

**FACTORS AFFECTING TEACHING AND LEARNING FRENCH LANGUAGE IN
NIGERIA: A STUDY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN UYO LOCAL
GOVERNMENT AREA OF AKWA IBOM STATE**

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the factors affecting teaching and learning French language in Nigeria: a study of secondary school students in Uyo local government area of Akwa Ibom state. In order to carry out this study, specified research objectives. The research design for this study is a survey design. The population of the study consisted of all the 9473 Junior Secondary II students (JSSII) from the fourteen (14) secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 383 respondents out of the population. The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. The instrument was validated by experts in Test and Measurement. Crombach Alpha reliability technique was used for testing the reliability of the instrument and reliability index of .72 was realized, hence the instrument was regard as being reliable. Data from completed questionnaires was subjected to percentage analysis. The finding showed and concludes that at secondary school level, neither the instructor nor the student views it as a language for either learning or life. The meager professional and administrative support provided for the sciences by teachers and school officials is not sustained. Most instructors apparently do not believe in what they are doing, which makes it difficult to create a supportive environment in which they can perform a reasonably good job. The study recommends that the government has to take a more enthusiastic stance toward encouraging the study of French. The country's secondary schools, both public and private, should mandate French language instruction. Additionally, all Art students should be required to get a passing grade in French (as English language is in many francophone countries). This will have a significant impact on getting the pupils to take things more seriously. Since a result, the high unemployment rate among French university grads will be alleviated, as the vast majority of them will find gainful job as secondary school French instructors. As a result, more and more college students will choose to study the French language.

INTRODUCTION

Every public school in Nigeria includes French language instruction. It is considered as crucial as the required study of English. The people of Nigeria speak a variety of languages, although the country itself belongs to the English-speaking world; its French-speaking neighbours include Cameroon. Nigerians are required to have a solid grasp of the French language to ensure

effective communication and cooperation with neighbouring nations (Ntibe 2009). According to Onyemelukwe (2004), Nigerians require a strong grasp of the French language not merely to communicate with their neighbours in the neighbouring nations, but also to communicate with the rest of the French-speaking globe. Despite all of this, French remains a neglected subject in Nigerian schools because pupils perceive it to be too difficult to master and comprehend. After Latin fell into disuse, the French language was introduced to the country's curriculum in the 1960s. The elite status of the language's speakers contributed to the language's prestige. These emotions used to be mutual, but they aren't any more. In the 1970s and 1980s, experts were brought in to teach English in secondary schools across Nigeria. The government of Nigeria stopped prioritising the study of French in the early 1990s (Schwab, J.J.) (1983).

French instructors are becoming hard to find in secondary schools, and those who do find work sometimes have to teach topics other than French since the language they were hired to teach, French, is no longer considered useful. As a result of the government's attitude toward the introduction, teaching, and learning of French, both parents and kids have lost interest in and been distracted from the language. Many adults, including the parents of schoolchildren, now consider it pointless for their children to study French. As a result, at the few institutions where it is still taught, French receives little to no attention from pupils. Many French college grads have found themselves unemployed and marginalised as a result of this mindset. G.O. Simire (2002).

The government of Nigeria mandated the high school curriculum include French instruction in the 1920s. Teachers who are fluent in French are hard to come by these days, and those who do exist sometimes have to juggle many subject areas (including English, social studies, English literature, History, and a host of others) on top of their regular teaching responsibilities. It's understandable that many Nigerians would take a dim view of French classes in their children's schools if they knew more about the importance of teaching French as an international language. This is due to the widespread belief that learning French is a pointless waste of time. Some students and parents have been so misinformed and bewildered by the idea that they no longer want to learn the language (Okeke 2004). Not only the enumerated concerns, but others as well, were investigated. Nigeria is an Anglophone nation, yet as has been said, she is surrounded by French-speaking countries. Bliss (2007) pointed out that since Nigeria is surrounded by French-speaking nations, the French language is very important there. Another way in which Nigeria has been characterised is as an Anglophone nation among a sea of Adie-Of francophone. However, due to its location, the French language is now required in Nigeria. Academics have observed that a command of French is crucial for Nigeria to maintain positive ties with its Francophone neighbours. Nigeria must be able to communicate with these countries at least in part in their official language — French — if she is to begin a mutually beneficial relationship with them.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the importance of teaching French language in Nigerian schools.
2. To examine the level of acceptability of French language in Nigerian schools.

3. To determine the factors militating against effective development of French language in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the importance of teaching French language in Nigerian schools?
2. What is the level of acceptability of French language in Nigerian schools?
3. What are the factors militating against effective development of French language in Nigeria?

