

**AN ASSESSMENT OF FRENCH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM: A CASE STUDY OF ODEDA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF OGUN STATE**

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**Abstract**

*Despite the introduction of French as a foreign language/compulsory subject in Nigerian educational system and as a second official language of the nation, it is still observed that there exists few usage of French as a communication tool in the country especially during cross border trade. It thus became pertinent to assess the teaching of French as a foreign language in Nigeria, using Odeda Local Government Area as a case study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. 30 junior secondary schools were randomly selected in Odeda LGA, from which 50 teachers of French were selected using the total enumeration sampling technique. Teachers' Assessment of the Teaching of French Questionnaire-TATFQ ( $r=0.87$ ) was used for data collection and data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency type, mean, percentages and standard deviation. Findings revealed that insufficient availability of French teachers in the school is affecting the teaching of French; adequate instructional materials play innumerable roles in the teaching of French; and that time allocated for French affects teachers' performance in teaching French language as a foreign language in Nigerian schools. Based on these findings, it was recommended that government and school owners should employ more qualified teachers of French and provide more instructional materials. School administrators should also endeavor to allocate time to the teaching and learning of French language as commensurate to its importance in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Foreign language, Official language, French language, French teachers, Curriculum.

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**INTRODUCTION**

French language is known to be a romance language, belonging to the indo-European Family. French language has a long history as an international language of commerce, diplomacy, literature etc. It is the language is the second most wide spread language in the world after English; being the official language in 29 countries (Emodi, 1986). Nigeria is one of the Anglophone countries and her official language is English. It is a country with more than 400 languages, though three national languages; Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, have been constitutionally recognised, according to the Ethnologue of World's Languages (2012). This can be inferred that French has nothing to do with the affairs of the country, theoretically (Olayiwola 2005), because the percentage of people that speak the language in the country is little, although the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) has recognized French as the second official language and a compulsory subject in the first nine years of schooling.

Consequently, there has been a growing concern about the attitude of Nigerians towards the study of French in our school. A good number of students are not sufficiently informed about the usefulness of French language in our educational system or its importance as an international language. Such students erroneously posit that people who study French in tertiary institutions are slow learners or that French Department is a dumping ground for students who could not enter for their intended course

of study. However, appreciation goes to the current administration in Nigeria, that is the administration of President Mohammadu Buhari who has seen how important French is to Nigeria, and on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February, 2016 has reinforced its compulsory status in primary and junior secondary schools (The Punch, 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2016).

An attempt on the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria dated as far back as 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1878, the Wesley High School already included in its curriculum the teaching and learning German and French language respectively. But unfortunately, French language education was not officially introduced into the secondary school curriculum in Nigeria until 1956. Thus King's College Lagos and Government College Ibadan need to be mentioned in this regards for pioneering the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in this country (Asobele, 1999). At tertiary level the situations was not much different. The teaching and learning of French language at the university level for instance was necessitated as those few lucky Nigerians who were products of the schools mentioned above were in quest for their university education.

Consequently as from 1960, shortly after independence some of the so called first generation universities such as University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria (NSUKKA), University of Lagos, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria took up the challenge of teaching and learning of French

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language with expatriate lecturers like Henri G.J.Evans, Wilfred Fewer, Branna C.M.B e.t.c Awolowo (2004) and Falade (2008). Thus, readers need to know that the first set of Nigerian French graduates were products of these three famous universities and many of them after graduation joined the noble teaching profession.

At this juncture, it is our joy to stress that in Nigeria today some of these indigenous 'fore runners' and seasoned scholars of French language education in Nigeria are professors of French in their respective universities, either at home or abroad. Among them are Professor Abiola Irele, Victor O. Aire, Tunde Ajiboye, Kester O. Echenim, Adebola A. Kukoyi, Raymond O. Elaho, John E. Elerius, Unionmwan Edebiri, Paul Eigodum, Pai Obanya, Olusola Oke, Emmanuel C. Nwezeh e.t.c (Ajiboye 2004). Similarly, still on tertiary level, some colleges of education known as Advanced Teachers's College in the country then also joined in the crusade for French language education in Nigeria. Among these old colleges are Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Alvan Ikoku College of Education as well as University of Lagos College of Education. In the early 60s, there were already French graduates from these colleges of educations.

