



Impact of French Language Literacy on Subregional International Trade in Northeast Nigeria

¹Ezekiel Kefas Etienne, ²Ishaya Bitrus, ³Jinga C. Jahknwa and ⁴Ayuba G. John

¹ Department of International Relations, School of Social and Management Sciences, Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola, Nigeria

² Department of English Education, School of Continuing Education, Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola, Nigeria

³ Department of Disaster Management, School of Environmental Sciences, Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola, Nigeria

⁴Sharda School of Basic Science and Research,(SSBSR), Sharda University India, +919599208993 2023811233.john@dr.sharda.ac.in

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of French language teaching and its impact on language literacy and international trade in border towns of Adamawa and Taraba states, Nigeria. The research addresses three primary objectives: analysing the teacher-to-student ratios for French language teaching across border towns, examining the relationship between French language teaching and language literacy, and assessing the impact of language literacy on international trade in the study area. Data were collected from primary sources through surveys and interviews with French language teachers and students, and from secondary sources including educational institutions, government records, and existing literature. Teacher-to-student ratios were calculated by dividing the total number of students by the total number of teachers in each town, and the mean ratio was determined. Proficiency levels were assessed through standardized tests and teacher evaluations, and data on international trade volumes were obtained from trade records and customs offices. Interviews with traders and customs officials identified instances where French literacy facilitated trade. The findings revealed significant variability in teacher-to-student ratios, with towns such as Ganye and Gembu exhibiting lower ratios, indicating a more favourable teaching environment, while towns like Gombi and Mubi showed higher ratios, suggesting challenges in teaching effectiveness. Multiple regression analyses indicated that increases in the number of French teachers and instructional hours per week significantly improved French language literacy. Additionally, the analysis demonstrated that instances where French literacy facilitated trade had a significant positive impact on subregional international trade, highlighting the practical importance of language skills in trade contexts. The study underscores the need for policy interventions to recruit and train more French teachers, especially in towns with higher student loads, to balance the ratios and improve educational outcomes. It also emphasizes the necessity for targeted language training to leverage the benefits of French literacy in enhancing subregional trade, offering valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders aiming to improve French language education and its impact on international trade in Northeast Nigeria.

Keywords: French language teaching, language literacy, international trade, teacher-to-student ratio, Northeast Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Language is a communication system, and communication is the use of signs (oral/written/otherwise) to convey message. It is thus a medium of communication that drives all human activities thereby fostering cultural diffusion through economies of scales across borders (Faniran 2016). Consequently, it is seen to have a double-edged outcome of being a barrier to communication when two cultures that share common geographical boundaries have different languages and a promoter of all activities when they understand each other. This is the case with many African countries with multi-ethnic composition, different colonial backgrounds and sharing a common boundary. It is expected that the lingua-franca should remove such communication barriers. Yet this is not the case for most African countries. For example, Anglophone countries in Africa sharing boundaries with Francophone countries suffer this problem, which in turn affects their economic activities across their common boundaries. Thus, language parity in such cases is a barrier that limits communication and thus socio-economic activities. It is obvious that each of the linguists sees language as an instrument expressing one's thought. Since it gives clearer expression to human thoughts, it has a great influence on human thinking as well as human interaction.

Nigeria and Cameroon share a common international boundary. As such, there is mutual migration from both sides for social and economic needs. Yet, these two countries of Africa do not share a common language of communication. While Nigeria has English as her language of communication, Cameroun has French; and this has always militated the mutuality in communication. It is in a bid to solve this communication gap that Nigeria as a country enshrined in her constitution the teaching of French as a second language in her educational system. The history of formal teaching and learning of French in Nigeria can be traced to the early post-independent days (Ezike, 1988). Also according to Brann (1970), young independent African Countries "insisted on the introduction of French/English within the framework of bilingual Pan-Africanism". This came as an offshoot of an international conference in Yaoundé in 1961 where all African Ministers of Education, South of the Sahara got recommendation to introduce a second European

language, (that is French in English speaking countries and English in French speaking countries) (Brann, 1970). It was in 1963 at the OAU meeting in Addis Ababa that this bilingual policy for all Africa was officially approved.

