

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AND COLLEGE OF EDUCATION STUDENTS' LEARNING OUTCOMES IN FRENCH, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**Agbor Catherine Alex (Ph.D) and Ashabua Derick A.**

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ABSTRACT: *The study investigated psychological factors and College of Education students' learning outcomes in French, Cross River State, Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to give direction to the study. The study adopted a survey research design and the population comprised 55 second year French Language students, of which the entire population was used for the study. A well validated Psychological Factors and Students' Learning Outcomes in French (PFSLOF) questionnaire and a French Literacy Test (FLT) were used to collect the required data. The independent t-test was the statistical tools used for analysis of the data collected. Two hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. The results of the analysis revealed that students' attitude and personality have significant influence on their learning outcomes in French Language. Sequel to the findings of this study, recommendations were made.*

KEYWORDS: Psychological Factors, Attitude, Personality, Learning Outcomes, French Language.

INTRODUCTION

Language learning is a conscious effort learners make to acquire basic knowledge of the target language. The objectives of learning a language cannot be achieved without the learners' willful and active participation in the learning process. Second language learning depends largely on psychological principles and operatives and the conditions under which it takes place must be put into consideration. Most individuals' behaviours occur in a social context, and these behaviours are being manifested linguistically by cognitive processes. This is to say that thought precedes language behaviours. Psychological factors like attitude and personality traits, (that is, introvert or extrovert) of students play significant roles in determining students' learning outcomes and are essential for delivering quality teaching and learning.

There is more to language as a concept than just being a medium of communication. Every action is always preceded by thoughts which is language bound. In this vein, language could be seen as a medium of thinking, expression of ideas, feelings, emotions and affections. In the words of Akudolu (2004), language is a system of speech used by human beings to communicate with one another. The author added that it is not only a means of communication. It is also a means for thinking, conceptualization and identification. It enables humans to think and to communicate with each other as it is being transmitted from one generation to another. Language identifies a people, their culture, history and tradition. That is why people from a particular linguistic background possess similar characteristics wherever they are found.

Learning a second language like French in a multilingual and multicultural society like Nigeria with over 450 indigenous languages and dialects could be very cumbersome (Omodiaye, 1992). Learners will strive to overcome the challenges of their mother tongue, English language or language of the immediate environment.

The declaration of French as the second official language in Nigeria by the then Head of State, late General Sani Abacha in 1996 is still a mirage as it is politicized. In the words of Igonor (2011), the Nigerian government took a fundamental policy decision in 2002, making French the second official language as well as giving it the status of a core subject in both junior and senior secondary school curriculum. However, the decision to place French on a high pedestal turned out to be a deceit as lack of motivation on the part of stakeholders has also contributed to the dearth of interest in the language (Igonor, 2011). But in the present Nigerian society, that generosity rarely exists as French students in the Colleges of Education are left to pay their fares for acculturation and excursion with little or no support from government.

The above gesture which was meant to establish the presence of French as a second official language as well as a course of study in Colleges of Education in the state in particular is yet to pay off as there is still a high rate of poor performance in the language by prospective teachers of the language. This is evident in the dwindling performance of second year students of French in both the Federal College of Education, Obudu, and College of Education, Akamkpa, whereby, in the last 5 academic sessions beginning from 2012/2013 – 2016/2017, their performances have not been encouraging, as only 45% of students were able to pass from A-C in some selected French courses for first and second semesters of each session, while 55% of them settled for D-F. These discouraging performances of second year students who are the intermediate class have not been taken lightly by parents and teachers as it has posed several questions as to why the situation has hardly improved.

In the light of the above, learning the language could be just for the sake of acquiring a University degree or certificate, getting a job, gaining promotion or having knowledge of a second or foreign language. However, learners of French Language should be able to exhibit the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills so acquired, should also be evident in their performance if appropriate effort is put into the language learning process. By so doing, learners will not deny themselves the opportunities the language carry in this 21st century, where knowledge of a second or foreign language is advantageous for international trade and politics. And having a good command of it will be an added advantage. Worthy of note is the fact that Nigeria is bordered by French speaking countries (Cameroun, Chad, Niger and The Republic of Benin).

In an attempt to understand the discrepancy in second language learning among different category of learners with regards to their psychological background, Gardner (2001) posed the following questions: why is it that students of second language differ in their level of attainment, some ultimately becoming bilingual, others remaining virtual monoglots? Does studying a second language make students more tolerant of others and more appreciative of the language group concerned? Does travel to another language community promote warmth and understanding?

Students' attitude towards the learning of French could play a pivotal role in their learning outcomes. Those with positive attitude tend to do better in performance than their counterparts with negative attitude. In the same vein, a student's attitude towards learning French is his predisposition to act either favourably or unfavourably to situations pertaining to the language. It takes interest, passion and determination by a student of the language for him or her to be willing to work either independently or in groups for the purpose of achieving learning objectives. This behaviour by a student or group of students may influence their learning outcomes as has been manifested in their poor level of vocabulary acquisition by many second year students in Colleges of Education in Cross River State in the last five academic sessions.

