, it should be soberly realized that English is still the most important worldwide language. Therefore,

to further enhance the status of Chinese in international communication and vocational language planning, the most fundamental way is still to vigorously develop China’s economic strength and cultural soft power, to establish and improve Chinese discourse system in international exchanges, and to fulfill the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

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