Based on the foregoing, the expectation is, after almost six decades of the policy initiation, Nigerians and Cameroonians alike should by now be literate in both French and English. However, this is not the case for both countries. The study of French Literacy, especially in North-east Nigeria is poor despite the fact that most states in the northeast share a common boundary with Nigeria. It can thus be assumed that this has in many ways affected the level of socio-cultural diffusion and thus economic gains for both sides.

All researches related to the influence of language on trade were carried out in other climes. For example, Rahimzadeh and Ebrahim (2021) explored the impacts of Arabic language in transaction and negotiation in middle east; Dinca et.al., (nd) investigated the place of French language in the field of business; Fidrmuc and Fidrmuc (2016) assessed the role of European languages as determinant for foreign trade. In Africa, the work of Aka (2010) only gave an analytical view to establish the perception that French language is important for trade flows.

Other empirical studies on language's role in trade and education reveal important connections to the impact of French language literacy on trade in Northeast Nigeria. Hutchinson (2005) demonstrates a significant negative correlation between linguistic distance and trade volumes, highlighting that French proficiency can reduce trade barriers with Francophone countries. Melitz (2008) supports this by showing that higher language skills, including French, positively affect trade volumes. Grin (2003) provides a theoretical framework on how economic factors influence language policy, relevant for understanding the economic benefits of French literacy. Lanza and Svendsen (2007) discuss how multilingual communication practices influence social interactions, indirectly impacting trade. Educational research by Blatchford, Bassett, and Brown (2002) and Glass and Smith (1978) underscores the importance of effective education in enhancing language skills, which can influence trade capabilities. Cummins (2000) and Krashen (1982) offer foundational insights into bilingual education and second language acquisition, essential for assessing French literacy's impact on trade. Ellis (2008) reviews second language acquisition theories, providing a basis for understanding French language learning processes. Uguru (2008) explores the development of a common language in Nigeria, contextualizing the importance of language policies for trade.

Collectively, these studies support the hypothesis that improved French language literacy can enhance trade opportunities by mitigating linguistic barriers and fostering better communication with Francophone partners. However, the reviewed literature lacks a focused analysis on how French language literacy specifically impacts subregional trade dynamics in Northeast Nigeria. Addressing this gap is critical to achieving the stated objectives of this study, which aims to provide targeted insights into how French proficiency affects trade practices and economic interactions within this specific context.

2. Materials and methods

The study focused on border towns in Adamawa and Taraba states, Nigeria, to assess the effectiveness of French language teaching and its broader impact on language literacy and international trade. The selected border towns in Adamawa state included Wula-Mango, Mubi, Gombi, Wurro-bokki, Malabu, Kodjoli, Jada, Gurin, Ganye, and Toungo, while in Taraba state, the towns of Dorofi, Gembu, Shibong, Manga, Baissa, and Tosso were selected for the study.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through surveys and interviews with French language teachers and students across the selected border towns. These surveys collected data on the number of French teachers and students, hours of instruction per week, and proficiency levels. Proficiency was assessed through standardized tests and teacher evaluations. Secondary data were obtained from educational records, government records, and existing literature on French language teaching and international trade. Data on international trade volumes were sourced from trade records and customs offices, while interviews with traders and customs officials helped identify instances where French literacy facilitated trade.

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS software. The teacher-to-student ratio for French language teaching was calculated by dividing the total number of students by the total number of teachers in each town, and the mean ratio was computed to provide an overall average for the study area. These ratios were analyzed to identify trends and variations across different towns. Multiple regression analyses were employed to explore the relationships between French language teaching, language literacy, and international trade. The analysis focused on the impact of French language literacy on subregional international trade, with independent variables including French language literacy, proficiency levels, trade language, and instances when French literacy facilitated trade. The significance of the predictors was determined based on p-values, with a threshold of 0.05 for statistical significance.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review boards, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study to ensure ethical compliance.

The study acknowledged potential limitations, including variability in data quality across different towns and challenges in accurately measuring proficiency levels and trade volumes. Efforts were made to mitigate these limitations through triangulation and robust data collection methods, ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings.

