

PREDICTORS OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS FRENCH LANGUAGE IN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OREDO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE, NIGERIA

Peace Joan Alufohai
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Faculty of Education, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma-Nigeria
Email: pjalufy@gmail.com

Copyright@2019 West East Institute

Abstract

For years, “Comment tu t’appelle?” and the response, “Je m’appelle...” has remained a famous lingo among young Nigerians, who were taught the French language at the basic education level. To most Nigerian students, these are the only words they can remember in the language. What makes the issue disgusting is the fact that this subject (French) was introduced into the Nigerian school system as far back as 1859 when other topics like the English language, Mathematics, Sciences etc. were introduced. In addition to address this lukewarm attitude towards this subject, there is a need to determine the factors that predict it. Three hypotheses were raised for the study. The correlational survey design was employed for the study. The population for the study consists of all the 6534 junior secondary 3 students in public schools. Six hundred students consisted of the sample size. The instrument for the study is the questionnaire titled Attitudes Towards French Language Questionnaire (ATFLQ). The data collected were analyzed using linear regression statistics. Findings of the study revealed that the three factors (societal value, instructional materials and method of teaching) hypothesized are significant predictors of French language learning. Based on the findings, recommendations were made amongst which is that since communication competency is one of the problems of the students, teachers as a matter of policy, should teach French language employing the learner-centered methods that will make students participate/speak the language in class.

Keywords: Predictors, Attitudes, French language, Secondary school

Introduction

Language can be described as the most powerful agent for social reform. It is the only means by which human beings cooperate. It is against this backdrop that the late president Abacha of the Federal Republic of Nigeria declared the French language as the second official language of Nigeria. The French language is a well-developed and recognized language in the world. It is one of the very few languages spoken all over the world; thus, it is ranked the sixth most widely spoken language after Mandarin Chinese, English, Hindi, Spanish, and Arabic. There are currently over 220 million French speakers worldwide, including 72 million so-called partial French speakers. In fact, it has been estimated that by 2050, 700 million people will be using the French language to communicate, out of which 80 percent will be in Africa. The French is Europe's second most widely spoken mother tongue with over 77 million speakers after Germany (around 100 million). Demographers forecast that France's birth rate will make French the most widely spoken mother tongue in Europe, overtaking German, by 2025. Currently, second only to English in the category.

The French language shares with English the distinction of being taught as a foreign language in the education systems of most countries around the world, of which Nigeria is one of such countries. Thus, the Federal government of Nigeria stated in its National Policy on Education (2013) edition among other things that, "French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools..." Despite this policy statement and the status given to the language in Nigeria, it appears Nigerians and the government itself have lost interest in the teaching and learning of the language. Currently, French teachers are hardly employed. This negative attitude towards the subject has greatly contributed to the lack of interest in the matter. In fact, most Nigerians see the study of the French as a mere waste of time, and as such, students often pay very little or no attention to the French as a subject in the few secondary schools where the subject is still taught. As a result of this attitude, the departments of French language in Nigerian universities hardly get students coming on their own volition to study the course. Most often, at times, students who applied for other courses are given admission to study the French language against their own will. Thus, in most universities in Nigeria, the population of students studying French language as a course is very low. In Ambrose Alli University, for instance, in the 2016/2017 academic session, the population of students in the entire department was 76. In 2017/2018 academic session the population was 87. In the current session, which is 2018/2019, the population of students is 70. This is very low when compared to the population of other departments in the same university.

This situation is very disheartening as Nigeria is surrounded by countries (The Republic of Benin, Republic of Tchad, Republic of Cameroon and the Niger Republic) whose official medium of communication is French. Since language has been described as a powerful medium for social reforms, the French language should be treated as a crucial subject so that Nigeria as a nation can effectively interact with her neighbours. No wonder Nigeria is described as an Anglophone country in a sea of Aide-of francophone. This description ought not to be so because the French language has been taught in Nigeria as far back as 1859. It was amongst the subjects introduced into Nigerian secondary schools by Church Missionary Society Grammar School, Lagos – Nigeria in 1859. It is, therefore obvious that French as a subject dates back to the commencement of western education in Nigeria. It is, therefore worrisome to know that a subject as old as French in the curriculum of Nigeria education is not given its rightful place in the affairs of the nation. Thus, students' performance in the subject, particularly in the area of speaking remains poor. Concerned scholars like (Tar, 2011; Olayiwola, 2015; Gella and Kwaja, 2017; Alufohai, 2017) etc. have tried to look at the problems of teaching and learning the French, yet the problem remains. It is on this basis the study attempted to find out if factors like societal values attached to the French language, lack of instructional materials and methods of teaching predict the attitude of students towards French language in secondary schools?

