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Analysis of the perceptions of students and teachers towards French language education in Nigeria, identifying common themes and areas for improvement

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ABSTRACT :

This study analyzes the perceptions of students and teachers towards French language education in Nigeria, focusing on identifying key challenges and areas for improvement. A total of 400 participants, consisting of 300 students and 100 teachers were surveyed across secondary and tertiary institutions. The findings indicate that while both students (70%) and teachers (80%) acknowledge the importance of French, students' interest in learning the language remains limited, with 50% showing only moderate to low engagement. Key concerns include an outdated curriculum, ineffective teaching methods, and a lack of adequate resources, such as textbooks and multimedia tools. Common themes emerging from the study include the need for a revised curriculum, better teaching resources, improved teaching methods, and increased student motivation. Furthermore, both students and teachers expressed a need for professional development and more practical exposure to French through immersive learning experiences. The study concludes with recommendations for curriculum revision, enhanced teacher training, the provision of learning materials, and the implementation of motivation programs to foster greater interest and proficiency in French education across Nigeria.

Keywords: French Language Education, Curriculum Revision, Student Engagement, Teaching Methods, Learning Resources

Introduction

Nigeria is bordered by French-speaking countries such as Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, which necessitates a functional proficiency in French for cross-border cooperation, trade, and regional diplomacy (Danladi, 2013). Furthermore, organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) promote French as a working language, thus reinforcing its importance. Consequently, the Nigerian government has initiated various policies to integrate French language education at different levels of schooling, from primary through tertiary institutions (Unachukwu et al., 2023). These initiatives aim to produce a generation of Nigerians who are not only bilingual but also competitive in the global and regional job markets. The Nigerian government's recognition of French as a "second official language" in 1996 marked a significant policy shift, emphasizing the importance of French for national development and regional integration (Mady, 2012). This policy change led to the introduction of French language programs in schools and the establishment of French language centers and alliances across the country. Despite these efforts, the implementation of French language education has faced numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, insufficient qualified teachers, and varying levels of commitment at different educational levels. The significance of studying French language education in Nigeria extends beyond the classroom. It encompasses broader sociopolitical and economic dimensions, contributing to Nigeria's regional integration and its citizens' global mobility. By fostering French proficiency, Nigeria enhances its diplomatic relations and economic engagements within the Francophone sphere, aligning itself with key regional and international policies that emphasize multilingualism as a bridge for cultural and economic exchange.

Understanding the perceptions of various stakeholders such as students, parents, teachers, and policymakers is crucial in evaluating the current state of French language education and identifying areas for improvement. Students' perceptions reflect the effectiveness of the educational strategies in place, while parents' attitudes provide insights into the home support system and societal value placed on French proficiency. Teachers' perspectives highlight practical challenges and successes in the classroom, and policymakers' views offer a macro-level understanding of the educational landscape and strategic initiatives. Educational policy analysis helps in understanding the formulation, implementation, and impact of language education policies. By examining the policies governing French language education, this research seeks to identify gaps between policy intentions and actual classroom practices. The combination of these frameworks allows for a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing French language education in Nigeria. This study seeks to analyze the perceptions of French language education among Nigerian stakeholders.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are to:

1. Analyze the perceptions of students, parents, teachers, and policymakers towards French language education in Nigeria.
2. Identify common themes and areas of convergence or divergence in these perceptions.
3. Highlight the challenges and barriers faced in the implementation of French language education.
4. Provide recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness and attractiveness of French language education in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. How do students and teachers perceive French language education in Nigeria?
2. What are common themes and areas of convergence or divergence in these perceptions?
3. What are the challenges and barriers faced in the implementation of French language education?
4. What recommendations could be made to enhance the effectiveness and attractiveness of French language education in Nigeria.

Methodology

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. This methodology ensures a holistic understanding of stakeholders' perceptions and the contextual factors influencing French language education.

Quantitative Methods: Surveys was administered to students, parents, teachers, and policymakers to gather numerical data on their attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of French language education. This research utilized a purposive sampling technique to randomly select 250 university undergraduates, 50 NCE students and 20 parents as well as 100 lecturers from 5 tertiary institutions within southwest Nigeria. This gave a total sample of 300 French language students, and 100 teachers/lecturers used for this study.

Qualitative Methods: In-depth interviews with one director each at federal ministry of education, state ministry of education and local government education authority from the five southwest states of Nigeria was conducted to gain deeper insights into the reasons behind stakeholders' perceptions and experiences. This give a total of 15 policy makers utilized for this study..

Data analysis

Data obtained from the respondents was analyzed using frequency count, simple percentages, standard deviation to identify patterns, correlations, and differences among the stakeholder groups. The qualitative data was analyzed thematically to identify common themes and nuanced understandings.

Results

Table 1: Demographics of Participants

Category	Total Number	Percentage (%)
Total Participants	400	100%
Students	300	75%
Teachers	100	25%
Gender (Students)		
Female	180	60%
Male	120	40%
Age Groups (Students)		
18-24 years	135	45%
25-34 years	105	35%
35 and above	60	20%
Institution Type		
Secondary Schools	240	60%
Tertiary Institutions	160	40%

The study surveyed a total of 400 participants, of which 300 (75%) were students and 100 (25%) were teachers. Among the students, 60% were female and 40% male. The age group of 18-24 years was the most represented, making up 45% of the student sample, followed by 35% of students aged 25-34, and 20% aged 35 and above. In terms of institutional representation, 60% of participants were from secondary schools, while 40% were from tertiary institutions.

