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## INVESTIGATION OF FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' ENROLLMENT OF FRENCH IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL EXAMINATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BENIN METROPOLIS

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### Abstract

*This study investigated the factors influencing students' enrollment of French in SSCE in Benin Metropolis. It also considered the influence of sex as a moderating variable. Two research questions and one hypothesis were raised to guide the study. This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population of this study comprises 13,450 senior secondary students in Benin Metropolis. The sample size was 453 senior secondary students selected using the random sampling technique. The instrument was validated by three experts in language education in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City. The reliability of the instrument was calculated using Cronbach Alpha statistics and reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Research question one was answered using frequency counts, percentage, mean and standard deviation, while the hypothesis was tested using Independent Samples t-test at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study showed that school-based/academic factors are the most responsible for students' lack of interest in enrolling for French in SSCE. Next are the social factors while the least are the personal factors. For instance, even when students did not enroll for French, they do not see French as being a difficult subject. There was also sex difference in students' views about the factors that influence students' enrollment for French in SSCE. Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, it is recommended among others that government should employ more qualified French teachers to teach the subject and they should endeavour to implement the language policy as spelt out in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013).*

**Key Words:** French Enrollment, SSCE, Personal factors, School-based/Academic factors, Social factors

### Introduction

French language is one of the leading languages in the world. It originated from France, where it was first used in an official document in AD842. It is the national language used in France. It is the

second most learnt foreign language in the world. Over 200 million people speak French language the world over, in about five continents of the world. The language is taught in all continents and it is the most widely learned foreign language after English language. It is the official language of most international organizations such as the European Union, United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), United Nations Scientific Education and Cultural Organization UNESCO, European Court of Justice, the European Tribunal, World Health Organization (WHO), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and others (Osawaru, 2017).

The geographical location of Nigeria has made French language necessary as it is bordered by Niger Republic in the North, Benin Republic in the West, Cameroon in the East and Chad in the North East. These countries have French as their Lingua Franca. Gella & Kwaja (2017) say that Nigeria is an Anglophone country in a sea of Francophone countries. Languages are not only prerequisites for international commerce, they are also business drivers. They drive economic growth, creates jobs and foster global competitiveness, (Fenstermacher & Lawless, 2012). The economic influence of France as one of the advanced nations of the world is one reason why the teaching of French in Nigeria is advantageous. France is the world's fifth largest economy which attracts entrepreneurs, researchers and top foreign diplomats. There are many multinational companies whose working language is French language established in areas of business such as retailing, automotive, luxury goods and aeronautics. Graduates of French both at NCE or degree levels stand the chance of working in these establishments sited in Nigeria and thereby building a career in various fields of human endeavours.

Promoting French language learning in secondary schools in Nigeria where English language is the official second language can be a challenging task especially in a time when globalization is rapidly increasing, along with the spread of English as a global lingua franca. Most secondary school students in the country are of the opinion that French Language is not as educationally useful as almost everyone the world over speaks English. This argument can lead to students perceiving French Language learning as irrelevant to their future career. In Anglophone countries, students perceive French to be more difficult to learn than English, which causes anxiety to learn the language. Taylor and Marsden (2014) believe that the perceived cause of the decline in enrollment in foreign languages is the societal attitude towards the global status of the English language. However, while it may be true that English has become the lingua franca, monolingual speakers are no longer the norm. There is the need for students to be able to speak other foreign languages and a very good option could be the French Language.

Despite the gains students stand to benefit from the learning of French, the lack of policy statements in support of it is a great hindrance. Two legal instruments in Nigeria that serve as language policies do not give any clear policy statement about the teaching of French Language. The Nigerian Constitution (FRN, 1979; 1999) maintain that the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in the three major languages of the country while English is upheld as the lingua franca of the country. Also, The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004; 2013) provides that children be taught in their mother tongue in the primary school during the first three years with English as a subject of study, while in the last three years of primary education, English takes over as medium of instruction. This policy does not in any way support or encourage the teaching/learning of French in the Nigerian school system.

