

Attitudes of Undergraduate Students to the Study of French Language as a General Study Course in Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the attitudes of undergraduate students to the study of French language as a general study course in Nigerian tertiary institutions using Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria as a case study. A total of 200 undergraduate students of this university constitute the sample for this study. The research adopted descriptive research design of survey type. The results show that area of specialization has influence on attitudes of students towards French language. Also, there is no significant difference between the male and female undergraduate students' attitude towards French language. The results further revealed that there is a significant difference in students' attitudes and the knowledge of French language. It is recommended that the Government should make French language compulsory in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria as part of efforts to make Nigeria English-French bilingual nation.

Key words: Undergraduate students; French language; Attitude

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INTRODUCTION

An attitude could be described as an expression of favour or disfavour towards a person, place, thing or event.

The concept of attitude is traceable to the field of social psychology. It is highly distinct and indispensable concept in this field of socio psychology. It has been a subject of debate among experts in the field of socio psychology. Attitude could be further described as a positive or negative evaluation of people, objects, event, activities and ideas. It is debatable to say that attitude is deliberately formed or comes from human subconscious. Thus, there are explicit and implicit types of attitude. However, there is no consensus of opinion among experts on this issue of explicit and implicit attitude. It is controversial to affirm that people from multiple attitudes in certain situation or circumstances. Attitude could be formed unconsciously or consciously and these two discernible attitudes i.e explicit and implicit attitude do affect people's behaviour. Attitude could also be rational or irrational. Rational attitude subdivides into the thinking and feeling psychological functions while irrational attitude subdivides into the sensing and intuition psychological functions. It is highly difficult to measure attitude directly because attitudes are hypothetical construct that cannot be observed directly. However, attitude can be measured through direct and indirect measures.

In most cases, attitudes we hold are mostly learned. Many theories attest to this fact which includes theories of classical conditioning, instrumental conditioning and social learning. Attitude as compared with personality is subject to change due to experience and persuasion.

The National universities commission, an organ established by the federal Government of Nigeria to regulate the running of universities in Nigeria, conceived the idea of general studies (GES) as a veritable programme designed to expose undergraduate student to a wide range of general, non-specialty courses which are carefully designed to widen their knowledge base beyond the narrow confines of their specialization areas (Olajire, 2009). The primary aim of the general studies programme is to produce graduates that are versatile and

knowledgeable in diverse field of study in preparation for the challenges of the job market after graduation from the universities. A large number of universities in Nigeria implement the general studies programme in their various universities with all sense of strictness and it is a determining factor in admitting as graduates in various classes of degree. A good number of undergraduate students failed to graduate in various field of study due to their failure to measure up to expectation in the general studies courses. This is to buttress the point that general studies programme is a force to be reckoned with in the quest to obtain a university degree. Use of English features most often on the general study programme virtually in all universities in Nigeria. This is in view of the fact that English language is the lingua franca in Nigeria and the official language of administration in Nigeria. Making English language one of the courses on the general studies programme is traceable to our colonial experience under the British colonial rule where English language was imposed on us as a language of colonial administration. Apart from the fact that English language is one of the courses on the general studies programme, it is also a requirement for admission into any tertiary institution in Nigeria. However, the inclusion of French language into the general studies programmes in some private universities in Nigeria is a welcome development in the tertiary education in Nigeria. This boils down to the fact that Nigerian graduate need be competent in a foreign language such as French in order to boost their chances of securing a job in the labour market that is already saturated. Adebayo (2009) states that the inclusion of the French language among the list of foundation courses offered in Ajayi Crowther is not by chance. It is borne out of the need to afford students the opportunity to acquire necessary competence in the basic skills in French. The course in proficiency in French in this university incorporates various topics such as basic French grammar, French and francophone literature, phonetics and phonology, French and African literature, French and francophone civilization and French for specific purposes. The curriculum content of this course is comprehensive and wide enough to make the students become versatile and bilingual citizens capable of communicating in both English and French which are the two recognizable languages of international communication and diplomacy.