Review of Related Literature

The concept of attitude has been defined by different scholars from diverse perceptions. This has actually resulted in semantic disagreement and differences about the generality and specifically of the term (Wamalwa, 2013 and Bartram 2010). According to Bartram (2010), "attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response towards all subjects and situations with which it is related. This is a mentalist perspective on the term attitude. For social psychologists, attitudes are divided into cognitive, affective and conative/behavioral attitude. Cognitive attitude has to do with a set of beliefs about an object, while affective has to do with feelings about an object and conative behavioral attitude has

to do with the way people act towards an object (Salta and Tzougrak 2004). Attitude can either be positive or negative. According to Dyers (1998), language and attitude can be described as the strong “positive or negative emotions experienced by people when they are faced with a choice between languages in a variety of situations or are learning a language. Crystal (1997) described language attitude as the feelings people have about their own language or the language of others. These two definitions rightly describe the attitude of Nigerian students towards the French language, although the majority of the students’ feelings towards the subject is negative.

There is a growing concern about the attitude of Nigerians towards the study of French in schools. A good number of people are not sufficiently informed about the usefulness of the French in the educational system nor its importance as an international language. Thus, they feel that people who study French language, especially in the tertiary institutions are slow learners or a course for dumping students who did not pass their intended course of study. Thus, most secondary school students think it is a waste of time studying it (myproject.com.ng). In second language acquisition and pedagogy, the extent to how much learners’ attitudes towards learning a second language affects their overall ability to learn that second language has been a soaring debate for nearly half a century (Brianna 2012). Several scholars have agreed that motivation is the key factor for success in language acquisition (Clement, 1980; Dornyel, 1998; Tremblay and Gardner, 1995; Deci and Ryan, 1985). For these groups of scholars, students with a high level of motivation will be more successful. Therefore, it is not surprising that here in Nigeria students’ attitude to the study of the French language is very poor or low because the society’s attitude does not motivate them to study the subject – French. Motivation and attitude go hand in hand. This is buttressed by Brianna (2012), who declared that motivation is one of the most important out of the many facets that affect the success of acquisition in reaching competency in the target language achievement. According to Gardner et al. (1992), second language learner motivation is “operationally defined in terms of a composite of variables including measures of integrative attitudes towards the learning situation and motivation.” However, in a research carried out by Wright (1999) on grammar and secondary school students in Ireland based on learner motivation and perceptions of the French language to determine three factors affecting student motivation: attitudes towards foreign language, attitudes towards foreign culture, and perceived influences on those attitudes. Using student-centered surveys, the results implied that cultural generalizations and stereotyped gleaned from media, family, friends, and personal experiences are, in fact, less of a factor in foreign language motivation.

Several scholars have discussed the use of instructional materials in the effective implementation of French language curriculum (Mahant 2017). Instructional materials such as textbooks, workbooks, picture books, tape recorders, televisions/VCD, computers, and etcetera are some of the instructional materials needed in the effective teaching of the language. In the study of Tar (2012), carried out in South West of Nigeria, it was revealed that there is a problem of inadequate teaching aids such as lack of teaching text, lack of teaching aids and old teaching gadgets for the effective teaching of the French language. They were teaching aids, according to Iluromi (2016), help to overcome the French language barrier and get right to the heart of meaning. Therefore, according to Iluromi (2016), Nigerian schools administration should make provisions for teaching aids so that teachers can enhance the effective teaching of the French. In the study of Tar (2012), the findings also revealed that the availability of physical resources significantly affected the performance of students in French language. However, the findings of Kurdzioleck (2011), who examined classroom resources and their influence on learning in Texas, USA claimed that educationists and policymakers believed that by providing more resources they could improve students’ learning outcomes. To their frustration, however this turned out not to be entirely true as resources themselves are not self-enacting. In other words, they do not make change inevitable, and differences in their effects depend on differences in their use.

A good teaching method is the one that implies relevant and visible training values which shall motivate students and make them academically upright (Gupta 2017). Teaching method can best be defined as the type of principle and methods used for instruction. There are many types of teaching methods, depending on what information or skill the teacher is trying to convey. Class participation, demonstration, recitation and memorization are some of the teaching methods used. It has been asserted that regular poor academic performance by the majority of students is fundamentally linked to application of ineffective teaching methods by teachers to impact knowledge (Adunola 2011). According to Ayeni (2011), teaching is a process that involves bringing about desirable changes in learners so as to achieve specific outcomes.

