

**Learning French as a second language: A case of
selected primary schools in Awka South L.G.A.,
Anambra State**

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Abstract

This study is based on learning French as a second official language and its challenges in selected primary schools in Awka South Local Government Area (L.G.A.) of Anambra State, Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique is used to sample 150 pupils in Basic 3-6 and 7 teachers of French in the area. Questionnaire which has twenty-four items is used for the data collection and further analyzed based on the research questions. The findings of the study show that contrary to the expectations of the National Policy on Education (NPE) 2008 for the adoption and inculcation of French in the 9-year basic Education curriculum, there are numerous challenges such as inadequate number of trained teachers of French, poor teaching methods, lack of teaching and learning resources, and lack of quality

background in the French language. We therefore, conclude that the status of French as a second official language in Nigeria will not improve unless the government makes conscientious efforts in order to provide human and material resources needed such as automatic employment of qualified French graduates, adequate funding of French Education, provision of instructional and infrastructural facilities, as well as organizing interschool French competitions backed up with awards in Primary and Secondary.

Introduction

Language is very dynamic and closely intertwined with human nature. Learning a language is learning the behaviour of a given society and its cultural values as one cannot learn a language that is devoid of culture. Language is a product of the thought and behaviour of a society. An individual's effectiveness in a second language is directly related to his/her understanding of the culture of that language. Therefore, language is part of culture and through it, we can express cultural beliefs and values. Guessabi (2017) argues that, culture is a language in itself. Language is obviously a vital tool not only as a means of communicating thoughts and ideas, but it also forges friendships, cultural ties, and economic relationships. It is evident that knowledge in the language is relevant to the socio-cultural practices of any linguistic community. Research into foreign language

acquisition over the past few decades has repeatedly come up with two main findings. First, foreign language acquisition is highly systematic, as shown by the acquisition sequences learners from different first language (L1) backgrounds go through when acquiring a given foreign language (L2). Second, SLA is highly variable, as evidenced by the widely different levels of proficiency reached by foreign language learners, Myles (2004).

The NPE on French language stipulates the necessity of French language to Nigerians as most of her neighbours are Francophone nations. In West Africa, it is a major language of science, commerce, industry, diplomacy and technology, hence, it becomes pertinent that school pupils have the privilege to learn French right from the inception of Basic 1. With this policy the government intends that Nigerians will have the right to take up their rightful positions in the international organisations such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), Interpol and others. This shows that the policy makers are aware of the need for the learning of French language.

As a result of the above, the departments of French in the Universities and Colleges of Education across Nigeria were created with the aim of increasing the number of trained teachers of French language for the lower and upper basic levels of education and our

tertiary institutions. Even though there have been improvements in the patronage of the French Language over the years at the various levels of education in Nigeria, there are several challenges that limit the efforts of Nigerian government in promoting the study of French in the country. Nigerians in general and students at all levels of education in particular frequently view the French language as a challenge, a difficult subject. It is still observed that enrolment figures at all levels of education remain abysmally low, Amah (2009). Owoeye (2010) observes that the shortage of French teachers have direct bearing on the quality of teaching and learning of French. The inadequate teaching and learning materials affect the quality of French taught to students in most schools, especially at the rural areas.. According to Galadi (2008), there is inadequate teaching and learning materials available at most training colleges and universities. Most schools, even tertiary institutions lack basic teaching and learning resources including well equipped language laboratories, multi-media equipment and textbooks to encourage, promote the study of the French language. Also, the challenge of inadequate number of trained teachers in French remains a serious concern to government and state holders in education. Galadi (2008) observes that there is ample evidence that there is a real shortage of teachers of French in public and private primary schools in Nigeria.

Many public and private primary schools do not have French teachers and as a result, they do not offer the subject. The reasons for lack of French teachers and the French language learning at all levels of education relate to limited numbers opting to study French at colleges of education and Universities. This low patronage is partly due to trainee teacher's fear that French is a difficult language and as a result they may not be able to cope with the subject. However, the performance of pupils in French at terminal examination (Primary six) remains abysmally low (Odewumi 2009). Lack of adequate funding of French language education has continued to militate against the study of French in public and private primary schools in Nigeria. Generally, the budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria has continued to dwindle. Adequate funding of education and the French language in particular is one of the ways of maintaining standard and quality in teaching and learning of French language. Dauladi (2005) asserts that due to inadequate allocation of funds to teaching and the learning of French; facilities and materials provided are obsolete or not provided at all. As a result, teachers are not sufficiently trained in the subject. According to Okeke (1999), non-availability of required French textbooks, journals and magazines hamper effective teaching of French language in primary schools. He said that textbooks that would aid effective discussion of French concepts, ideas, including student's exposure to

European socio-cultural experiences are not in appreciable quantity.