3. Results

3.1 Teacher to student's ratio for French language teaching across border towns

The teacher-to-student ratios for French language teaching across various border towns in Adamawa and Taraba states are presented in Table 1. The mean ratio is approximately 1:14.3, indicating that, on average, there is one French teacher for every 14.3 students. Notably, the ratios vary significantly across different locations.

Locations such as Jada, Ganye, and Gembu exhibit lower ratios (1:8.5, 1:6, and 1:7.5, respectively), suggesting a more favourable teaching environment where teachers can potentially provide more individualized attention to students. In contrast, towns like Gombi and Mubi have higher ratios (1:32 and 1:28, respectively), indicating a higher student load per teacher, which might impede the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

A lower teacher-to-student ratio is generally associated with better educational outcomes, as it allows for more personalized instruction and greater student engagement (Blatchford et al., 2002). The findings for towns like Ganye and Gembu align with this, suggesting that these areas might experience better French language literacy outcomes due to their favourable ratios.

Conversely, the higher ratios observed in Gombi and Mubi could be detrimental. Research by Glass and Smith (1978) indicates that larger class sizes can negatively impact student performance, as teachers are less able to address individual student needs and manage the classroom effectively. This might explain why French language literacy is lower in towns with higher ratios.

The variability in teacher-to-student ratios across border towns has significant implications for French language education. Towns with lower ratios, such as Ganye and Dorofi, are likely to see more effective teaching and higher literacy rates. This is consistent with the literature that emphasizes the benefits of smaller class sizes for language learning (Blatchford et al., 2002; Glass & Smith, 1978).

However, the high ratios in towns like Gombi and Mubi highlight a critical area for policy intervention. Efforts should be made to recruit and train more French teachers in these regions to balance the ratios and improve educational outcomes. Additionally, support systems such as teaching assistants or improved teaching resources could mitigate some of the challenges posed by high student numbers per teacher.

Overall, while some border towns are well-positioned to foster French language literacy due to favorable teacher-to-student ratios, others require targeted interventions to address the disparity and enhance the overall quality of language education.

Table 1: Teacher to Student Ratio for French Language Teaching Across Border Towns

State	Border Town	French Teachers	French Learners	Teacher to Student Ratio
Adamawa	Wula-Mango	1	10	1:10
	Mubi	2	56	1:28
	Gombi	1	32	1:32
	Wurro-bokki	1	15	1:15
	Malabu	1	18	1:18
	Kodjoli	1	14	1:14
	Jada	2	17	1:8.5
	Gurin	1	13	1:13
	Ganye	2	12	1:6
	Toungo	1	12	1:12
Taraba	Dorofi	1	14	1:14
	Gembu	2	15	1:7.5
	Shibong	0	0	N/A
	Gembu (2)	1	10	1:10
	Manga	1	16	1:16
	Baissa	0	0	N/A
	Tosso	0	0	N/A
Dorofi (2)	2	16	1:8	

Baissa (2)	0	0	N/A
Mean	-	-	1:14.3

3.2 Relationship between French language teaching and language literacy

The multiple regression analysis presented in Table 2 shows the relationship between French Language Literacy (%) and the predictors: French Teachers, French Learners, Hours per Week, and Proficiency. The model explains approximately 78.5% of the variance in French language literacy ($R^2 = 0.785$), and the overall model is statistically significant ($F(4, 15) = 13.68, p < 0.001$).

The coefficient for French Teachers ($B = 1.57, SE = 0.70, p = 0.037$) is statistically significant, indicating that an increase in the number of French teachers is associated with a significant increase in French language literacy. Specifically, for every additional French teacher, French language literacy increases by approximately 1.57%. This finding supports the literature emphasizing the importance of teacher availability in enhancing language acquisition (Cummins, 2000).

The coefficient for French Learners ($B = 0.03, SE = 0.01, p = 0.006$) is also statistically significant, suggesting that an increase in the number of French learners significantly improves French language literacy. For every additional French learner, literacy increases by approximately 0.03%. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition improves with increased exposure and interaction among learners.

The coefficient for Hours per Week ($B = 0.58, SE = 0.22, p = 0.020$) is statistically significant, indicating that more instructional hours per week are positively related to French language literacy. For every additional hour of instruction per week, literacy increases by approximately 0.58%. This finding is consistent with research highlighting the critical role of sufficient instructional time in language learning outcomes (Ellis, 2008).

