

STUDENTS' MOTIVATION AND INTEREST IN LEARNING FRENCH: ANALYSING THE ROLE OF PARENTAL ATTITUDES.

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Abstract

Due to increasing economic globalization, Nigeria faces a growing need to promote the study of foreign languages. Although French is officially recognized as the second language in Nigeria, it has not received adequate attention in the educational system. This is largely because many students lack the motivation and interest required to learn the language. This study therefore aimed to examine parental attitude as a factor influencing students' motivation and interest in learning French. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. Participants consisted of adults identified as parents, who were randomly selected from different locations in Imo State, Nigeria. Data were collected using a self-report questionnaire to assess parents' attitudes toward the French language. The data were analyzed using simple regression analysis. The findings revealed that parental attitude significantly predicts students' motivation and interest in learning French. The study concluded that positive parental attitudes play a crucial role in enhancing students' willingness to learn the language.

Keywords: Parental attitude, student motivation, French language, language learning, Nigeria.

Introduction

Today's world has become an interconnected space among different nationalities and countries, making fluency in more than one language both vital and essential. As a result, many international organizations now conduct their activities in multiple languages simultaneously. Consequently, the teaching of more than one foreign language has become increasingly important. Akambi and Ndidi (2020) note that the acquisition of a foreign language helps in understanding multicultural contexts and the diverse nature of different peoples. For them, knowledge of a foreign language also aids an individual's integration into globalisation processes. In the same vein, Kendall (2020) believes that acquiring another foreign language contributes to the professional development of individuals along their career pathways. Considering this, learning and attaining proficiency in a foreign language other than one's first language has become both a widespread phenomenon and highly important. It also points to the cognitive abilities of a polyglot.

In West Africa, particularly Nigeria, the English language has become an integral medium of instruction (Afolayan, 2015; Ajibola, 2010; Ezekwesili and Chinedu, 2019; Mustapha, 2012; Omidire and Adeyemo, 2015; Owoloye and Jimoh, 2018). These scholars emphasise that English has become the mainstream language of instruction in the Nigerian educational system. However, Olanlunye and Yinusha (2017) observe that many Nigerians are not aware that other foreign languages also have significant international reach comparable to English.

The closest foreign language to English in Nigeria is French, which is considered the de facto second official foreign language (Adewuyi et al., 2015; Babatunde, 2016; Lawal, 2020). Igboanusi

and Putz (2008) highlight that this status was reinforced by the Nigerian government's declaration in 1996. This led to the introduction of French language teaching in Nigerian schools as a subject, and as a course of study in higher institutions. This policy was further incorporated into the educational curriculum geared towards encouraging more speakers of the French language and ensuring that more Nigerians participate in the international globalization wave, thereby positioning Nigeria among other international entities in diplomacy and global relations. Additionally, the teaching of French exposes learners to the cultural attributes of the language. This is particularly important, considering that Nigeria shares borders with many French-speaking countries.

However, the teaching of this language has been hindered by several challenges. Okedion (2019) and Onah (2019) identified these challenges as inadequate instructional materials, a shortage of qualified instructors, low motivation, and students' disinterest in learning the language. Araromi (2013) argued that a change in learners' attitudes is necessary for effective language learning. This attitudinal indifference is also reflected in some parents, who perceive learning French as a waste of time. Consequently, they fail to encourage their children, which negatively affects the learners' interest.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine this perspective.

2. Methods

To substantiate this study, a quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The sample consisted of parents whose children are in the lower educational levels. This group included guardians, adoptive parents, and biological parents. In Imo State, the sample comprised 145 respondents, and data were collected between January and April 2024. Respondents voluntarily participated in the survey by completing a questionnaire. A total of 113 completed questionnaires were retrieved and used for statistical analysis.

3. Measures

A Likert scale was developed and adopted by the researcher to assess parents' attitudes towards their children's or wards' learning of the French language. The scale consisted of ten items across three sub-dimensions. It also used a 4-point response system, ranging from “disinterested” to “strongly interested”. The total score ranged from 10 (minimum) to 40(maximum), with higher scores indicating a more positive stance. The reliability coefficient of this scale was 0.86.

4. Results

To ensure valid testing of the hypothesis, a linear analysis was conducted to examine the effect of parents' attitudes toward their children's learning of the French language. The analysis revealed that parents' attitudes significantly influenced their children's motivation to learn the French language. This result was statistically significant at $F(1,111) = 60.035$, $p < .001$. The predictor variable accounted for 43.4% of the variance.

Table 1: Linear regression results showing the effect of parental attitude toward the French language on students' motivation and interest in learning French.

Variable	95% Confidence Interval for B				β	t	Sig.
	B	LL	UL	SEB			
Constant	2.47	2.84	2.61	.133	—	18.678	.000
PATFL	-0.476	-0.596	-0.396	.061	-0.567	-8.730	.000

Note: PATFL = Parental attitude toward the French language;

B = Unstandardized regression coefficient;

CI = Confidence interval;

LL = Lower limit; UL = Upper limit;
SEB = Standard error of the coefficient;
 β = Standardized coefficient;
 R^2 = Coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .434$);
 $p < .001$.

5. Discussion

To ascertain children's inclination and motivation to learn the French language, their parents' stance was examined. This study showed that parental stance significantly predicted outcomes, $F(1,111) = 60.035$, $p < .001$. This result corresponds with and lends evidence to an earlier study by Alimny (2020), which highlighted that parental influence is a key factor. Again, Aigbatan (2017) equally reflected that a positive attitude from parents helps children develop a positive disposition towards learning a foreign language.

However, the results also reveal that less-than-positive parental attitudes invariably lead to demotivation in children to learn French as a subject in class. Engin (2020) notes that parental attitude can negatively impact children's learning enthusiasm. Home support, whether present or absent, has far-reaching consequences on the effectiveness of a child's learning of the French language.

6. Conclusion

This study was geared towards ascertaining the relationship between parents' attitudes and children's language learning, specifically in the context of the French language. The study found a highly significant relationship between the two variables. The findings suggest that a positive and supportive parental attitude leads to increased motivation in young learners. This conclusion provides guidance for instructors of the French language in Nigerian primary and secondary schools, emphasizing that home support is essential for effective teaching and learning. Therefore, parental support should be encouraged, and policies should be implemented periodically to promote positive attitudinal changes towards learning the French language as a second language.

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