The study has many significant dimensions. It will provide information and data on the challenges of learning French in the primary schools and it will also suggest recommendations which if implemented will result in more effective teaching and learning of French as a second language to primary school pupils. It is also believed that future researchers will find this study, a valuable source of literature. It is expected that the findings will stimulate more studies in this area especially towards the actualization of having French as a second official language in Nigeria.

Methodology

The research design for this study is Survey. The researchers choose the design because it seeks to obtain information that described existing phenomena by asking questions on the topic of study through the questionnaire. A sample of 150 primary school pupils (Basic 3 – 6) and 7 teachers were used for the study. The pupils were selected through purposive sampling technique.

Table 1: Primary schools used as sample for the study

S/N	NAMES OF SCHOOLS	NO OF TEACHERS	NO OF PUPILS
1	Agulu-Awka	1	20

	Primary School, Awka		
2	Union Primary School, Nibo	1	20
3	Igwedimma Primary School, Amawbia	2	30
4	Udodimma Primary School, Okpuno	1	20
5	Udeozo Primary School, Awka	2	60
	Total	7	150

Questionnaire is the major instrument for data collection. The questionnaire consists of Sections A and B. Section 'A' seeks information on the personal data of the pupils while Section 'B' is designed to get information from the pupils and teachers based on learning French language as a second language. A total of 157 questionnaires were given out to these schools. Also, the questions require the respondents to choose the appropriate variable. The variables include;

YES

NO

UNDECIDED

The data is analyzed based on the responses extracted from the questionnaires. In other words, the percentage of the variable is gotten by multiplying the variables with 100 and dividing them with the number of the sample size. Below is an instance of how the variables are calculated

Do you love speaking French?

Total responses/sample size * 100

$$\text{YES} = 56/150 * 100 = 37.3\%$$

$$\text{NO} = 92/150 * 100 = 61.3\%$$

$$\text{UNDECIDED} = 75/150 * 100 = 50\%$$

The variable includes Yes, No, and Undecided. However, the percentage of each variable is calculated in order to ascertain or to determine which challenge is prominent and prevailing in learning French as a second language

Data Presentation and analysis

The collated data was mainly in two forms. Questionnaire was given to the selected pupils and also to the selected teachers. As such, the presentation will be in two sub-sections. The first sub-section presents the data collated from the pupils, while the second sub-section simply presents the data collated from the teachers.

Data from the pupils

1) How old are you?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
5 – 7	40	26.66%
8 – 10	80	53.34%
11 – 13	30	20%
Total	150	100

2) What class are you?

Variable	Frequency	Distribution
Primary 3 – 4	116	77.34%
Primary 5 – 6	34	22.66%
Total	150	100%

3) What is your first language?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Igbo	121	80.67%
English	29	19.33%
French	0	0
Total	150	100%

4) What is your second language?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Igbo	91	60.67%
English	21	14%
French	38	27.17%

Total	150	100%
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From the tables, 1-4 above, we have the following records;

1. The ages of the pupils consulted are between the ages 5 to 10. 53.34% of the pupils are within the ages 8-10, while 22.66% are within the ages 5-7 and 20% are within the ages of 11-13.
2. About 77% of the respondents are in primary 3-4, while 22% are in primary 5-6.
3. 80% of the respondents speak Igbo as their first language, while 19% speak English as their first language
4. 60% speak English as their second language, while 27% and 13% speak Igbo, with French as their foreign languages.

5) What is your third language?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Igbo	5	3.33%
English	25	16.64%
French	120	80%
Total	150	100%

6) Do you love learning French in the classroom?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	109	72.66%

No	11	7.34%
Undecided	30	20%
Total	150	100%

7) Do you love to communicate using French?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	122	81.33%
No	20	13.34%
Undecided	08	5.33%
Total	150	100%

8) Do you speak French at home?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	72	48%
No	58	38.64%
Undecided	20	13.33%
Total	150	100%

From tables, 5 – 8, we determined how often the pupils communicated in French?