However, Siti (2014) maintained that students' attitudes correlate with their proficiency level as well as the location of their school and their classes. In another development, Candlin and Mercer (2001) opined that, students' attitudes towards the target language, its speakers, and the learning content may all play some part in explaining their success in learning a language.

Personality traits, be it introvert or extrovert, could influence students' learning outcomes in French Language, since second or foreign language is a conscious effort learners make to acquire some degree or level of proficiency. Introverts, the reserved category of language learners who find it difficult to express themselves in a target language, acquire mostly the linguistic competence in French Language. In the same vein, Suliman (2014) sees an introvert as a person who is more concerned with his own emotions and feelings than in issues outside himself. The researcher added that these persons are too shy to join social activities. Practice makes perfect. Every aspect of a language that is not put to use goes extinct. Extroverts on the other hand, are the easy-going, sociable, out-spoken and talkative who like to work in groups. These persons demonstrate linguistic performance in French Language. Suliman (2014) added here that an extrovert is a person who is more concerned with what is happening around him than his own emotions.

This research work is focused on the psychological factors and College of Education students' learning outcomes in French, Cross River State, Nigeria. The sub-variables of the study are; attitude and personality.

Theoretical framework

This research work was based on the psychological theory of second language learning by Robert Gardner (1985) and Cognitive learning theory by Jean Piaget (1936)

Statement of the problem

French is the second official language in Nigeria. The country is also bordered by French speaking countries (francophone). The free flow of citizens to and from Nigeria even before the language was adopted as the second official language some 22 years ago established the presence of the language in the country. It is expected that with the presence of the language in the country over these years, there should be some level of proficiency among citizens because the language is a core subject at basic education, as well as an area of specialization in tertiary institutions.

College of Education graduates of French are required to lay the foundation at the basic level for the language to thrive. But these teacher trainees themselves do not fare well in the language. The question now is; what could be responsible for this abysmal state of things? The low level of understanding of the language among College of Education students which could be attributed to some psychosocial factors such as students' attitude towards the language and personality (i.e introvert or extrovert) may have led to the dwindling performance in the subject overtime. Precisely, in the last five academic sessions (2012/2013 to 2016/2017) it has been observed that only 45% of second year French Language students from the Federal College of Education, Obudu, and the College of Education, Akamkpa, passed between A-C on the average, while 55% settled from D-F (see appendices D-M, pp101-119).

However, the establishment of the Nigerian French Language village in Badagry, Lagos state, by the Federal Government of Nigeria was meant to create an impact on the learning of the language for both educational and administrative purposes. This objective has been rarely

achieved as the performance of students in the Colleges of Education in most aspects of the language keeps dwindling which necessitated this research work.

A lot of psychological constructs influence students' academic performance, herein referred to as learning outcomes. In this vein, Mushtaq & Khan (2012) stated that, academic performance is affected either by psychological factors among others, in which have a powerful influence on academic achievement of students' as either positive or negative. To this end, this study seeks to examine the psychological factors; attitudes and personality and College of Education students' learning outcomes in French, Cross River State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study which sought to determine how College of Education students' attitude and personality influence their learning outcomes in French was guided by two research questions:

1. Does College of Education students' attitude influence their learning outcomes in French?
2. How does College of Education students' personality influence their learning

The following hypotheses were deduced and tested in the study;

1. There is no significant influence of College of Education students' attitude on their learning outcomes in French.
2. There is no significant influence of College of Education students' personality on their learning outcomes in French.

The research design adopted for the study was a survey while the population of the study consisted of the 55 second year French Language students in government owned Colleges of Education in Cross River State who are studying French either as a major or teaching subject. The institutions were College of Education (C.O.E.) Akamkpa, and Federal College of Education (F.C.E), Obudu. The students are the ones undergoing the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) programme in French Language. This study made use of purposive sampling technique. The sample of the study was made up of the entire 55 second year students who are studying French either as a major or teaching subject, drawn from the two Colleges of Education under study.

RESULTS FINDINGS

The results of the analysis are presented in tables 1 and 2, hypothesis by hypothesis.

Hypothesis one

There is no significant influence of students' attitude on their learning outcomes in French Language. The independent variable in this hypothesis is students' attitude and is categorized into two groups (negative and positive) while the dependent variable is learning outcomes in French Language. Independent t-test was used to test this hypothesis at .05 level of significance and the result is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Independent t-test for students' attitude and French Language learning outcomes

Grouping variable	N	Df	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.	Effect size
Negative attitude	17	49	23.47	9.19	4.81	.000	0.56
Positive attitude	34		33.65	5.87			

* significant at 0.05; df = 49; critical t-value 1.96

As presented in Table 1, the result was statistically significant $t(49) = 4.81$; $p < .05$. The calculated t-value of 4.81 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96, at $df = 49$; $p < .05$. This means that, there was significant influence of students' attitude on their learning outcomes in French Language. A look at the result shows that students with positive attitude have a higher mean value ($M = 33.65$; $SD = 5.87$) which is an indicator of better learning outcome than students with negative attitude ($M = 23.47$; $SD = 9.19$). This result implies that, the null hypothesis which states that, there is no significant influence of students' attitude on their learning outcomes in French Language is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is upheld.