The declaration of French as second official language of Nigeria during late General Sanni Abacha's regime in 1996 paved way for the recognition of French language education by some of our policy makers. This official declaration was

predicated on the fact that Nigeria is surrounded by Francophone countries (Niger Republic and Chad in the North, Cameroon in the East and Benin Republic in the West). For effective interaction with these neighboring countries, Nigerians need to embrace this foreign language and be proficient in it. Hence, NPE (2004) states that:

For smooth interaction with our neighbor, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the Second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and secondary schools, but non-vocational elective at the senior secondary schools.

The above good intent of the government has never been fulfilled, despite its high commendations. It is a pity that after about 10 years, the vision about making at least 70% of Nigerians internationally bilingual in French and English language has not fully materialised. Falade (2008) has observed that despite the fact that Nigerian government want French to be offered as a core subject in both primary and secondary levels of education, many public schools still remains adamant on the full implementation of the said policy. However, the schools should not be fully blame, for little could the schools do if adequate materials and motivation is not provided by the government, who is its sole owner.

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In schools, it is observed that teachers of French language are scarce as they are no more employed and the few existing ones are made to teach some other subjects like English, Literatures-in-English, Civic Education and so on. This problem is coupled with the fact that the status of French language in Nigerian schools is unstable as many Nigerians are still in their state of confusion over whether French should be treated as a second official language or as a foreign language. Such state of dilemma could be seriously affecting French language from taking its rightful position in the educational system of this nation. If French had been fully and practically recognised by all Nigerians as the second official language, they would have given it every support or succor needed to succeed as they have done to English language. It could be observed that many Nigerians still see French as a foreign, or better still, strange language to them, which needs not to be studied in their schools. This, as against the dictates of the country's NPE, spur the interest of the present researcher to carry out an assessment of the status of French as a foreign language in selected junior secondary schools in Odeda local government of Ogun state. Many graduates of Junior secondary school in Nigeria, who are said to have passed through a nine-year compulsory tutelage in French have been observed and reported by various examination bodies to be deficient in the nitty-gritty of French communication. The issue is so alarming and glaring in Odeda local government area of Ogun

state. Hence, a need to access the level at which junior secondary schools in Odeda Local Government is adopting the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Is the insufficient availability of French teachers in the school affecting teaching of French as a foreign language?
2. What is the role of adequate instructional materials to the teaching of French as a foreign language in Nigeria schools?

Is the time duration allocated for French affecting teachers' performance in teaching French language in secondary schools?

**METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design:** This study adopted a descriptive research design of survey type as it descriptively assesses the teaching of French as a foreign language in some selected junior secondary schools in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State.

**Population of the Study:** The JSS 1 to JSS 3 teachers in secondary schools in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun state constituted the population for this study.

**Sample and Sampling Techniques:** From all the junior secondary schools in Odeda local government area, 15 public and 15 private schools were selected using the simple random sampling technique. The total enumeration sampling technique was used to select the teachers that took part in the study, as all the teachers of French present in the randomly

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selected schools were enumerated. In all, 50 teachers of French language formed the respondent of the study.

**Research Instrument:** A questionnaire tagged 'Teachers' Assessment of the Teaching of French Questionnaire (TATFQ)' was used to gather data for this study. The instrument is designed to allow teachers of French assess the status and teaching of French in their respective schools. Hence, it was a form of self-assessment. TATFQ consisted of two sections, sections A and B. Section A elicited demographic information from the teachers while section B which consists of 10 items elicited information from the teachers, as related to the focus of the study. The response format for the 10 items was the modified Likert 4-point scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

**Validity and Reliability of Instrument:** The instrument was face and content validated by two experts; one in French language and the other in measurement evaluation. Their corrections and suggestions were considered in preparing the final instrument. The final instrument was trial-tested on a number of 10 French teachers in schools outside Odeda Local Government Area. Thereafter, a reliability index of 0.87 was gotten using the Cronbach alpha reliability method.