The coefficient for Proficiency ($B = 1.50, SE = 0.83, p = 0.089$) is not statistically significant, suggesting that while higher proficiency levels may contribute to increased literacy, this relationship is not strong enough to be considered statistically reliable in this sample. This indicates that additional factors, such as teaching quality and learning resources, might influence proficiency levels, as suggested by Cummins (2000).

The significant findings for French Teachers, French Learners, and Hours per Week highlight the critical factors that enhance French language literacy in Northeast Nigeria. Increasing the number of qualified French teachers, encouraging more learners, and ensuring adequate instructional time are pivotal for improving language literacy outcomes. These results support the existing literature, emphasizing the importance of teacher availability and instructional time in language acquisition (Cummins, 2000; Krashen, 1982; Ellis, 2008).

The non-significant effect of proficiency indicates that while proficiency is important, it may not be the sole determinant of literacy improvement. This aligns with Ellis (2008), who suggests that the quality of instruction and learning materials also play a significant role.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting language literacy

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Intercept	0.25	0.50	0.50	0.630
French Teachers	1.57	0.70	2.24	0.037*
French Learners	0.03	0.01	3.16	0.006*
Hours per Week	0.58	0.22	2.64	0.020*
Proficiency	1.50	0.83	1.81	0.089

Note: $R^2 = 0.785; F(4, 15) = 13.68, p < 0.001, *p < 0.05$

3.3 Impact of language literacy on international trade in the study area

The multiple regression analysis examined the relationship between subregional international trade (dependent variable) and several independent variables: French language literacy, proficiency level, trade language, and instances when French literacy facilitates trade. The regression model was significant, $F(4, 14) = 6.411, p = 0.00379$, with an R^2 of 0.647, indicating that approximately 64.7% of the variance in subregional international trade is explained by these variables (Table 3).

The coefficient for French language literacy ($B = 12.270, p = 0.209$) suggested a positive relationship with subregional international trade, though this effect was not statistically significant. This implies that while an increase in French language literacy could potentially enhance trade, the relationship is not strong enough to be deemed reliable in this sample. The coefficient for proficiency level ($B = 0.461, p = 0.990$) was very small and statistically insignificant, indicating that variations in proficiency levels do not significantly affect trade volumes. Similarly, the coefficient for trade language ($B = 9.803, p = 0.706$) indicated a positive but statistically insignificant relationship, suggesting that using interpreters over local languages might increase trade, but this effect is not statistically reliable.

However, the coefficient for instances when French literacy facilitates trade ($B = 31.908$, $p = 0.008$) was both positive and statistically significant, demonstrating that each additional instance where French literacy aids trade significantly increases subregional international trade by 31.91 units. This finding underscores the practical importance of language skills in specific trade scenarios, particularly in facilitating currency exchange and border transactions.

These results indicate that French language literacy has the potential to positively impact subregional international trade, aligning with previous studies emphasizing the importance of language skills in international trade (Hutchinson, 2005; Melitz, 2008). The lack of statistical significance for French language literacy, proficiency level, and trade language suggests that these variables alone may not be strong predictors of trade volume. Conversely, the significant impact of instances when French literacy facilitates trade highlights the importance of targeted language training in enhancing international trade. This finding aligns with Grin's (2003) argument that language skills provide significant economic benefits in trade contexts, particularly in multilingual regions.

The statistically insignificant results for proficiency level and trade language imply that while these factors might play a role in facilitating trade, they are not strong enough on their own to predict trade volumes in this sample. This finding suggests the need for a more nuanced understanding of how language proficiency and the use of interpreters interact with other factors in trade facilitation, as noted by Lanza and Svendsen (2007).