However, the effect size was moderate revealing that this finding was substantial in real terms since $r = (0.56)$ which is a measure of effect size indicates the proportion of explained or shared variance on the dependent variable (students' learning outcomes), which implies that 56% of the variance in students learning outcomes is accounted for by students' attitude.

Hypothesis two

There is no significant influence of students' personality on their learning outcomes in French Language. The independent variable in this hypothesis is students' personality and is categorized into two groups (extroversion and introversion) while the dependent variable is learning outcomes in French Language. Independent t-test was used to test this hypothesis at .05 level of significance and the result is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Independent t-test for students' personality and French Language learning outcomes

Grouping variable	N	Df	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.	Effect size
Introvert	29	49	27.83	9.24	2.436	.019	0.32
Extrovert	22		33.45	6.45			

* significant at 0.05; df = 49; critical t-value 1.96

As presented in Table 2, the result was statistically significant $t(49) = 2.436$; $p < .05$. The calculated t-value of 2.436 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96, at $df = 49$; $p < .05$. This means that, there was significant influence of students' personality on their learning outcomes in French Language. A look at the result shows that extrovert students have a higher mean value ($M = 33.45$; $SD = 6.457$) which is an indicator of better learning outcome than introvert students ($M = 27.83$; $SD = 9.24$). This result implies that, the null hypothesis which states that, there is no significant influence of students' personality on their learning outcomes in French Language is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is upheld. However, the effect size was

moderate revealing that this finding was substantial in real terms since $r = (0.32)$ which is a measure of effect size indicates the proportion of explained or shared variance on the dependent variable (students' learning outcomes), which implies that 34% of the variance in students learning outcomes is accounted for by students' personality.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed at determining the influence of psychosocial factors on students' learning outcomes in French language. Psychosocial factors (variables) such as students' attitude (negative or positive); personality (introvert or extrovert); linguistic environment and students' socio-economic status (low, mid or high) were considered to determine their influence on students' learning outcomes in French Language.

Discussion of results is presented as follows:

Students' attitude and learning outcomes in French Language

The result of data analysis rejected the null hypothesis that states, there is no significant influence of students' attitude on their learning outcomes in French Language while the alternate hypothesis was upheld. The result of this finding was expected, since attitude plays a significant role in students' actions and inactions. The result of this finding is similar to the finding of Araromi (2012) who examined the attitudes of undergraduate students to the study of French as a general study course in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The researcher found out that there is a significant difference in students' attitudes and knowledge of French Language. These differences in students' attitudes serve as a determining factor to their learning outcomes. This is because, students with positive attitude towards learning French Language may excel, while those with negative attitude may regress. In a similar research on the relationship between students' attitudes toward foreign language and foreign language learning achievement, Saracaloglu (2000) discovered that females show higher positive attitude than males in foreign language learning.

Students' personality and learning outcomes in French Language

The result of data analysis rejected the null hypothesis which states that, there is no significant influence of students' personality on their learning outcomes in French Language while the alternate hypothesis was upheld. This is not uncommon as there is a clear indication that introverts and extroverts learn languages at different paces. While introverts could be endowed with linguistic competence, their extrovert counterparts could be endowed with linguistic performance. In a similar study, Hsiang-Ning and Rebecca (2008) discovered in their study of shy and non-shy college students' use of strategies, foreign language anxiety, motivation, and willingness to communicate, that non-shy students reported using strategies more often across all strategy types than their shy counterparts, with compensation strategies being used the most often, and social strategies the least often.

In this vein, introverts need something to spur them to communicate, while extroverts are the talkatives who are always willing to explore the language environment. However, Dewaele (2002) maintained that a typical extrovert is sociable, active, talkative, person-oriented, optimistic, fun-loving, and affectionate. Meanwhile, a typical introvert is reserved, sober, aloof, task-oriented, retiring, isolated, pensive, and quiet. Language learning is a practice oriented

exercise, and only those who are willing to take up the challenges there in, will be able to express themselves, lest, it becomes an exercise in futility.

Based on the data collected and data analyzed, the following findings were reached:

1. There is significant influence of students' attitude on their learning outcomes in French Language. Learners with positive attitude towards French performed better than learners with negative attitude.
2. There is significant influence of students' personality on their learning outcomes in French Language. Extroverts performed better than introverts in language learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it was concluded that; students' attitude and personality significantly influence their learning outcomes in French Language.. Thus learners should be encouraged by their teachers to learn the language through healthy competitions such as debates, symposiums, quiz and presentation of seminars in order for them to develop a positive attitude towards the language, while government should encourage the study of French by assisting students financially, through grants and scholarships to deserving students, especially during their one year immersion programme.

Future Research

While the researchers will not claim that this research is conclusive, they will hold that the wheel of this research be kept rolling with the following suggestions:

1. A similar study should be carried out on private owned Colleges of Education in Cross River State.
2. This study should be replicated on variables not previously studied.
3. A study should be carried out comparing students' performance before and after their immersion programme.

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