Asikhia (2010), opined that qualification of teachers and students environment factor do not influence students’ poor performance but teachers’ method of teaching influence poor academic performance. In fact, several studies conducted on teaching method in many parts of the world have demonstrated that teaching methods impact students’

performance. For instance, Haas (2012), also agreed that teaching methods used in schools have an impact on students' performance.

The study of Kitti (2014), carried out on Tanzanian public secondary school students revealed that teachers seem not to be aware of the value and impact of different teaching methods on students' performance. This actually seems to be true as this researcher from experience has seen that most of the French language teachers use the traditional conventional method which is teacher-centered as against the functional national approach which is student-centered as it involves the students speaking the language, rather than just listening and writing which is the traditional/conventional method (Alufohai, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Students' attitude towards the French language in Nigeria is very poor. To worsen this challenge is the fact that society seems not to be interested in the subject despite its obvious importance and place in the economic and social development of the country-Nigeria. Most of the students who offer the subject at the Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination (JSSCE) level never proceed to study it at the senior secondary school level. More worrisome is the fact that there is this general impression that the performance rating of French acquired in secondary schools does not match with the learners' practical linguistic and communicative competence outside the school system (Simire 2002). This is actually the true state of French in Nigeria. Concerned scholars like Igonor (2011) Ayeomoni (2012), Alufohai (2017) have looked at the problem of inadequate instructional materials and personal, inadequate hours of contacts between students and teachers in a week, inadequate teaching methods and approaches etcetera. In spite of all these studies and several others, the problem persists. It is against this background that this research decided to bridge the gap by predicting the attitude of secondary school students on factors such as the society values attached to the French, lack of instructional materials and methods of teaching towards the French language at the junior secondary school level.

Hypotheses

1. Societal value attachment does not significantly predict attitude of junior secondary school students towards the French language.
2. Lack of instructional material does not significantly predict attitude of junior secondary school students towards the French language.
3. Method of teaching does not significantly predict attitude of junior secondary school students towards the French language.

Methodology

The correlational survey design was adopted for this study. The reason for choosing this design is because it is based on obtaining information from the respondents' so as to determine the relationship between variables. The population of the study consists of all the six thousand five hundred and thirty-four (6534) public junior secondary school students in Oredo Local Government area of Edo State. The sample for the study is 600 public junior secondary school students in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo state. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the 600 students.

The instrument for the collection of data for this study was a questionnaire by the researcher and, it is titled Attitude of Students towards French Language Questionnaire (ASFLQ). The questionnaire is made up of three sections. Section A consists of demographic variables such as the name of the school, gender, age, class. Section B covers four subsets ranging from A – D, which is on the issues of the subject matter. A to C in section B covers the predictors of French language and have four items each while section D covers attitude towards French language as a subject. Section D is made up of 10 items. The entire section B of the instrument is based on the four-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The face and content validity of the instrument was carried out by four experts, two experts from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty of Education, Ambrose Alli University and two experts from the Department of Modern Languages, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. The test-retest reliability procedure was adopted in determining the reliability of the instrument. The instrument (ASFLQ) was trial tested on a group of thirty junior secondary school students in Esan West Local Government Area of Edo State. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) statistics were used

to correlate the data to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.79.

Results

Hypothesis One

Societal value attachment does not significantly predict attitude of junior secondary school students towards the French language.

Table 1: ANOVA table of societal value attached to French on students attitude towards French language.

Sources	Sum of square	df	Mean Square	F	Significant
Regression	2550.667	1	2550.667	127.484	0.000
Residual	3961.528	598	20.008		
Total	6512.195	599			

=0.05

- a. Predictor: Societal value attached to the French language
- b. Dependent variable: students' attitude towards the French language

Table 1 shows that the linear regression F-value of 127.484 and a P-value of 0.000. testing at an alpha level of 0.05, the P-value is less than the alpha level. However, the null hypothesis which states that societal value attached to the French language does not significantly predict attitude of junior secondary school students towards the French language is rejected. Consequently, societal value attached to the French language significantly predicts the attitude of students towards the French language.

Hypothesis Two

Lack of instructional materials does not significantly predict attitude of junior secondary school students towards the French language.

Table 2: ANOVA table of lack of instructional materials on students' attitude towards the French language.