5. Over 80% of the respondents speak French as their foreign language. This has the implication that the Igbo is dominantly the first language, English is dominantly the second language, while French is also dominantly the foreign language.
6. About 72% of the pupils indicated that they love to learn French in the classroom.

7. Over 80% of the pupils affirmed that they love to communicate in French with their friends.
8. Over 13% of the pupils indicated that they sometimes try to communicate with French at home while over 48% do not use French in communication at home.
- 9) How many French teachers do you have in your school?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
One	137	91.34%
Two	13	8.66%
Three and above	0	0%
Total	150	100%

- 10) How do you feel when you are in a French class?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Happy	20	13.33%
Sad	42	28%
Indifferent	88	58.67%
Total	150	100%

- 11) How often do you answer questions in French classes?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
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Frequently	64	42.67%
Rarely	56	37.33%
Undecided	30	20%
Total	150	100%

12) Do you love the methods your French teacher uses in the class?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	42	28%
No	94	62.67%
Undecided	14	9.33%
Total	150	100%

Tables 9 – 12 are used to handle the issue around teachers and methodology used for the pupils, we were able to deduce the following;

9. 91% of the pupils have just one French teacher. This is compared to about less than 9% that have two teachers. None actually has more than two French teachers across the schools.
10. Over 13% of the pupils feel happy when they are in a French class, 28% feel sad while 58% are indifferent.
11. Over 42% of the pupils frequently answer questions in French classes. This is compared with the more than 37% of pupils who rarely answer questions in French classes.

12. Only 28% of the pupils indicated that they love the method of teaching used by their teachers while over 62% do not.

- 13) Rate your performance in French

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	91	60%
Fair	35	23.34%
Poor	24	16%
Total	150	100%

- 14) Which one do you find more difficult?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Writing French	20	13.33%
Speaking French	63	42%
Both	51	34%
None	16	10.67%
Total	150	100%

Tables 13 and 14 show their overall performance in the study of French, and here we arrived at the following;

13. Over 60% pupils rated themselves 'Excellent' on their performance in French while over 23% rated themselves 'Fair' and 16% 'Poor'

14. About 42% of the students find it difficult to read French textbooks, while 34% find it difficult to speak and 10% find it difficult to speak and read French at any level.

Data from selected teachers

As already stated, a total of 7 teachers were selected for the study, and all of them duly returned the distributed questionnaire.

- 15) How many years have you been teaching French?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
One month-one year	4	57%
2 – 4 years	2	29%
More than 4 years	1	14%
Total	7	100%

- 16) How many classes do you teach?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
One class	0	0
Two	3	42%

classes		
More than 2 classes	4	58%
Total	7	100%

17) Do you hold any administrative position in the school?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	4	57%
No	2	29%
May be	1	14%
Total	7	100%

The response from the teachers as it concerns their engagement in the teaching of French language and other responsibilities at school is summarized below;

15. The data indicates that over 57% of the teachers have less than two years teaching experience.
 16. More than 58% of the teachers teach more than two classes in there.
 17. 17.57% teachers indicated that they also hold other administrative positions in the school.
- 18) Apart from French textbooks, which other teaching materials do you use?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Magazines	1	14%

Visual player	0	0
Audio player	1	14%
None	5	72%
Total	7	100%

- 19) Which language do you use to interpret French to the pupils in the class?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
English	4	57%
Igbo	2	29%
English and Igbo	1	14%
Total	7	100%

- 20) Which teaching method do you think is better to adopt when teaching French?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Speaking on French	0	0
Grammar translation	3	42%
Communication and task-based approach	4	58%
Total	7	100%

- 21) How do pupils feel when you teach them French?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
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Excited	2	20%
Boring	1	14%
Sad	08	5.33%
Total	150	100%

18. Apart from textbook, over 72% of the teachers affirmed that they don't have any other teaching materials to use in their French classes.
 19. Over 58% of the teachers think that communication and task-based approach is a better teaching method than grammar translation.
 20. Over 57% of the teachers use English to translate French while teaching. This is against the fact that over 80% of the pupils speak Igbo as their first language. In other words, this would have been a situation where the pupils' first language is used to translate the French. The use of second language to translate foreign language for children below 11 years is a negative sign for adequate acquisition of the French language.
 21. Only 29% of the teachers indicated that pupils are excited when the teach French while over 43% indicated that the pupils act indifferent.
- 22) What motivates you while teaching French?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Incentives	4	57%
Availability of	2	29%

teaching materials		
Enrolling more pupils	1	14%
Total	7	100%

- 23) What do you think makes the pupils to have loathsome attitude towards the learning of French?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of Interest	2	29%
Weak background in French	4	57%
Teaching methods	1	14%
Total	7	100%