The status of French language in Nigeria questionable and controversial, considering the wide gap between policy statement and policy implementation of the laudable idea of making French language the second official language in Nigeria. Professor Evans, the first professor of French in Nigeria dealt a terrible blow on the status of French in Nigeria in his provocative and insightful article "Does everybody need French" published in 1972. The claim of this revered erudite scholar in the field of French language in Nigeria is genuine and

veracious judging by the deficient motivational and learning environment coupled with inadequacies in the physical and material resources meant for the teaching and learning of French language (Ade Ojo, 2006).

Nigeria as the most populated black nation of the world has been identified as the least advanced of all the West African countries in terms of the development in the teaching of French language. Nigeria is densely populated, intellectually and materially endowed but it is quite unfortunate that the implementation of French language as the second official language still suffers tremendous setback most especially when the country is thriving to be one of the twenty most developed nations in 2015. The declaration of French language as the second official language by general Sanni Abacha in 1996 has been characterized by an attempt by then military head of state to pursue a selfish goal and personal agenda. The declaration came at the time when the country, Nigeria, suffered stiff diplomatic penalty. The image of the country at the international community had been soiled through the dictatorial and inhuman tendency of the then military government in power which made Nigeria unpopular at the international scene. The declaration of French as the second official language is an attempt to redeem the image of Nigeria at the international community and geared towards winning the support of the francophone community that sees French language as a common heritage. Adejo (2006) states that irrespective of the criticism melted out to the position of Abacha in making French as the second official language in Nigeria, the decision is a welcome development and it is a pointer to the fact that French has come to stay and it is a language that will serve as an instrument of unity and a tool for global partnership among nations of the world. He further states that French language is considered a blessing to Nigeria and Nigerians in general. The blessings inherent in the language should not be limited to a restricted section of the Nigeria population it must be all encompassing. However, it could be inferred from the earlier discussion that French is needed by the entire Nigeria citizenry for global and international alignment and communication.

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The resultant effect of poor policy implementation, lack of strong political will and the influence of the past colonial experience led to the adoption of English language as the sole official language in Nigeria to the detriment of French language. French language is yet to be made compulsory in all tertiary institutions in spite of its status as a second official language in Nigeria. However, all tertiary institutions in Nigeria offered English language compulsorily as a course in the general study programme which must be passed by all undergraduate students as one of the requirements for the award of first degree in various

fields. In line with the adoption of French language in the general study programme of the Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, this study however sets to investigate the attitudes of undergraduate students to French language in Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- a. What are the levels of undergraduate student's attitude towards French language as a general study?
- b. Does Area of Specialization have influence on attitude of students towards French Language?
- c. Is there any gender difference on the attitude of undergraduate students towards French Language?
- d. Is there any significant difference between student's attitude and knowledge of undergraduate students in French Language?

3. ATTITUDE

It has been observed that the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and metacognitive knowledge that students bring with them to the classroom is significant contributory factors in the learning process and a determinant of the ultimate success in the classroom context (Breen, 2001). In the second or foreign language learning context, there are so many phenomena that could constitute the learners' disposition towards the learning of the language in question. Some of these variables include the beliefs about the nature of the language under study, its difficulty, the process of its acquisition, the success of certain learning strategies, the existence of aptitude and the learners' expectation about achievement and teaching methodologies. These phenomena constitute a comprehensive blue-print that showcase the learners' commitment to the learning of the foreign language. It is of paramount importance to state at this juncture that identifying these factors in the context of foreign language learning situation will help the curriculum developers to incorporate the learners' characteristics into the curriculum design and implementation most especially in the area of language learning strategies and the learners' expectation in the foreign language learning. However, learners' beliefs or attitude cannot be treated in isolation with respect to the learners' success or achievement in the second or foreign language.