Sources	Sum of square	df	Mean Square	F	Significant
Regression	2546.389	1	2546.389	127.33	0.000
Residual	3965.806	598	20.029		

= 0.05

- a. Predictor: Lack of instructional materials.
- b. Dependent variable: Students attitude towards French language.

Table 2 shows that the linear regression F value of 127.133 and a P value of 0.000. testing at an alpha level of 0.05, the P value is less than the alpha level. So, the null hypothesis which states that "lack of instructional materials does not significantly predict attitude of secondary school students towards French language is rejected. Consequently, lack of instructional materials significantly predict students' attitude towards French language.

Hypothesis Three

Methods of teaching does not significantly predict attitude of junior secondary school students towards French language.

Table 3: ANOVA table of methods of teaching on attitude towards French language.

Sources	Sum of square	df	Mean Square	F	Significant
Regression	2628.895	1	2528.895	125.705	0.000
Residual	3983.300	598	20.118		
Total	6612.195	599			

= 0.05

- a. Predictors: Methods of teaching
- b. Dependent variable: Students attitude towards the French language

Table 3 shows the linear regress F-value of 125.705 and P-value of 0.000 testing at an alpha level of 0.05, the P-value is less than the alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that the method of teaching does not significantly predicts attitude of junior secondary school students towards the French language is rejected. Consequently, method of teaching significantly predict attitude of students towards French language.

Discussion of Results

From the analysis of data, societal value influence significantly predicts the attitude of students towards the French language. This is line with Brianna (2012), who declared that motivation of students is one of the most important of the many facets that affect the success of acquisition in reaching competency in the target language to language achievement. Motivation and attitude, no doubt go hand in hand. A student positively motivated will have to perform better than a student negatively motivated. The second findings of this study show that a lack of instructional material significantly influences students to attitude towards the French language. This finding is in agreement with Illuromi (2016), who declared that instructional materials help to overcome the French language barrier and get right to the heart of meaning. The finding of the study is also in agreement with Tar (2012), whose finding revealed that the availability of physical resource significantly affected the performance of students in the French language. However, the finding of this study is at variance with that of Kurdzioleck (2011), who opined that teaching resources themselves are not self-enacting as they do not make change inevitable, and differences in their effect depend of differences in their use. However, we see it, this researcher feels that the teaching of the French will go a long way to positively change students' attitude towards French language in secondary schools. Lastly, the study found the method of teaching significantly predicts the attitude of students toward the French language. This is in agreement with Gupta (2017), who opined that a good teaching method is the one that implies relevant and visible training values which shall motivate students and make them academically upright. Adunola (2011), declared that regular poor academic performance of students is fundamentally linked to the application of ineffective teaching methods by teachers to impact knowledge.

Conclusion

This study has thus revealed some important factors that should be considered when the issue of students performance is the French is at stake. The value placed attached/ attached by the society on French language is something teachers, and the government/policymakers should take into consideration while trying to improve the students' performance in this subject. Also, factors such as adequate instructional method should be considered as they predict on student attitude towards the French language.

Recommendations

Based on the finding, it is therefore recommended that:

1. The government should put in place a national programme to sensitize the citizenry on the importance of the French language on the social and economic development of Nigeria.
2. Since the communication competency is one of the main problems of the students, teachers should as a matter of policy, teach French language employing the learner-centered methods that will make students participate/speak the language in class. In other words, the traditional grammar-translation method should be replaced with the functional notional approach, which is student centered.
3. The government should, as a matter of urgency invest in procuring instructional materials for the teaching of the French language in secondary schools as this will make the teaching and learning of the subject look real and interesting.