Importance of French in Nigeria

Because of its location in Africa, Nigerians have found studying French to be an absolute need. According to Onyemelukwe (1995), fluency in French is essential for Nigeria to maintain positive relationships with its Francophone neighbours. In the opinion of Igonor (2011), "...for Nigeria to establish a connection of mutual advantages with these nations, it is important, at least to some degree, for her to interact with these countries in their own official language - French." According to Onyemelukwe and Adie Offiong (2004), "Bilingualism is crucial to communication not just with our francophone neighbours but also with other French-speaking nations of the globe." In a nutshell, it facilitates intercultural exchange across all areas of human activity, including the academic, economic, religious, and political sectors. In his 2007 article, Ogunkeye outlined four arguments in favour of French's widespread acceptance in Nigeria. Since Nigeria is surrounded by French-speaking nations, he thinks learning the language would help people there communicate more effectively. And, he said, learning French is a good idea for Nigerians since the bulk of ECOWAS members are francophone. He said, thirdly, that knowing French is essential since the language is gaining popularity all over the globe. Finally, being able to speak French increases the likelihood that Nigerians would be hired by international organisations. To echo the sentiments of others who have come before him, Ogunbiyi (2012) argues that "because Nigeria is surrounded by French speaking nations, the significance of the language in Nigeria for social, political, economic, and international interactions cannot be overemphasised." Despite its obvious usefulness to the people of Nigeria, the French language has not been given the respect it deserves.

Despite all of Nigeria's problems, learning French and speaking French can be extremely helpful. French and English are both official working languages of the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), NATO, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Labour Bureau, the International Olympic Committee, the Council of Europe (which has 31 members), the European Community, the Universal Postal Union, and the Union of International Associations (UIA) (Nathan, 2007 & Shryock 1997 -2008). Also, in Brussels, Belgium, where the European Court of Justice and the European Tribunal of First Instance are located, the press room of the European Commission is also mostly French-speaking (Shryock1997-2008). Additionally, French is an important official language in most African republics. Black Africa is home to 22% of the world's French speakers (Ajiboye, 2002). Africa as a whole uses 33% of the world's French for

governmental or administrative reasons, with Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco alone responsible for 11%. When compared to France, which only accounts for around half of the world's French production, Africa may be the most significant region for French today. Reporting on the eight All African Games, held in Nigeria on October 4, 2003 and attended by delegates from African nations, was done in both English and French. The former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, made a welcoming speech in English, which was then translated into French for the audience. Conferences, seminars, and the oral presentation of scholarly papers all make significant use of it, therefore its importance must not be overlooked.

Difficulties in Teaching French Language

Although learning French would be beneficial for the people of Nigeria, there are several roadblocks in the way. In the early sixties, both French professors and students were awarded scholarships, according to Ogunbiyi (2012). To inspire them to continue their language education, this was done. This monetary incentive is no longer available. The French language is being completely ignored by the relevant parties. Igonor (2011) concurred, writing, "...French language learners were supposed to have not less than 16 hours of interactions with their instructors in a week." However, in reality, it is commonly seen that many distractions get in the way; students get fatigued and professors lose their enthusiasm. He also expressed disappointment at the limited availability of educational resources and facilities. While discussing the Arabic and French languages, Ayeomoni (2012) said, "... However, the government policy on the usage, teaching, and learning of the language is bedevilled by a variety of challenges which vary from inadequate materials and staff to conduct the teaching...". In addition to the aforementioned experts, there are many more who have written on the challenges the French language is now facing.

The quality of French language instruction in schools of education has declined due to environmental issues, including those described by the aforementioned writers. Far too many graduates lack the language skills necessary to pass O' level French without further help. According to Simire (2012), as cited by Igonor (ibid.), "the quality of French graduates rolled out varies from institution to institution, though the general impression is that the performance rating of French acquired in the colleges of Education did not march with learners' practical linguistic and communicative competence outside of the school system." The government has to do something about this so that learning French doesn't become pointless. I. Ogunkeye (2007).

Poor Learning Environments and Learning Foreign Languages

It's no secret that inadequate resources for teaching and studying French in Nigeria are a major obstacle for the country's French education system. Materials for education include any medium that may be used to capture, store, transmit, or retrieve data for the purpose of education. Instructional materials are the tools used in the classroom to impart knowledge, as defined by Ezike and Obodo (1991). Instructional materials are cited by Adekola (2010) as a factor affecting Nigeria's functional education. Unfortunately, current French education curricula in Nigeria do not employ suitable instructional resources to deal with the contemporary tendencies in skill development in the community. There is a paucity of high-quality French texts in Nigerian

schools, and current teaching techniques are not conducive to the pragmatic goals of French education Ogunbiyi O. (2012).