Mantle-Bromley (1995) suggests that if teachers attend to these affective and cognitive components of students' attitudes as well as develop dependable pedagogical techniques, they may be able to increase both the length of time students commit to language study and their chances of success in it. In the educational spheres, much attention has been focused on the cognitive domain of the learners to the detriment of the objective domain. It should be noted that learners are not puppets or dummies

that lack psychological or emotional feelings. One cannot coerce or compel learners to learn a subject if they are psychologically and emotionally disturbed and fail to exhibit any evidence of readiness to learn. Attention must be shifted to the affective domains in the foreign or second language learning if a meaningful success would be attained by the learners in foreign language class. Researchers have agreed that it is possible to discover students' attitudes and beliefs since it is particularly obvious that learners bring their attitudes to consciousness and these are well pronounced in the foreign language learning context (Willing, 1988; Kalaja, 2003; Hosenfeld, 2003; Kalaja, 2003) further suggested the use of discursive approach of social psychology to study the learner's belief claiming that this approach is more sensitive than the conventional methods of data collection. Attitudes of the learner can be easily observed in their natural state without the learners' prior knowledge of the researcher's intention to measure their attitude because attitudes of the learners in the second language learning context could be easily simulated or controlled and the learners present the caricature of their attitude. If it is measured via the normal traditional methods of data collection, students' attitudes could be changed or modified in the foreign language learning situation. Morgan (1993) suggests that four aspects of classroom persuasion should be considered in an attempt to change students' attitudes and beliefs. These aspects include.

- The learners should be actively involved in the learning content.
- The classroom enrolment should be of change or novelty.
- Students need to struggle with complex materials and reach their own conclusion.
- Students should be aware of their attitudes towards language and culture.

However, the factors that influence learners' beliefs or attitude varied from researchers to researchers. Dias (2000) identified family and home background as determinants of learners' beliefs and attitudes. Alexander and Dochy (1995) recognized the cultural background of the learners as a determinant of their beliefs while Arnold (1999) identified classroom and social peers as factors that influence the learners' beliefs or attitudes in the learning situation. Individual differences such as the gender and personality of the learners can also be a contributory factor to the learners' beliefs or influence in the foreign language context. Rifkin (2000) further corroborate the relative effect of the learners' individual differences such as personality on the learners' attitudes to foreign language learning. The researchers affirmed that the personality of the learners played significant and important roles in shaping the learners attitudes even more than phenomena such as the level of language instruction, the nature of language studied and the type of educational institution.

4. GENDER AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Kobayashi (2002) attempts to study Japanese high students' attitude towards current and long term English learning. The researcher accounted for one of the findings which established the female students' superiority in attitudes to English language learning over the male. The study emphasize the common practice of using questionnaire to discern the gender differences in attitude towards a language with the proper investigation for the factors and variables responsible for these differences. These factors are premised on Japanese social element such as the status of English language as feminised academic and professional choices and the marginalization of women in Japanese mainstream society.

Ayman Sabry Dauf- Allah (2012) conducted a research to investigate the overall beliefs of Saudi university students about learning English as a foreign language and the effect of gender on these beliefs. It was concluded that Saudi university students have positive and realistic beliefs about foreign language as regards the nature of language learning, communication strategies and motivation and expectation about learning English as a foreign language. The findings also indicate that overall males and females held similar beliefs about language learning as regards the difficulty and the nature of language learning.

However, Barton (2002) suggested that the teacher's gender is important in motivating foreign language students. Researchers in the advance countries of the world have identified the disengagement of boys from language class (Mc Gannon & Medeiro, 1995; Baker, 2002; Barton, 2002; Carr & Pauvels, 2006; Bradshaw, 2007) further supported the submission while reiterating that the preponderance of female teachers particularly in the primary schools deprived the boys of male role models and create feminized classroom environment . The scenario painted thus is making allusion to general school performance which could also be extended to foreign language learning where the larger percentage of the teachers are female teachers.