In conclusion, the significant finding for instances when French literacy facilitates trade highlights the importance of practical language skills training tailored to trade needs. Policymakers and educators in Northeast Nigeria should consider integrating such training to leverage the benefits of French literacy in subregional trade.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Subregional International Trade

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant (Intercept)	-8.421	22.964	-	-0.367	0.719
French Language Literacy (%)	12.270	9.308	0.405	1.318	0.209
Proficiency Level	0.461	34.719	0.007	0.013	0.990
Trade Language (1 = Local, 2 = Interpreter)	9.803	25.454	0.087	0.385	0.706
Instances when French Literacy Facilitates Trade	31.908	10.270	0.694	3.107	0.008

Note: $R^2 = 0.647$, $F(4, 14) = 6.411$, $p = 0.00379$

4. Discussion of Findings

4.1 Teacher to Student Ratio for French Language Teaching Across Border Towns

The analysis of teacher-to-student ratios for French language teaching across various border towns in Adamawa and Taraba states revealed significant variability. The average teacher-to-student ratio across all surveyed towns was approximately 1:14.3. However, specific towns exhibited both more favorable and less favorable ratios.

Towns such as Ganye, Gembu, and Jada displayed lower teacher-to-student ratios (1:6, 1:7.5, and 1:8.5 respectively). These ratios suggest a more supportive learning environment, where teachers can provide more personalized attention to each student. This personalized instruction is crucial in language learning, where individual feedback and interaction play a significant role in students' progress (Blatchford et al., 2002). These findings are consistent with the broader educational literature, which highlights the positive impact of lower student-to-teacher ratios on learning outcomes (Glass & Smith, 1978).

In contrast, towns like Gombi and Mubi exhibited higher ratios (1:32 and 1:28 respectively), indicating a heavier student load per teacher. These higher ratios can potentially hinder the effectiveness of language instruction, as teachers may struggle to manage larger classes and provide individualized attention. The implications of such high ratios are critical, as research shows that large class sizes can negatively impact student performance and engagement (Blatchford et al., 2002; Glass & Smith, 1978).

4.2 Relationship between French Language Teaching and Language Literacy

The study also examined the relationship between French language teaching and language literacy across the surveyed border towns. The data suggested that towns with more favourable teacher-to-student ratios tended to have higher levels of French language literacy. For instance, Ganye, with a ratio of 1:6, demonstrated higher literacy levels compared to towns with higher ratios like Gombi (1:32). This correlation underscores the importance of teacher availability and student engagement in language acquisition (Glass & Smith, 1978).

However, the overall proficiency levels remained low across most towns despite variations in teacher-to-student ratios. This finding suggests that other factors, such as teaching quality, resource availability, and the socio-economic environment, also play critical roles in determining literacy outcomes.

These insights align with the findings of previous studies that highlight the multifaceted nature of language learning, which is influenced by a combination of instructional, contextual, and individual factors (Cummins, 2000).

4.3 Impact of Language Literacy on International Trade in the Study Area

The impact of French language literacy on international trade within the study area was another key focus of this research. The findings indicated a positive relationship between higher levels of French literacy and increased subregional international trade activities. For example, towns like Mubi, which reported higher French literacy levels and more favorable teacher-to-student ratios, also exhibited higher indices of international trade.

This correlation can be attributed to the role of language proficiency in facilitating communication and negotiation in cross-border trade (Helliwell & Putnam, 2007). In towns where French is more widely spoken and understood, traders can engage more effectively with partners from Francophone neighboring countries, thus enhancing trade activities. The ability to exchange currencies and conduct transactions at border markets more smoothly is a practical advantage of higher French literacy, which directly contributes to trade facilitation.

However, the study also highlighted areas with lower literacy rates and higher teacher-to-student ratios, which experienced less robust trade activities. This disparity emphasizes the need for targeted educational interventions to improve language skills, thereby boosting trade potential in these regions. The findings suggest that enhancing French language education can be a strategic tool for economic development in border areas, fostering stronger trade ties and economic integration with neighboring Francophone countries (Helliwell & Putnam, 2007).

5. Conclusion

In summary, the study's findings reveal significant insights into the dynamics of French language education and its broader socio-economic implications in border towns of Adamawa and Taraba states. The variability in teacher-to-student ratios highlights the need for equitable distribution of educational resources to ensure effective language learning. The positive relationship between favorable teacher-to-student ratios and higher literacy levels underscores the importance of personalized instruction in language acquisition. Furthermore, the demonstrated impact of language literacy on international trade activities underscores the strategic role of language education in economic development. These findings advocate for targeted policy interventions to improve French language education, thereby enhancing both educational outcomes and economic prospects in the study area.

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