**Procedure for Data Collection:** Pre-visit was done to the selected schools to ascertain that they teach French language. The consents of the school

management and French teachers were also sorted and dates for the administration of the instrument were given. The researcher followed the dates given appropriately and administered the questionnaire at the most convenient time for the teacher. The retrieval of the administered instruments and the collation of data were done on the spot, as none of the teachers was allowed to take the questionnaire home. As such, four weeks were used for the administration of instrument and collation of data for this study.

**Method of Data Analysis:** The data collected for this study were analysed using the descriptive statistics of frequency count, mean, percentages and standard deviation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Demographic Data**

#### **Respondents' Gender**

From the data collected from the respondents used in this study, it was showed that out of 50 respondents 24 (48.0%) were males while 26 (52.0%) were females as indicated in Bar-chart below.

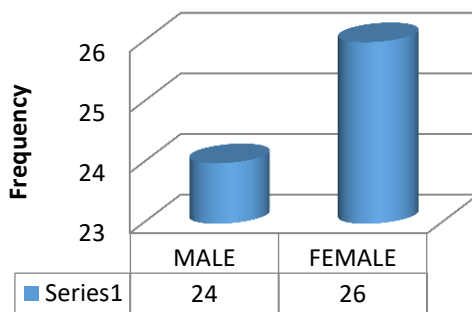
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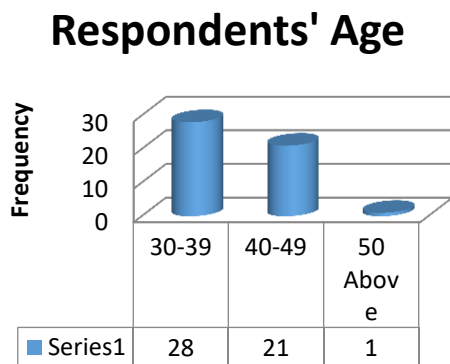
**Respondents' Gender**



*Figure 1: Showing Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Gender*

**Respondents' Age**

The results showed that out of 50 respondents sampled for the study, 28 (56.0%) of respondents were age interval of 30-39, 21 (42.0%) of respondents were age interval of 40-49, while 1 (2.0%) of respondents were age interval of 50-Above as illustrated in the bar chart below;

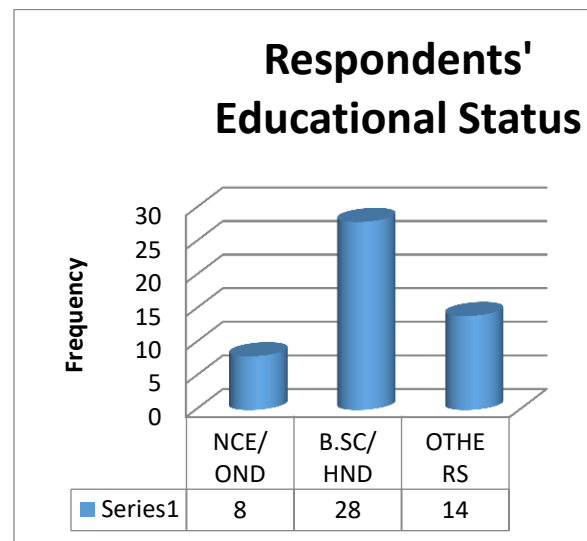


*Figure 2: Showing Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Age*

The bar chart above indicated that respondents with 30-39 years of age interval has the highest frequency count than others in the study.

**Respondents' Educational Background**

Educational qualification of the respondents as classified in this study revealed that out of 50 respondents used, 8 (16.0%) of respondents were NCE/OND certificate holders, 28 (56.0%) of respondents were B.Sc/HND certificate holders, while 14 (28.0%) of respondents were others of professionals and postgraduate certificate holders as indicated in the bar chart below;



*Figure 4.3: Showing Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Educational Qualification*

Bar chart revealed that respondents with B.Sc./HND certificate holders were more than other

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educational qualifications of the respondents used in the study.

**Results**

**Research Question One:** Is the insufficient of availability of French teachers in the school affecting teaching of French as a foreign language?