Martino and Pallota (2005) discussed the pre-occupation of researchers on gender and education which identified the major crisis in the boys' achievement and success in education generally. This could also translate to the controversy that exist between gender and second language learning

The study of other language other than one's mother-tongue should be seen as social good. Carr and Pauvels (2006) note the increasing importance of cross-cultural skills in a globalizing world and language is crucial to this. It is important for the individual and for society as a whole. There are humanist, cultural and economic advantages for individuals and societies equipped with multilingual skills. It is desirable that all students have access to language study, and that students are able to

continue to study language that interest them throughout their school career (Bradshaw, 2007).

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT OF FINDINGS

This section presents the result of findings on the student's attitude towards French language as one of the compulsory courses in the general study unit of the Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo. The summary of data analysis shall be under two sub-headings: (a) Demographic data analysis; (b) Research question, 210 questionnaires were administered while 200 were retrieved for analysis of frequency and percentage for demographic characteristic and inferential descriptive statistics of t-test and, ANOVA were used to test the result at 0.05 level of significance.

5.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1
Frequency Distribution of Socio-Demographic Characteristic

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	104	52.0
	Female	96	48.0
	Total	200	100.0%
Department	Banking & Financing	10	5.0
	Business administration	30	15.0
	Accounting	30	15.0
	English	40	20.0
	Communication & Media	2	1.0
	Economic	18	9.0
	Mass communication	22	11.0
	Geology (Earth science)	6	3.0
	Chemical science	8	4.0
	Physical science	28	14.0
	Biological science	2	1.0
	Microbiology	4	2.0
	Total	200	100.0%

Table 1 revealed Social demographic characteristics of respondents, the table revealed the frequency distribution according to sex of respondent used, the result shows that higher percentages of male as 104 (52.0%) while female were 96 (48.0%). It implies that male have higher percentage.

Furthermore, the table revealed frequency distribution according to the department of respondent used, the result shows higher percentages of English as 40 (20.0%) while Accounting and Business Administration were 30 (15.0%) respectively, while Physical Computer Science were 28 (14.0%) and Mass communication were 22 (11.0%), Economics were 18 (9.0%) and Banking and financing were 10 (5.0%), Chemical Science were 8 (4.0%), Geology (Earth Science) were 6 (3.0%) while

Microbiology were 4 (2.0%) and Communication and media studies and Biological Science were 2 (1.0%) . It implies that English department has highest percentage.

Table 2
The Level of Student Attitudes Towards French Languages

Statement	Disagree	Agree	Mean	SD
I like to study French language at all times.	46 (23.0%)	154 (77.0%)	2.87	0.89
I am always happy to be in French Language class.	26 (13.0%)	174 (87.0%)	3.19	0.75
I always feel sad when it is time to learn French language.	162 (81.0%)	38 (19.0%)	1.92	0.85
French language will add value to my future career.	22 (11.0%)	178 (89.0%)	3.27	0.86
If I have my ways I will abandon the learning of French language.	154 (77.0%)	46 (23.0%)	1.95	0.86
Learning French language amount to a waste of time.	168 (84.0%)	32 (16.0%)	1.92	0.87
I love to speak French language fluently.	51 (25.5%)	149 (74.5%)	2.99	0.98
I hardly revise my French language notes after the French class.	112 (56.0%)	88 (44.0%)	2.22	1.06
I scarcely read my French language notes except when exam approaches.	104(52.0%)	96 (48.0%)	2.41	1.10
I love people that speak French language fluently.	34 (17.0%)	166 (83.0%)	3.33	0.94
I always love to be in the company of French language speakers.	54 (27.0%)	144 (73.0%)	2.93	1.11
I study additional materials to improve my knowledge of French.	80 (40.0%)	120(60.0%)	2.60	1.13
My dislike for French language started from secondary school.	128 (64.0%)	72 (36.0%)	2.14	1.04
I felt shocked when I learnt that French is compulsory in this University.	82 (41.0%)	118 (59.0%)	2.61	1.09
I only read French language notes that I can pass my exam	110 (55.0%)	90 (45.0%)	2.32	1.16
I hate when my colleague speak French language to me.	152 (76.0%)	48 (24.0%)	1.97	1.03
I do not need French Language since I speak English Language already.	142 (71.0%)	58 (29.0%)	2.09	1.04
I will continue to learn French Language after my University Education.	76 (38.0%)	124 (62.0%)	2.65	1.12
I listen to French Station or Cassettes at my leisure.	130 (65.0%)	70 (25.0%)	2.12	1.04
I make use of knowledge acquired in French daily.	90 (45.0%)	110 (55.0%)	2.48	1.09
Average mean scores.			2.49	