It has been observed that the number of students enrolling and choosing French as a SSCE examination subject in Nigeria, Edo State in particular has been on the decline. This decline enrollment is not peculiar to Edo state, it is a world-wide phenomenon, Mady and Turnbull (2010) in Canada, Doughty (2013) in the United Kingdom and even in the African continent, Gbollie and Gong (2013) have all reported declining enrolment for French. Several factors can be adduced for this persistent decline, prominent among which is the fact that at the senior secondary school level, where English Language now becomes the only compulsory language for students, the French Language now has to

contend with other languages such as Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Efik, Arabic. Coupled with this is that French Language is also listed under Humanities in the fields of studies students can enroll for SSCE; subjects in this group include the likes of Christian Religious Studies, Islamic Studies, Visual Arts, Music, History, Geography, Government, Economics, Literature-in-English (FRN, 2013). Besides the four compulsory cross-cutting subjects (English Language, General Mathematics, Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects and Civic Education), students can only enroll for additional four and maximum of five other subjects.

Therein lies the dilemma, making any choice involves a process of examination of the existing alternatives. The other optional subjects the learners have to choose from constitute the alternatives. Faced with the task of selecting a subject of study from among these alternatives when they enroll for SSCE the secondary school, students apply the principles of utilitarianism and consequential reasoning. This makes it very competitive for the subjects under the Humanities. French Language is now on the cliff edge where motivational factors interplay, enrollment rates experience a massive decline, with the majority of students going over the edge. Superficially, this would appear to indicate a lack of perceived value in French Language learning, with enrollments steadily decreasing each academic year to a very small percent of students enrolling for French Language for SSCE. It thus appears that students have the ultimate decision of the choice of subjects they would enroll for in the SSCE. It is on the basis of this that the study specifically sought to examine students' perception of the factors which influence their enrolment as an examination subject in SSCE in public schools in Benin Metropolis. To achieve the objectives of the study, two research questions and one hypothesis were raised to guide the study.

1. What factors do senior secondary school students identify as influencing their decision to enroll for French language in the Senior School Certificate Examination?
2. Is there any difference in the factors senior secondary school students identify as influencing their decision to enroll for French language in the Senior School Certificate Examination based on sex?

### **Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference in the factors senior secondary school students identify as influencing their decision to enroll for French language in the Senior School Certificate Examination based on sex.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **➤ Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of the study is hinged on Maslow's (1943) theory of needs and motivation. Maslow (1943) defined need as a psychological deficiency that a person feels the compulsion to satisfy. This serves as motivation to influence a person's work attitudes, behaviours and choice. Maslow (1943) posited that everybody has needs that he/she wants to satisfy. He classified these needs into two namely primary and secondary needs. The primary needs he refers to as basic needs of life like food, water, sleep which deal with the physical aspects of behaviour. The secondary needs are psychological needs which are learned primarily through experience. These are cultural and individual needs like the desire for power, achievement, and love and so on.

Education today is targeted at providing good jobs to citizens to sustain their livelihood and to also enable them make significant and meaningful contributions to the society where they live. The Nigerian and world education structure and curriculum content are tailored towards achieving this task whereby students would acquire educational skills that would make them self-reliant and dependent after leaving school (FRN, 2004; NERDC 2011, Noordin 2012). Enrolling for French Language by students for SSCE might not easily be detached from motivation in the sense that this is the level that would determine future course of studies students will go for in the universities and their future

prospects. This study therefore examined the motivating variables which de-motivated students from enrolling for French Language in SSCE,

➤ Factors Responsible for Low French Enrolment in Secondary Schools

Various factors affect students' decisions to take French as a subject. Several key factors affect students' motivation to enroll in a language as a subject, one of which are the barriers preventing them from doing so. These barriers can be classified according to three main themes: personal, school-based/academic, social factors. Chinedu and Anthonia (2015) observe in their study on the challenges of learning French as a second language, that learners encountered challenges in two main aspects. The first one being the learners' problem such as pronunciation, spelling, stress, and rhythm of speech, gender, verbal compliments, use of the imperfect tense, and verb conjugation. The second one is the lack of textual materials, which could have been used to solve some of the first challenge identified. Tar (2011) listed lack of enthusiasm and drive in learning French as some of the challenges students face in the learning of French. Gella, and Kwaja (2017) observe that the learners' negative attitude and lack of interest are some of the problems which affect teaching and learning of the French language in Adamawa State secondary schools. Students have not yet understood the value of learning foreign languages and thus do not feel the need to enroll. Kolawole (2015) also observed that students pay little attention to French as a subject, and this is reflected in the student's low enrolment for French language course in colleges in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Amott (2019), citing Lapkin et al. (2009), states that factors that hinder the success of French include students' dissatisfaction with the subject, lack of a dedicated classroom, generalist teachers forced to teach French and cancelling of French classes to accommodate other school subjects. Gella and Kwaja (2017) opined that lack of qualified teachers is one major problem, and as a result of that shortage, some schools do not teach French in Adamawa State in Nigeria. Wagaba's (2010) study revealed the challenges of promoting foreign languages to include the following: cost of teaching materials, teaching resources not readily available in the local market, lack of clear language policy, and dedicated professional association. Machinyise's (2012) study revealed among others; shortage of French teachers, inadequate teaching, and learning materials. Alufohai (2019) findings revealed that the low societal value attached to the study of French is one of the reasons for its low enrollment in the country.

