

French, more an asset than an obstacle

FLORENCE RAYNAL

THESE days there are over 80 million people worldwide learning French. You can study in France without giving up English and while learning French, a language spoken by more than 180 million people. 56 countries have French as one of their official languages.

In France you speak French! An obvious fact certainly, but one which might be thought to imply that, in order to get the most out of their course, applicants for studies in France have to have previous knowledge of the language. Nevertheless, says a deputy director of ÉduFrance, "Everyone has now agreed that language skills will

not be grounds for automatic rejection. The idea is to select the right applicants and enable them to learn French". To do this, in between making the decision and starting the course at their chosen establishment, students have many months which they can put to profitable use.

In Bangladesh, France has two Alliances Françaises where it is possible to take courses in French as a foreign language (FLE), or indeed, to prepare for qualifications recognised in France, such as the diploma in French language studies (Delf) and the advanced diploma in French language (Dalf). Applicants will be able to continue the learning process in France at one of the many FLE teaching

centres, universities, Alliances Françaises or even at chambers of commerce and industry.

French, an international language

But why make all this effort, some will ask, when they speak English and both Great Britain and the United States are very open to foreign students? In addition to pursuing higher education at a lower cost or having the pleasure of knowing a language whose richness is recognised worldwide, speaking French provides a number of advantages. First, it gives access to courses whose excellence is proven and which offer genuine opportunities on the international job market. Courses such as those offered by the 'Grandes Écoles' and

the medical schools.

Next, and this may seem paradoxical, it is precisely because, unlike English, not everyone speaks French, that mastering it becomes an ace up the student's sleeve for their future career. For let's not forget that French is the mother tongue or second language of 181 million people across the world and is learnt by 82.5 million others. Furthermore, it is one of the official and working languages of the international organisations and main multilateral bodies (United Nations, European Union, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Council of Europe, etc.).

It is, moreover, the basic link between the 56 countries that "have French in common" and belong to the international organisation for the French-speaking world (OIF). In this body, the French language has an institution that takes pains to ensure it flourishes and which, furthermore, is driven by the determination that this sharing of a common language is coupled with common values, including the defence of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Anxious to support multilingualism, the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs too has an active policy of

promoting the French language, particularly through the network of 151 cultural centres and institutes and 283 Alliances Françaises. The aim is to support French as a major language of international communication which combines culture and modernity.

Coming to France does not mean giving up English, or any other language. The University of Cergy-Pontoise (northern Paris), for example, offers a bilingual degree in science and technology. The Angers École supérieure d'agriculture prepares students for an international Master's degree in the vine, wine and soil management. Indeed, ÉduFrance has put on line a catalogue of some 300 English courses offered in a variety of fields (visual arts/design/fashion, law, business, literature, engineering sciences, tourism, environment, etc.) and lists bilingual courses taught in French and English, and in other languages.

Thus, while taking a course in English, students can be immersed in an environment that also enables them to learn French as they go about their daily lives. In this way, they not only gain access to France's great literary and cultural heritage but can also make

the most of its celebrated way of life, its rich social and artistic life and discover other approaches to the major political, philosophical, ethical and other issues of today.

Finally, since France is at the heart of Europe, what better gateway for getting to know it?

Florence Raynal is a journalist.

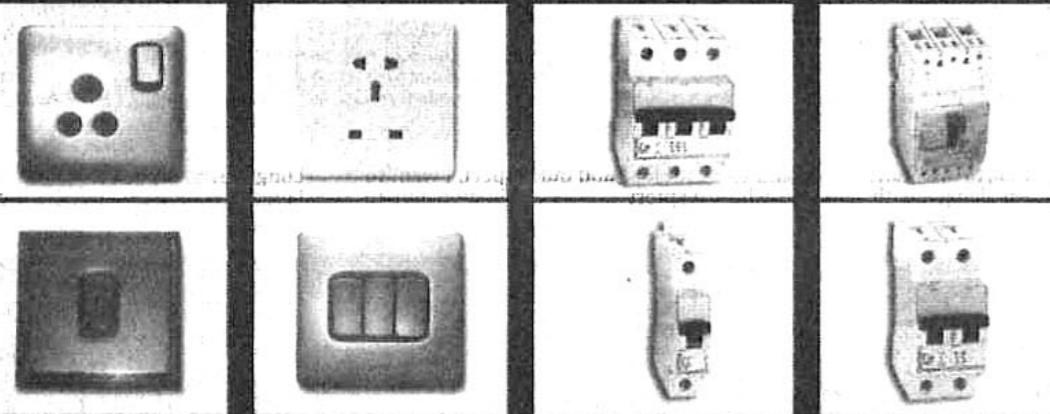
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France - five, four, three, two, one

One figure, one fact : 5, 4, 3, 2, 1

Five: France is the world's fifth-largest exporter of products. This high ranking is explained by continued growth of her exports of products, which, at \$356 billion in 2005 account for 4.8% of the world total.

Four: she is the world's fourth-largest exporter of services. According to World Trade Organization figures, exports of French services (around \$90 billion in 2005) account for 4.8% of the world total.

Three: France ranks third for foreign

inward investment. In 2005, she received \$1 billion in FDI, i.e. three times the total for the previous year.

Two: for hourly productivity France ranks second in the OECD, ahead of the United States.

One: France is the world's Number One tourist destination with 78 million tourists in 2006, around 20% of them from the United Kingdom and Ireland! She is also the global leader for agribusiness exports. And all this with just 1% of the world population!

This ranking, which has become a benchmark in Europe, assesses the value of a "Masters in Management", a qualification increasingly sought by employers. It is based on 15 criteria, including alumni's salaries three years after graduating.

The Ecole des Hautes Etudes commerciales (HEC) is ranked top for the second consecutive year. Its alumni, earning over \$2,000 a year, are the best paid.

The École Supérieure de Commerce de Paris (ESCP), in third place, owes its excellence to its European course, which allows students to study at three of five campuses, in Paris, London, Madrid, Berlin and Turin. The ESCP ranks particularly highly for international mobility.

The "Financial Times" ranking thus implicitly constitutes recognition of the model of the French-style "grande école", a renowned higher education institute with a competitive entrance examination. Every

year, French business schools improve their facilities and courses in order to attract better students, professors, lecturers and researchers, broaden their international programmes and agreements and extend their links with business and industry.

200 million French speakers in the world

The number of people who can speak French reaches 200 million, according to a report issued by the OIF (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie) international Francophone organization.

In 2005, the OIF had put this figure at 175 million. Today over 118 million people are learning French or studying in it. The highest increase was recorded in Africa and the Middle East (+60.37%). In Europe, French is one of the European institutions' official languages and remains the tongue most often taught as a second language. It is also one of the UN's two working languages.

French is spoken on all continents.

According to the OIF, Francophone culture is also very popular abroad. In 2005, audiences for French films outside France outnumbered those inside the country. 2006 was marked by the "Francophonies" festival celebrating, in 400 or so events, music, dance, theatre and the visual arts from the Francophone world. Moreover, in many countries the annual Fête de la musique (street music festival), Lire en fête (literary festival) and le Printemps des poètes (poetry festival) are hugely successful.

The French language also has a high profile in the media. TV5 is the second most widely distributed channel in international broadcasting and the launch in December 2006 of France 24 provides the first French-language international news channel.

Finally, economically, the 68 OIF countries (members, associates and observers) account for 11% of the world population and 12% of its revenue. They carry out 19% of global trade in goods and 26% of global investment.



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