Table 2 reveals the percentage, mean and standard deviation of the levels of undergraduate student's attitude towards French language as a general study. According to the statements, 77.0% of the total respondents agreed that they like to study French language at all times, while 23.0% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 2.87). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they like to study French language at all times.

Furthermore, the table shows that 87.0% of the respondents agreed that they are always happy to be in French Language class, while 13.0% disagree, also supported with (Mean = 3.19). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they are always happy to be in French Language class.

In-addition, 81.0% of the total respondents disagreed that they always feel sad when it is time to learn French language, while 19.0% agreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.92). It implies that majority of the respondents disagreed that they always feel sad when it is time to learn French language.

Also, the table shows that 89.0% of the total respondents agreed that French language will add value to

5.2 Test of Research questions of Respondents

5.2.1 Research Question 1

What are the levels of undergraduate student's attitude towards French languages as a general study?

their future career, while 11.0% disagree. Also supported with (Mean = 3.27). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that French language will add value to their future career.

Furthermore, the table shows that 77.0% of the total respondents disagreed that if they have their ways they will abandon the learning of French language, while 23.0% agreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.95). It implies that majority of the respondents disagreed that if they have their ways they will abandon the learning of French language.

Also, 84.0% of the total respondents disagreed that Learning French language amount to a waste of time, while 16.0% agree, also supported with (Mean = 2.99). It implies that majority of the respondent disagreed that Learning French language amount to a waste of time.

Furthermore, 56.0% of the total respondents disagreed that they hardly revise their French language notes after the French class, while 44.0% agreed, also supported with (Mean = 2.22). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they hardly revise their French language notes after the French class.

Also, 52.0% of the total respondents disagreed that they scarcely read their French language notes except when exam approaches, while 48.0% agreed, also supported with (Mean = 2.41). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they scarcely read their French language notes except when exam approaches.

In-addition, 83.0% of the total respondents agreed that they love people that speak French language fluently, while 17.0% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 3.33). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they love people that speak French language fluently.

Furthermore, 73.0% of the total respondents agreed that they always love to be in the company of French language speakers, while 27.0% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 2.93). It implied that majority of the respondents agreed that they always love to be in the company of French language speakers.

In-addition, 60.0% of the total respondents agreed that they study additional materials to improve their knowledge of French, while 40.0% disagree, also supported with (Mean = 2.60). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they study additional materials to improve their knowledge of French language.

Also, 64.0% of the total respondents disagreed that they dislike French language starting from secondary school, while 36.0% agreed, also supported with (Mean = 2.14). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they dislike French language starting from secondary school.

Furthermore, 59.0% of the total respondents agreed that they felt shocked when they learnt that French is compulsory in this University, while 41.0% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 2.61). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they felt shocked when they learnt that French is compulsory in this University.

In-addition, 55.0% of the total respondents disagreed that they only read French language notes so that they can pass exam, while 45.0% agreed, also supported with (Mean = 2.32). It implies that majority of the respondents disagreed that they only read French language notes so that they can pass exam.

Also, 76.0% of the total respondents disagreed that they are happy when their colleagues speak French language to them, while 24.0% agreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.97). It implies that majority of the respondents disagreed that they are not happy when their colleagues speak French language to them.

Furthermore, 71.0% of the total respondents disagreed that they do not need French Language since they speak English Language already, while 29.0% agreed, also supported with (Mean = 2.65). It implies that majority of the respondents disagreed that they do not need French Language since they speak English Language already.