➤ Sex and Second/Foreign Language Learning

Languages may sometimes be seen as 'girls' subjects' because girls tend to choose languages. It is also commonly assumed that females are able to learn languages at a quicker pace than males. There is a great deal of empirical evidence that suggests that the female brain is more situated for language learning even from birth (Dionne, Dale, Boivin, & Plomin, 2003). Within the field of second language acquisition (SLA), there are varying factors that affect the willingness of a learner. One of the major factors is sex, which can determine everything from how one learns a language to what languages one will learn and how long one will learn them (Ortega, 2009).

Recent findings reveal that girls are over twice as likely to enter and achieve at least a pass in a language (Mills & Tinsley, 2020). They also noted that the ratio of girls to boys in many post compulsory MFL classrooms was two to one. Abbey (2020) investigated gender differences in L2 motivation in a sample of Year 11 pupils. The aim of the study was to determine the reasons for boys' lack of motivation to learn languages in secondary schools. A mixed methods approach was adopted, the methods of data collection were a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, with a sample of Year 11 pupils from four secondary schools. The results revealed gender differences in measures of perceived usefulness and enjoyment, which, indicated within the qualitative data, were associated with expected norms of male behaviour, a negative social image surrounding MFL subjects, and the notion of risk taking inherent to the language learning process. Further, the data suggest the real-world

applicability of lesson content, together with pupils' awareness of their progress in language learning, are integral to improving the motivation of boys and girls in this subject area.

### Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised of all the 13,450 Senior Secondary School I (SSI) students in Egor, Ikpoba-Okha and Oredo Local Government Areas in Benin Metropolis. The sample of the study consists of 453 students of which 273 are males and 265 are females in Senior Secondary School I. The stratified random sampling technique was adopted. First, schools were stratified into school type; private and public, then seven schools were randomly selected from each stratum. The simple random sampling technique was used to distribute the copies of the questionnaire among the schools; 45 copies in each of the seven public secondary schools and 25 copies in each of the seven private schools, making a total of 490 copies. However, 453 of the copies of the questionnaire were useable thus given 92.4% rate of return, which is quite high. One research instrument, a questionnaire was used for data collection for the study. The questionnaire tagged "Survey of the Factors that Hinders Students' Enrollment for French Language in SSCE in Benin Metropolis" has two sections; A and B. Validity of the research instruments was ascertained by three language educators in the Department of Curriculum and Instructional Technology, University of Benin, Benin City. The reliability of the instrument was estimated using Cronbach Alpha formula and reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained. The questionnaire was personally administered by the researchers after due permission was sought from the school principals. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Research question one was answered using frequency counts, percentage, mean and standard deviation, while the hypothesis was tested using Independent Samples t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

### Results

This study examined the factors senior secondary school students considered as responsible for students not enrolling for French in SSCE in Benin Metropolis. The result is presented in this section. *Research Question One: What factors do senior secondary school students identify as influencing their decision on enrollment for French in the Senior School Certificate Examination?*

**Table 1: Factors that Discourage Students from Enrolling for French in SSCE**

s/n	Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean (%)	Std.Dev. (%)
1	French is a difficult subject to learn.	146 (32.2%)	207 (67.8%)	2.17	1.098
2	I don't like or have no interest in French language.	197 (43.5%)	256 (56.5%)	2.34	1.135
3	I don't feel comfortable learning another language besides English.	256 (56.5%)	197 (43.5%)	2.65	1.124
4	My lack of oral proficiency in French.	269 (59.4%)	184 (40.6%)	2.72	1.053
5	The risk of getting poor grades in French in SSCE.	214 (47.2%)	239 (52.8%)	2.44	1.039
6	My career aspiration is not related to French.	198	255	2.36	1.116