- 24) Can changing of governmental policies towards teaching of French in schools in Nigeria serve as a solution to the challenges faced by pupils that acquire French as foreign language in the classroom?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	2	29%
No	1	14%
May be	4	57%

Total	7	100%
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From Tables 22-24, teachers expressed their feelings and what they think could be done to enhance the teaching of French language in the primary schools as follows;

22. 57% of the teachers indicated that incentives are their motivation whereas 29% of the teachers feel motivated when there's availability of teaching materials.
23. 57% of the teachers affirm that weak background in French is one of the main reasons children have loathsome attitude towards the acquisition of French. This finding further requires the need to look into the economic value of French in Nigeria and why many parents do not encourage their children to learn French the way they learn the English language.
24. More than 57% of the teachers believe that changing certain governmental policies towards the use of French in Nigeria may improve the pupils' attitude towards the acquisition and learning of French.

Highlights

Three basic questions apply in expressing the highlights of this study:

- 1) What are the challenges of learning French as a foreign language by primary school pupils?

As evident, the pupils in the schools are enthusiastic about the introduction of the French language but the number of available teachers, qualification, methodology, instructional materials and work load cannot match with the staff to student ratio. This has a lot of negative impacts on the achievement of French as the second official language in Nigeria.

- 2) What aspect of the language is more difficult in learning French as a foreign language in primary school?

Phonology stands out as the aspect of language that is more difficult for the pupils. This is based on the fact that the sound system of French is totally different from their native and first official language. And it is quite obvious when they pronounce French words such as *père* ‘father’, rather than producing [r] the pupils produced the plain [r], in producing *je* ‘I’, and *jardin* ‘garden’ pupils substituted the sound [dʒ] for [ʒ], for *faim* ‘hunger’, the sound [æ] was used instead of [ɛ̃], lastly in reciting the days of the week, the pupils produced [ã], instead of [œ̃], in *lundi* ‘Monday’.

- 3) What are the measures to put in place for effective learning of French language as a foreign language by primary school pupils?

The measures that should be adopted in tackling these challenges remain prominent in this study. From the analysis of the questions 9, 15, 22 and 24, the measures that should be adopted for the effective learning of French as a foreign language include:

- Firstly, there is massive low number of French teachers across the schools. Hence, efforts should be put in place in recruiting more French teachers.
- Secondly, the training and re-training of teachers teaching French language across the schools should be adopted. This will enable the French teachers to be creative and adopt good approach and appropriate methods in teaching the pupils.
- Thirdly, the provision of infrastructures and learning resources such as textbook, magazines, audio-visual and audio materials, internet facilities, computers and adequate budgetary allocation to educational sector will improve the teaching and learning of French at all levels of education in Nigeria.
- Fourthly, improving the educational policy towards French language will also aid immensely in learning French as a foreign language.

- Lastly, organizing interschool competitions in French. This will make pupils more interested in learning the language and also enlighten them on the economic value of French in Nigeria. This will encourage them to learn French the way they learn English language

Conclusion

This study is based on the challenges of learning French as a second language by primary school pupils. Despite seeking to adopt French as a second official language in Nigeria in accordance with NPE 2008, there are many challenges that militate from achieving this goal. We pointed out the importance of French language, its benefits in the world, the current challenges of learning the French language and how the identified problems would be tackled in order to ensure the effective learning of French language. Some of the teachers who teach French in the public primary schools are professionally qualified but lack the pedagogical skills, the commitment and practical orientation required for effective teaching of the language which is very pertinent. Moreover the teaching of French in primary schools requires the use of specialized materials, equipment, and laboratories. Problems identified which are encountered by the pupils during the acquisition of the French language can be tackled if schools recruit more qualified teachers which will improve the learning standard of French. The

government changing the educational policy towards learning of French as well as allotting proper incentives for the French teachers is highly recommended. This could be achieved by increasing the budgetary allocation to the education sector. There is need for collaboration with foreign based educational institutions for effective learning of the French language in primary schools. Healthy competition in French language is also very much encouraged.

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