There has been a lot of fretting about the inadequate classroom space. Language educators have advocated for the use of laboratory activities as a means to reap rich advantages in learning despite inadequate teaching facilities, which have been accorded a vital and unique position in French education (Aina 2012).

If there aren't enough proper facilities, the kids will have to use whatever is already there, regardless of how run down it is. Integrating theory and practise is the key to excellent French instruction, which in turn is the key to achieving scientific and technical brilliance (Abuseji 2007). The utilisation of a practical programme is fundamental to the French language classroom (Owoeye and Yara 2011). As a result, the professors prioritise their own convenience above the needs of their students, and practical lessons are seldom conducted on time. In their research, Adefunke (2008) and Owoeye and Yara (2011) found that high-quality laboratory equipment and resources are crucial to the success of language classrooms.

The French curriculum at the secondary school level in Lagos State is being hampered by a lack of texts. While curriculum designers may have good intentions, they often wind up recommending resources that just aren't accessible in our classrooms. In, a group of professors of French from both the United States and France formed a committee to evaluate Jacques David's *Pierre etSoydou*. It was found that the vast majority of book content was not created with the African kid in mind. The pupils have complained that the book is difficult to read and comprehend since it fails to accurately reflect African culture and civilisation. The textbook does not align with the primary goals of the French curriculum, which include teaching children to have informed conversations about their immediate surroundings. The ability to draw parallels between the learner's own world and the world of the target language depends on his familiarity with the latter. Studies have indicated that including examples of the student's culture and civilisation in textbooks improves students' ability to learn the language. According to Stern (2014), the goal of teaching a foreign language is to contribute to the development of the native culture.

Position of the Government towards Foreign Language

Despite French's designation as Nigeria's second official language, no efforts have been made to enhance its instruction. The nation took the French language more seriously in the 1970s and 1980s. Over the course of the first three years of high school, most institutions offered French as a subject. This allowed students who were passionate about the language to keep studying it through high school. In modern times, the French language has been utterly marginalised. According to Ogunkeye (2007), "The Federal Government order declares that French is required in schools, but does little to enforce this requirement." Since French is no longer taught in the vast majority of public secondary schools, many recent graduates with a degree in the language find refuge only in the private sector. Those who have graduated from a French university and are currently in the teaching profession are forced to teach languages other than French.

The availability of French instructors is low in most secondary schools in Lagos State. Unfortunately, the vast majority of available educators lack the requisite expertise to effectively instruct their students in French. As educators, teachers play a crucial role in any curriculum's success or failure, making their preparation a priority is crucial. There is an open secret in our educational system: professors often delay presenting some topics (such Oral exercises), claiming that their pupils lack the requisite degree of intellectual maturity. The effectiveness of the programme depends heavily on the quality, quantity, willingness, self-motivation, interest, dedication, and application of methodology of its teachers, since it is they who interpret the goals and contents in the curriculum plans and manage the learning environment. The instructor is responsible for making sense of the lesson plans' stated goals and material, as well as directing the classroom activities. Pre-service and on-the-job training for French teachers is necessary to provide a pool of qualified, enthusiastic educators who can effectively pass on the language to their students. They also need to have seminars and conferences set up for them. There should not be more than 30 pupils for per instructor. A cane is inappropriate for a French instructor with a class size of 45–50 pupils. It's difficult to execute curriculum to their full potential when class sizes are enormous. Since its schools are congested to the point where three or more schools are established in the same compound (Adegoke, 2014), curriculum implementation in Lagos State Schools is that which will be essentially beset with uncertainties, prejudice, fantasy, imprecision, limited resources, and a high risk of probabilities.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Design

The ex-post factor and survey design was used for this study. Ezejulue and Ogwo (1990) explained that the purpose of a survey research is not the collection of data per se but the discovery of meaning in the data collected, so that facts and events can be better understood, interpreted and explained.

Area of the Study

Uyo metropolis was chosen as a study area for this study. It is the geopolitical headquarters of Akwa Ibom State. It is also headquarters of Uyo Local Government Area. Uyo LGA is located on latitude 5.05 North and longitude 80 East. It is bounded on the South by NsitAtai and NsitIbom Local Government Areas, on the East by Uruan Local Government Area while North is Itu and bounded on the West by Etinan local government area. Uyo is located within the low land coastal region of Nigeria.

Population of the Study

The population of this study consisted of nine thousand four hundred and seventy-three (9473) Junior Secondary II students (JSSII) from the fourteen (14) secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area.