		(43.7%)	(56.3%)		
7	My inability to communicate in French outside the classroom.	257	196	2.64	1.135
		(56.7%)	(43.3%)		
8	My inability to read and write in French.	262	191	2.60	1.143
		(57.8%)	(42.2%)		
	<b>Total for Personal Factors</b>			<b>2.49</b>	<b>.667</b>
9	Shortage of qualified French teachers.	263	190	2.67	1.071
		(58.1%)	(41.9%)		
10	Insufficient time allocated for French in the school timetable.	263	190	2.67	1.071
		(58.1%)	(41.9%)		
11	Limited exposure (Less participation in drama and music festivals).	269	184	2.72	1.055
		(59.3%)	(40.7%)		
12	Lack of advice from the career counselor on the importance of French.	157	296	2.28	.985
		(34.7%)	(65.3%)		
13	Lack of French textbooks in the school library.	225	228	2.53	1.086
		(49.6%)	(50.3%)		
14	Teachers' use of ineffective teaching methods.	283	170	2.78	1.047
		(62.5%)	(37.5%)		
15	Lack of French language laboratory.	384	69	3.27	.950
		(84.8%)	(15.2%)		
16	Lack of audio-visual gadgets (CD/DVD players) to develop/improve students' proficiency in French.	381	72	3.28	.917
		(84.1%)	(15.9%)		
	<b>Total for School-based/Academic Factors</b>			<b>2.77</b>	<b>.520</b>
17	Parents do not perceive French language as important/ useful.	157	296	2.28	.985
		(34.7%)	(65.3%)		
18	Siblings and peers discouraged me from enrolling for French in SSCE.	95	358	1.86	1.019
		(21%)	(79%)		
19	No professional in the French language talked about its importance.	284	169	2.80	1.051
		(62.7%)	(37.3%)		
20	Most parents see the study of French as a waste of time.	157	296	2.28	.985
		(34.7%)	(65.3%)		
21	I am unaware of French careers in my country/state.	301	152	2.88	1.157
		(66.5%)	(33.5%)		
22	Apart from my French teacher, I have not come across professionals with French knowledge.	341	112	3.09	1.059
		(75.3%)	(24.7%)		
23	French-related careers in my country are scarce.	309	144	2.91	1.141
		(68.2%)	(31.8%)		
24	Teaching French is the only occupation related to French.	203	150	2.88	1.157
		(66.9%)	(33.1%)		

Table 1 presents analysis of data of factors that influence students' enrollment of French for SSCE. Three main groups of factors are presented, personal, school-based/academic and social factors, each with eight statements. The analysis shows that from students' perspectives school-based/academic factors with (Mean = 2.77, SD = .520) are mostly responsible for their not enrolling for French in

SSCE. Next is the social factors with (Mean = 2.63, SD = .452), while the least is the personal factors with (Mean = 2.49, SD = .667).

The average mean of the personal factors (2.49) is lower than the average mean of 2.50. However, further analysis reveals that students agreed that four of the factors were hindrance to their choice of French. These are: lack of oral proficiency in French (Mean = 2.72, SD = 1.135), not being comfortable learning another language besides English (Mean = 2.65, SD = 1.124), inability to communicate in French outside the classroom (Mean = 2.64, SD = 1.135), and inability to read and write in French. The four other statements students did not perceive as hindrances include the following: the risk of getting low grades (Mean = 2.44, SD = 1.039), career aspiration not being related French (Mean = 2.36, SD = 1.116), lack of interest in French (Mean = 2.34, SD = 1.135), and French as a difficult language (Mean = 2.17, SD = 1.098) in fact 68% of the respondents disagreed with the statement.