**Table 1: Frequency Distribution and Simple Percentage of Availability of Teaching French as a Foreign Language**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
1.	Lack of French teachers has effect on the teaching of French as a foreign language in my school	44 88.0%	6 12.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	3.880	.328
2.	Does available French teachers teach students according to French language curriculum as a foreign language	7 14.0%	11 22.0%	12 24.0%	20 40.0%	3.080	1.007
3.	Recruiting French teachers from French speaking countries can contribute to the effective teaching of French language in Nigeria schools	18 36.0%	23 46.0%	6 12.0%	3 6.0%	3.120	.848
4.	Adequate implementation of French language policy and curriculum requires versed teachers' knowledge	21 42.0%	26 52.0%	3 6.0%	0 0.0%	3.360	.598

From the above research question: item 1 showed that 100.0% with  $\bar{x}=3.880$  of the respondents agreed that lack of French teachers has effected on the teaching of French as a foreign language in their schools while remained percentage disagreed with the question; items 2 revealed that 36.0 % with  $\bar{x} = 3.080$  of the respondent agreed that available French teachers taught students according to French language curriculum as a foreign language while the remained percentage disagreed; item 3 indicated that 82.3% with  $\bar{x} = 3.120$  of the respondent agreed that recruiting French teachers from French speaking countries could contribute to the effective teaching of French language in Nigeria schools while remained percentage disagreed; item 4 revealed

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that 94.0% with  $\bar{x} = 3.360$  of the respondents agreed that adequate implementation of French language policy and curriculum requires versed teachers' knowledgewhile the remained percentage disagreed with the statement.

**Research Question Two:** What is the role of adequate instructional materials to the teaching French as a foreign language in Nigeria schools?

**Table 2: Frequency Distribution and Simple Percentage of instructional materials on Teaching of French language**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
1.	Carrying students along in the class by calling them to read from the textbook aid students' performance	25 50.0%	22 44.0%	3 6.0%	0 0.0%	3.440	.611
2.	Adequate use of instructional materials contribute to students' performance	20 40.0%	21 42.0%	7 14.0%	2 4.0%	3.180	.825
3.	Audio materials are necessities in the teaching of French	18 36.0%	21 42.0%	9 18.0%	2 4.0%	3.360	.598

From the above research question: item 1 indicated that 94.0% with  $\bar{x} = 3.440$  of the respondents agreed that carrying students along in the class by calling them to read from the textbook aid performance while remained percentage disagreed with the question; items 2 revealed that 82.0 % with  $\bar{x} = 3.180$  of the

respondent agreed that adequate uses of instructional materials contribute to students' performance while the remained percentage disagreed with the statement; item 3 showed that 78.0% with  $\bar{x} = 3.360$  of the respondent agreed that audio materials were necessities teaching aid in the teaching of French while remained percentage disagreed.



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**Research Question Three:** Is the time duration allocated for French affecting teachers' performance in teaching French language in secondary schools?

**Table 3: Frequency Distribution and Simple Percentage of Time Duration Allocated on Teaching of French language**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
1.	The number of periods allocated to the teaching of French in my school is different from other subjects	20 40.0%	26 52.0%	3 6.0%	1 2.0%	3.160	.618
2.	Regular assignment on French language develops students level of proficiency	25 50.0%	23 46.0%	2 4.0%	0 0.0%	3.460	.579
3.	The suggested percentage of time allocation is similar to other related subjects like English in my school	17 34.0%	19 38.0%	7 14.0%	7 14.0%	2.920	1.027

From the above research question: item 1 indicated that 92.0% with  $\bar{x} = 3.160$  of the respondents agreed that the number of periods allocated to the teaching of French in their schools is different from other subjects while remained percentage disagreed with the question; items 2 revealed that 96.0 % with  $\bar{x} = 3.460$  of the respondent agreed that regular assignment on French

language develops students level of proficiency while the remained percentage disagreed with the statement; item 3 showed that 72.0% with  $\bar{x} = 2.920$  of the respondent agreed that the suggested percentage of time allocated to teaching of French is not similar to other related subjects like English in my school while remained percentage disagreed.