In-addition, 62.0% of the total respondents agreed that they will continue to learn French Language after their University Education, while 38.0% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 2.12). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they will continue to learn French Language after their University Education.

Finally, 55.0% of the total respondents agreed that they make use of knowledge acquired in French in daily activities, while 45.0% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 2.48). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they make use of knowledge acquired in French in daily activities.

5.2.2 Research Question 2

Does Area of Specialization have influence on attitude of students towards French Languages?

Table 3
The ANOVA of Students Performance

Department	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Banking & Financing	10	58.00	9.06	1827.520	11	166.138		
Business administration	30	53.36	9.14	15315.075	188			
Accounting	30	51.06	4.25					
English	40	58.65	10.45					
Communication & Media	2	59.00	0.00					
Economic	18	54.88	7.41					
Mass communication	22	58.27	4.41					
Geology	6	50.00	8.80	17142.595	199	81.463	2.039	0.027
Chemical science	8	50.00	6.45					
Physical computer science	28	54.50	12.17					
Biological science	2	51.00	0.00					
Microbiology	4	54.00	20.78					
Total	200							

In the above table, the ANOVA analysis shows that Area of Specialization has influence on attitude of students towards French Language. The result revealed that Communication and Media studies mean has highest value of 59.00, followed by English, 58.65, while Mass communication has 58.27 and Banking and Finance has 58.00, Economics has mean of 54.88, while Physical computer science has mean of 54.50, and Business Administration, has means of 53.36, and Accounting has mean of 51.06, while Geology and

Chemical Science has 50.00 means respectively, in that order. Therefore, it can be concluded that Area of Specialization has influence on attitude of students toward French Language. at (F value = 2.039, Pro = 0.027 < 0.05). That is, Area of Specialization has influence on attitude of students toward French Language.

5.2.3 Research Question 3

Is there any gender difference on the attitude of undergraduate students towards French Language?

Table 4
The T-Test of Male and Female

Gender	N	Mean	Std. dev.	t.	df	P	Sig
Male	104	54.82	9.282				
Female	96	55.09	9.326	-0.203	198	0.840	0.05
Total	200						

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference between the male and female undergraduate students attitude towards French language (t = -0.203; df = 198; P > 0.05). It was observed that the t- Calculated value was less than t-Critical value. It is not significant. Therefore it was concluded that, there is no significant difference

between male and female attitude towards French language.

5.2.4 Research Question 4

Is there any significant difference between student's attitude and knowledge of undergraduate students in French Language?

Table 5
The T-Test of Attitude and Knowledge of French Languages

Factors	N	Mean	Std. dev.	t.	df	P	Sig
Attitude	200	54.95	9.28				
Knowledge	200	11.99	3.55	86.126	199	0.000	0.05
Total							

Table 5 shows that there is a significant difference between the attitude and knowledge of French Language (t = 86.126; df = 199; P < 0.05). It was observed that the t-Calculated value was greater than t-Critical value. It is significant. Therefore it was concluded that, there is a significant difference between the attitude and knowledge of French Language.

d. The attitude of the undergraduate students to French language can be further enhanced by showing total commitment to the teaching of French language through policy formulation and implementation, exercise of political will and providing incentives for effective teaching of the language.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Government should consider the idea of introducing French language into the curriculum of conventional universities across the nation. The language should constitute one of the courses lined up under the general study programme of these universities.

b. More teachers of French language should be deployed to universities in order to complement the efforts of the few available language teachers in the department of modern languages in the Nigerian universities.

c. The government should further emphasize on the policy declaring French as the second official language in Nigeria. This could culminate into making French language mandatory in all universities in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that majority of the undergraduate students investigated are positively disposed to the teaching of French language as a general course in the university curriculum. The study further revealed that the area of specialization of the students has a significant influence on the students' attitude to French language. The students in the language related areas and communication and media study are mostly favored. More awareness and sensitivity measures can be taken by the government to influence the attitude of the students to the value inherent in the study of French language irrespective of students chosen fields of study.

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