The average mean of the school-based/academic factors (2.77) is higher than the average mean of 2.50. However, the respondents consider only one factor: "lack of advice from career counselor on the importance of French" (Mean = 2.28, SD = .985) out of the eight factors as not being a hindrance to their enrollment for French the other seven factors they consider as hindrances to their enrollment for French in SSCE include the following: "lack of audio-visual gadgets to develop proficiency in French" (Mean = 3.28, SD = .917), "Lack of French language laboratory" (Mean = 3.27, SD = .950), "teachers' teaching methods" (Mean = 2.78, SD = 1.047), "limited exposure" (Mean = 2.72, SD = 1.055), "shortage of qualified French teachers" (Mean = 2.67, SD = 1.071), "insufficient time allocated to French in the school timetable" (Mean = 2.67, SD = 1.071), and "lack of French textbooks in the library" (Mean = 2.53, SD = 1.086).

The average mean of the social factors (2.63) is higher than the average mean of (2.50). further analysis reveals that respondents consider five of the factors out of the eight as hindrance. These include: "apart from French teachers I have not come across other professionals with French knowledge" (Mean = 3.09, SD = 1.059), "scarcity of French-related careers in the country" (Mean = 2.91, SD = 1.141), "unaware of French careers in the country" (Mean = 2.88, SD = 1.157), "teaching French is the only viable occupation in the country" (Mean = 2.88, SD = 1.157), and "lack of professional counselling on the importance of French" (Mean = 2.80, SD = 1.051). The three factors that are not considered hindrances include "parents do not see French as important", (Mean = 2.28, SD = .985) "most parents see the study of French as a waste of time" (Mean = 2.28, SD = .985), and "discouragement from peers and siblings" ((Mean = 1.86).

*Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the factors senior secondary school students identify as influencing their decision to enroll for French language in the Senior School Certificate Examination based on sex.*

**Table 2: Summary of Independent Samples t-test of Gender Difference on Factors which Influence Students' Enrollment for French in SSCE based on Sex**

Factors	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)	Result
	Male	177	2.71	.481	451	3.158	.002	Rejected
	Female	278	2.58	.425				

Table 2 shows that there is significant difference in the scores of male students (Mean = 2.71, SD = .481) and female students (Mean = 2.58, SD = .425),  $t(451) = 3.366$ ,  $p = .001$ . These results suggest that sex has significant effect on students' views about the factors which influence their enrolling for French. So, hypothesis 2, which states that there is no significant difference in the factors senior

secondary school students identify as influencing their decision to enroll for French language in the Senior School Certificate Examination based on sex was rejected.

### **Discussion**

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the factors that influence senior secondary school students' enrollment for French in SSCE in Benin Metropolis. The findings from research question one reveal that students are of the view that school-based/academic factors were mostly what hindered students from enrolling for French in SSCE. This finding is in line with previous findings (Wagaba, 2010; Machinery, 2012; Gella & Kwaja, 2017) which have found that school-based factors such as lack of qualified French teachers, inadequate learning and teaching resources among others were responsible for low French enrollment in secondary schools. The findings also revealed that social factors were part of the factors which hinder French enrollment. This confirms the finding of Alufohai (2019) which reported that societal factors such as the non recognition of French language among members of the society as a major factor in the low enrolment of French by secondary school students in the country. The findings however, reveals that the students did not feel that personal factors were really what prevented students from enrolling for French in SSCE. This is at variance with the findings of (Tar, 2011; Chinedu & Anthonia, 2015; Kolawole, 2015, Amott, 2019) which reported that personal factors such as students' attitude towards French were responsible for the low enrollment for French in SSCE.

The findings from hypothesis one reveal that there was sex difference in how students view the factors that hinder students' enrollment for French in SSCE with the males having a higher mean, that is they see these factors as more of a hindrance than the females view it. This is not surprising as languages may sometimes be seen as 'girls' subjects' because girls tend to choose languages. It is also commonly assumed that females are able to learn languages at a quicker pace than males. The finding is in line with those of (Abbey, 2020; Mills & Tinsely, 2020) which reveal that girls are over twice as likely to enter and achieve at least a pass in a language.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that school-based/academic factors are the most responsible for students' lack of interest in enrolling for French in SSCE. Next are the social factors while the least are the personal factors. For instance, even when they did not enroll for French do not see French as being a difficult subject.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, it is recommended that:

1. Government should employ more qualified French teachers to teach the subject.
2. Government should endeavour to implement the French language policy as spelt out in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013).
3. Enlightenment campaign should be mounted to sensitize students, parents and members of the public on the advantages to be derived from the study of French.

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