Sample and sampling Technique

A sample of 383 Junior Secondary School II students was used for the study. First and foremost, five out of fourteen schools were selected using hat and draw method as representative schools. Proportional sampling techniques was employed in selecting the respondents from the five sampled public secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area. The sample size was statistically determined using the sample fraction of 10%.

Instrumentation

The research instrument used for the study was questionnaire adopted from the works of Teseema and Socters, (2006), and Allen and Meyers, (1990). The instruments elicited information on the independent and dependent variables. Likert (1932) modified scale of measurement was used in the study.

Validation of the Research Instrument

The research instrument was given for validation by research experts. The purpose was to ensure that items on the questionnaire were properly worded to meet the respondents' level of understanding and comprehensively covered the research objectives. Finally, the purpose of the validation of the instrument was to determine face and content validity.

Reliability of the Instrument

The researcher adopted Croabah alpha analysis to determine the reliability of the instrument. In the pre testing, a total of 20 students who were not part of the main study were randomly selected from the secondary schools in the study area, and used. The data collected were analyzed and the result showed 0.73 reliability coefficient. This indicated that the instrument was reliable for use.

Administration of the Instrument

The questionnaire was administered to the sampled students after obtaining permission from the school principals on presentation of a letter of introduction. All the questions on the questionnaire were read to the students to avoid any misunderstanding. The teachers of the selected classes assisted the researcher in the distribution and collection of completed copies of the questionnaire. This method was adopted by the researcher to ensure that time was judiciously utilized and to avoid missing copies of the questionnaire. At the end, all the copies distributed were collected for collection and data analysis.

Method of data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using independent t-test statistical technique. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions while independent t-test analysis was used to test the null hypotheses.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

RESEACRH QUESTIONS

Research Question One

What is the importance of teaching French language in Nigerian schools?

Table 1: percentage analysis of effect of the importance of teaching French language in Nigerian schools

Extent	Frequency	Percentage
Very high extent	122	31.85
High extent	77	20.10
Low extent	96	25.06
Very low extent	88	22.97
Total	383	100

The above table 1 present the percentage analysis of the importance of teaching French language in Nigerian schools, the table shows that there is very high importance of teaching French language in Nigerian schools. Therefore, the result causes the research question to be significant.

Research Question Two

What is the level of acceptability of French language in Nigerian schools?

Table 2: percentage analysis of level of acceptability of French language in Nigerian schools

Extent	Frequency	Percentage
Very high extent	137	35.77
High extent	89	23.23
Low extent	78	20.36
Very low extent	79	20.62
Total	383	100

The above table 2 present the percentage analysis of level of acceptability of French language in Nigerian schools, the table shows that the is high level of acceptability of French language in Nigerian schools. Therefore, the result causes the research question to be significant.

Research Question Three

What are the factors militating against effective development of French language in Nigeria?

Table 3: percentage analysis of factors militating against effective development of French language in Nigeria

Extent	Frequency	Percentage
Very high extent	129	33.68
High extent	77	20.10
Low extent	82	21.40
Very low extent	95	24.80
Total	383	100

The above table 3 presents the percentage analysis of factors militating against effective development of French language in Nigeria, the table show that there is high effect of factors militating against effective development of French language in Nigeria. Therefore, the result causes the research question to be significant.

CONCLUSION

This research lends credence to the idea that French language education in Nigeria is in a precarious state. At the secondary school level, neither the instructor nor the student views it as a language for either learning or life. The meager professional and administrative support provided for the sciences by teachers and school officials is not sustained. Most instructors apparently do not believe in what they are doing, which makes it difficult to create a supportive environment in which they can perform a reasonably good job. In addition, students who are interested in pursuing language related courses have not had their French language education adapted to meet their unique interests and demands.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With this in mind, the researcher has come up with several suggestions for enhancing the French language classroom experience in Nigeria.

The government has to take a more enthusiastic stance toward encouraging the study of French. The country's secondary schools, both public and private, should mandate French language instruction. Additionally, all Art students should be required to get a passing grade in French (as English language is in many francophone countries). This will have a significant impact on getting the pupils to take things more seriously. Since a result, the high unemployment rate among French university grads will be alleviated, as the vast majority of them will find gainful job as secondary school French instructors. As a result, more and more college students will choose to study the French language.

Scholarships to francophone nations would be a great way to inspire French language instructors and students at universities of education. All universities offering teacher training programmes should also provide state-of-the-art French language labs and libraries to its students. The government should also be willing to provide the necessary funding for the language immersion initiative.

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