References

- Adunola, O. (2011). The impact of teacher teaching method on academic performance of primary school pupils in Ijebu-Ode local government area of Ogun State, Nigeria. Ijebu Ode: Ego Booster Books.
- Alufohai, P.J. and Abu, E.O. (2016). French language education in Nigeria: Issues and challenges. In E.O. Omoregie & B.O. Jimoh (Eds.), *Education and best practices in the 21st century: A book of reading*. Lagos: AMFITOP Books.
- Alufohai, P.J., (2017). Effects of grammar-translation method on teaching of French in junior secondary school in Edo state, Nigeria in J.A.T. Bewaji, K.W. Harrow, E.E. Omozejie & C.E. Ukhun (Eds.). *The humanities and the dynamics of African culture in the 21st century*. UK: Cambridge scholars publishing.
- Asikhia, O.A. (2010). Student and teachers perception of the causes of poor academic performance in Ogun state secondary schools; implications for counseling for national development. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 13(2), 229-242.
- Ayeni, A.J. (2011). Teachers' professional development and quality assurance in Nigerian secondary schools. *World Journal of Education*, 1(2), 143 - 149.
- Ayeomoni, M.D. (2012). The language in Nigerian socio-political domains: Features and functions. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 5(10), 12 – 19.
- Bartram, B. (2010). *Attitudes to language: Insights from comparative education*. London: Continuum.
- Brianna, J. (2012). Motivation and attitudes towards learning French in foreign language classrooms. An unpublished master's degree thesis submitted to Southern Illinois University Carbondale.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a global language* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deci, E.L. & Ryan, R.M. (1985). Self-determination theory of motivation. Retrieved from <https://principlesoflearning.wordpress.com>
- Dornyei, Z. (1998). Motivation in second and foreign language teaching. *Language Teaching*, 31, 117-135.
- Dyers, C. (1998). Xhosa students' attitude towards black South African languages at the University of Western Cape. *South African Journal of African Languages*, 19(2), 73-83.
- Dykstra, J. (2018). I have studied five languages over the course of my career. What is language teaching? Retrieved from <https://www.quora.com>.
- Eno – Abasi, S. & Ujunwa, A. (2016). Nigeria: A case for French as a Second Official Language. *The Guardian Newspaper*. Retrieved from <https://m.guardian.ng>
- Federal Government of Nigeria. (2013). *National Policy of Education*. Abuja: NERDC.
- Gupta, P. (2017). Study of the effect of teaching method on the academic achievement of school going children of semi-urban area secondary schools of Lucknow City. *International Journal of Home Science*, 3(2), 447 – 453.
- Haas, M.S. (2002). The influence of teaching methods on student achievement. Unpublished Research dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia polytechnic institute and University. Retrieved from <https://www.coursehero.com/file/Haas>
- Hudson – Ross, S. & Mcwhoter, P. (1996). Going back/looking in: A teacher educator and high school teacher explore beginning teaching together. *English Journal*, 84(2), 46-54.

- Igonor, J. (2011). Quality assurance in the training of teachers of French as a second language in the Nigerian colleges of Education. *The Nigerian Teacher Today*. Abuja NCCE.
- Iluromi, P.B. (2016). The use of teaching aids in the teaching of French as a foreign language. *Nigerian Journal of Linguistics and Literature Studies*, 4(2), 105 – 108.
- Kitti, M.R. (2014). Effect of teaching methods on students' performance in Tanzanian Education Institution: A case of public Secondary Schools in Nyamagana district – Mwanza. A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Human Resource Management of the Open University of Tanzania.
- Mahant, P. (2017). What is language teaching? Retrieved from <https://www.quora.com>
- Olayiwola, J.K. (2015). Teaching and learning of French language in colleges of education in Oyo State. *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3(2), 120-127
- Salta, K. & Tzougraki, C. (2004). Attitudes towards Chemistry among 11th Grade students in Greece. *Science Education*, 88, 353-547.
- Simire, A.B. (2002). "Le francais de Specialite a l' Universite: Un Atout de Travail." In *AGORA Journal of Foreign Language Studies* 2, 139-157.
- Suleiman, B.G. & Ibrahim I.K. (2017). Problems of teaching French language in Nigeria. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Public Policy, Social Development and Enterprise Studies*, 2(1). Retrieved from www.intrenationalpolicybrif.org>ARPP
- Tar, M. (2011). Percieved problems associated with French language learning among secondary school students in Nigeria. *Journal of Functional Management, Lead City University, Ibadan*, 4 (1), 58-63.
- Tar, M., (2012). Comprehensive Analysis of perception of teachers on challenges of teaching translation in Nigerian universities. In F.A. Soyoye & S. Maganja (eds). *Current Issues in Translation Studies in Nigeria*, Hannover, pages 103 – 111.
- The status of French in the world. <https://www.diplomatic.gouv.fr>
- Tremblay, P.F. & Gardner, R.C. (1998). Examning the motivation construct in language learning. *Modern Language Journal*, 79(4), 505 – 520. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/330002>
- Wamalma, E.W. (2013). Multilingualism and language attitude: Students perception towards Kiswahili in Mtwara region of Tanzania. *Research in Humanities and social Sciences*.
- Wright, M. (1999). Influences on learner attitudes towards foreign language and Culture Educational Research, 41(2), 197 – 208.