***Discussion of Findings***

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The first research question for this study asked if the insufficient availability of French teachers in the school is affecting the teaching of French as a foreign language. Findings revealed that majority of the teachers believed that lack of French teachers has effect on the teaching of French as a foreign language in their schools; that the available French teachers teach students according to the curriculum; that recruiting French teachers from French speaking countries can contribute to the effective teaching of French language in Nigeria; that adequate implementation of French language policy and curriculum requires versed teachers' knowledge. This readily shows that teachers are key factor in the effective teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in Nigeria. The numbers of teachers available for the teaching of French in each school, their expertise and professionalism have something to say on the teaching of French as a foreign language in Nigeria.

The second research question for this study question the role of adequate instructional materials to the teaching of French as a foreign language. In answering this question, it was found that carrying students along in the class by calling them to read from the textbook aid students' performance; that adequate use of instructional materials contribute to students' performance; and that audio materials are necessities in the teaching of French language. This shows that the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in Nigeria is not being effective

because adequate instructional materials which are panacea to its effectiveness are not being provided. There is a little to what teachers' improvisation could do, especially when it comes to the issue of proficiency in the oracy skills, that requires that students practice listening and speaking in French.

The third research question for this study asked if the time duration allocated for French is affecting teachers' performance in teaching French language in secondary schools. The result showed that the number of periods allocated to the teaching of French in their schools is different from other subjects; that regular assignment on French language develops students' level of proficiency; and that the suggested percentage of time allocation is similar to other related subjects like English in their school. It could be deduced from this result that French has not been fully enjoying time allocation on the school time table like other subject and this is really affecting the teaching of French as a foreign language in Nigeria. There are all indications from the findings of this study that the policy statement related to the teaching of French as a foreign language and its adoption as a second official language in Nigeria has not been fully implemented. This corroborated the finding of Falade (2008) who also submitted that despite the fact that Nigerian government wants French to be offered as a core subject in both primary and secondary levels of education, many public schools still remains adamant on the full implementation of the said policy.

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***Conclusion***

Teaching French in the public education system is not mean job to be undertaken by a teacher. It is possible and admissible to assert that French teachers in public junior secondary schools are teaching under very difficult situations. In most schools, emphasis has shifted to giving priority to so-called 'important' subjects in the curriculum with the surprise exclusion of French. For this reason, a lot of schools do not offer French even though this, in some cases could be as a result of inadequate French teachers. As if this is not enough, students interest in studying French at the junior secondary schools level have deteriorated over the years. Consequently, performances of students in public schools which continue to offer French as a subject of study have been low generally due to the myriad of challenges. Government has done and continues to do its bit, together with support from the French government, to raise the stakes as far as teaching and learning of French are concerned. In all these, teachers too have a crucial role to play so as to promote learning. The role of the foreign language teacher in modern times needs to change to one of full innovative strategies to help students learn.

***Recommendations***

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Government and school owners should employ more qualified teachers of French and provide more instructional materials. School administrators should also endeavor to allocate time to the teaching and learning of French language as commensurate to its importance in Nigeria.
- The Government should embrace a more positive attitude towards the French language learning.
- Learning of French language should be made compulsory right from the primary schools to secondary schools (both public and private) in the country.
- Passing French at credit level must be made compulsory for all the Arts students (as English language is in many francophone countries). This will go a long way in imposing more seriousness in the students. Also, it will settle the problem of unemployment of the French graduates as majority of them will be employed as French teachers in the primary schools secondary schools. This will also increase the number of students enrolling for French language in the tertiary institutions.
- Both the teachers and the students of French language in the colleges of education should be motivated through scholarships to francophone countries. Also, modern French laboratories and libraries should be sited in all colleges of

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Education to facilitate the teaching and learning of the language.

- Government should as a matter of urgency, recruit French teachers in large number and deploy them to various secondary schools across the state. This can be done through the national teachers' scheme.
- Government needs to produce and provide schools with adequate infrastructural facilities such as desks, tables, chair etc. more classrooms should be constructed. The existing ones which are in bad condition should be renovated. Equally, good quality chalkboards be provided to enhance functional teaching and learning.
- The government should also subsidize the amount needed for the linguistic immersion programme in French Village Badagry Lagos.
- The government should also sensitize the authorities of Nigeria French language village, Badagry on the need to enforce the students to be speaking French in and outside the environment. If this is done, the students will have a francophone feeling in the society rather than speaking different mother tongues or Pidgin English.

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