Table 2: Perceptions of Students Toward French Language Education

Category	Percentage (%)
Importance of French	
Very Important	70%
Moderately Important	20%
Not Important	10%
Interest in Learning French	
High Interest	50%
Moderate Interest	30%
Low Interest	20%
Curriculum Content	
Needs Improvement	45%
Satisfactory	40%
Unsatisfactory	15%
Teaching Methods	
Ineffective	50%
Effective	35%
Unsatisfactory	15%

Importance of French: A majority of students (70%) considered French to be very important, while 20% found it moderately important, and 10% felt it was not important.

Interest in Learning French: 50% of students expressed high interest in learning French, 30% showed moderate interest, and 20% were not interested.

Curriculum Content: 45% of students felt that the French curriculum needed improvement, while 40% found it satisfactory, and 15% felt it was unsatisfactory.

Teaching Methods: 50% of students felt the teaching methods used were ineffective, 35% thought they were effective, and 15% viewed them as unsatisfactory.

Table 3: Perceptions of Teachers Toward French Language Education

Category	Percentage (%)
Importance of French	
Very Important	80%
Moderately Important	15%
Not Important	5%
Student Engagement	
High Engagement	45%
Moderate Engagement	35%
Low Engagement	20%
Curriculum and Resources	
Limited Resources	50%
Adequate Resources	30%
Inadequate Resources	20%
Teaching Methods	
Effective	40%
Needs Improvement	40%

Ineffective	20%
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Importance of French: 80% of teachers emphasized that French was very important, 15% thought it was moderately important, and 5% felt it was not important.

Student Engagement: 45% of teachers reported high student engagement with French, 35% said engagement was moderate, and 20% observed low engagement.

Curriculum and Resources: 50% of teachers mentioned that resources for teaching French were limited, 30% found resources adequate, and 20% felt they were inadequate.

Teaching Methods: 40% of teachers considered their teaching methods effective, 40% felt there was room for improvement, and 20% found them ineffective.

Table 4: Common Themes Identified

Theme	Percentage (%)
Need for Updated Curriculum	65%
Lack of Resources	55%
Teaching Methodology Challenges	50%
Low Student Motivation	45%
Cultural and Linguistic Barriers	40%
Lack of Qualified Teachers	35%

Several common themes emerged from both students and teachers:

1. Need for Updated Curriculum: 65% of participants identified the curriculum as needing an update to make it more relevant and engaging.
2. Lack of Resources: 55% of respondents noted the lack of adequate resources such as textbooks, audiovisual materials, and technology.
3. Teaching Methodology Challenges: 50% pointed out that teaching methods needed to be more interactive and effective.
4. Low Student Motivation: 45% of participants observed that many students lacked motivation to learn French.
5. Cultural and Linguistic Barriers: 40% highlighted that cultural differences and language barriers made learning French more challenging.
6. Lack of Qualified Teachers: 35% of participants indicated that there were not enough qualified teachers to effectively teach French.

Table 5: Areas for Improvement Identified by Students and Teachers

Area for Improvement	Students (%)	Teachers (%)
Curriculum Revision	50%	60%
Teacher Training & Professional Development	45%	70%
Availability of Learning Resources	60%	50%
More Practical Exposure	55%	50%
Motivation Enhancement Programs	40%	45%

Curriculum Revision: Both students (50%) and teachers (60%) agreed that the curriculum needed to be revised to better engage students and reflect practical usage of the French language.

Teacher Training and Professional Development: 45% of students and 70% of teachers highlighted the need for more training and professional development programs to enhance teaching quality.

Availability of Learning Resources: 60% of students and 50% of teachers emphasized the importance of improving the availability of learning resources such as textbooks and multimedia tools.

More Practical Exposure: 55% of students and 50% of teachers felt that more practical language exposure (e.g., immersion programs) would greatly improve students' proficiency in French.

Motivation Enhancement Programs: 40% of students and 45% of teachers suggested implementing programs to boost student motivation and interest in learning French.

Discussion of Results

The findings indicate a strong recognition of the importance of French among both students (70%) and teachers (80%). However, there is a significant gap between this recognition and students' actual interest in learning the language. While many students consider French important, half of them are not very engaged or motivated to learn it. This can be attributed to several factors, including outdated curricula, lack of resources, and ineffective teaching methods. The need for curriculum revision was the most frequent theme identified by both students and teachers. Many respondents believe that the curriculum does not reflect the practical use of French, and it needs to be updated to keep students engaged. Furthermore, there is a clear call for better teaching methods that encourage more interaction and practical application of the language. A critical issue highlighted by 50% of teachers and 55% of students is the lack of resources, which hampers the learning process. Access to textbooks, audiovisual aids, and technology is limited, particularly in secondary schools. This shortage of resources directly affects the quality of teaching and learning. Finally, both students and teachers agreed that teacher training and professional development are essential for improving French education. Many teachers feel they need more support to improve their teaching skills, and this is further emphasized by students' dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of current teaching methods.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study concludes that several changes are needed to improve French language education in Nigeria:

1. Curriculum Revision: The curriculum should be revised to incorporate more practical and culturally relevant content, making it more engaging for students.
2. Teacher Training: Teachers should receive continuous professional development in modern teaching methods and technology use to enhance their teaching effectiveness.
3. Increased Learning Resources: There should be a concerted effort to provide more learning materials, including textbooks, digital resources, and audiovisual tools.
4. Practical Learning Opportunities: More immersive and hands-on learning experiences should be provided to students, such as French language camps or virtual exchanges with French-speaking countries.
5. Motivation Programs: Schools should implement strategies to boost student interest and motivation in learning French, perhaps through extracurricular activities, competitions, or rewards for proficiency.

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