

AN APPRAISAL OF THE SUFFICIENCY OF FRENCH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF NIGER STATE

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Abstract: The pertinence of the roles of teachers at all levels of education should never be undermined. Teachers are professionally trained to see to the mental and moral development of people in the society, by imparting into them knowledge in various fields. In every nation therefore, teachers are cornerstones of all other professions such as doctors, lawyers, accountants, bankers, ambassadors, police, army, journalist, and politicians among others. For teachers to be effective and yield desirable results in the society, they must perform their duties efficiently. However, adequacy or inadequacy of teachers remains a major determinant factor for teachers' efficiency or inefficiency at all levels of education. On this background, this research work discusses appraisal of the sufficiency of Teachers of French language in Junior Secondary schools in Niger State using the selected local government areas within the state. The methodology adopted for the research is the case study research method, while the major instrument used to collect data for the study is questionnaire. The research findings showed that, in spite of the fact that National Policy on Education (NPE) makes French a core subject at Junior Secondary School, teachers of French in public and private schools in Niger State are not sufficient compared to other subjects. The study further showed the level of negative impact of the insufficiency of teachers on the students' academic performances in the language thereby causing discouragement in many students to continue with French at Senior Secondary School level. The alarming consequence of this is the low enrolment of students for French language at various higher institutions (Colleges of Education and Universities) in the country.

Keywords: French language, Local Government, Niger State, Schools Sufficiency, Teacher.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language remains a distinct feature of human beings among all other creatures, as it serves as an instrument of expression of thoughts, ideas, feelings and opinions among them. It is a natural gift for mankind. Hornby (2015: 834) defined language as a system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country or area. It is a universal instrument for social interactions among human beings. Aside its communicative functions, language also serves as a mark of identity. In Nigeria, for instance, there are various tribes with their corresponding languages which,

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according to Ezema (2018:1), number about 350 and are categorized into major, minor and minority languages respectively. Among them are Yoruba, Tiv, Urhobo, Gbagyi, Izom, Edo, Gwari etc. Thus, as a heterogonous nation, over 500 languages play this all-important communicative role across various tribes and cultures in Nigeria. Aside Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo identified as the three major indigenous languages, English equally registers its presence as a colonial heritage thereby becoming the official language in the country.

In view of the above, both English and French are foreign languages who found their way into Nigeria through colonial domination and multilateral relations with France and African francophone counterparts such as Niger, Cameroon, Chad, and the Republic of Benin. Being a colonial heritage, English automatically became an official language in Nigeria after the nation's independence in 1960. In the case of French, as Onyemelukwe (2004:47) noted, it attained status of the second official language of the country in 1996 during the regime of the late Head of State, Gen. Sani Abacha.

In the area of teaching and learning of French in Nigeria, a lot of efforts have been remarkably made by the government and several indigenous experts in the field. Historically, Onyemelukwe (2004:8) traced the beginning of teaching and learning of French in Nigeria back to the sixties and the early seventies and was taught as an optional subject. Onyemelukwe posited further that French language teachers (FLTs) were very scarce during the period. This, therefore, prevented many schools from obeying government orders to introduce French into the curriculum. However, Ajiboye (2002) was quoted by Yekini (2016:2) that French was not included in the Nigerian educational curriculum until the 1960s when it became a university subject thereby making it the first foreign language in the educational programme.

Onyemelukwe (2004:21) explained further that in the 1981 version of *National Policy on Education* (NPE), French in Nigeria moved from a non-vocational elective to a compulsory core subject at both junior and senior secondary school levels and to be taught from primary 4. In the same vein, the 1998 edition of the NPE equally upgraded the status of French in Nigeria as the second official language and a compulsory subject in schools (FRN, 1998:9). Unfortunately, the 2013 version of the *National Policy on Education* limited the compulsory status of French language to the Upper Basic education level, specifically from primary four to JSS three. While at Post-basic education level (i.e. Senior secondary school level), the subject's status was been made optional under Humanities (FRN, 2013:13). This article considers this as an act of inconsistency on educational policy on the part of government.

To go by the above policy statements, the availability of adequate and capable teachers for French in various public primary and secondary schools across the country becomes imperative. This is because the population of teachers must commensurate with the population of the pupils/students in order to give room for efficiency on the part of the teachers and good academic performances on the part of the pupils/students. This must be so if French, by virtue of its new status, would be treated like other core subjects like English language and Mathematics which must be taught daily in every class throughout the week. In this regard, FRN (2013: 8-9) recommended 1:35 and 1:40 as the teacher-students ratio for upper basic education and secondary education respectively.

Statement of the Problem

As blood is to the human body so also the teacher to the education industry. Teachers are the drivers of the government's educational curriculum, as they are often saddled with the responsibility of employing their competence and initiative to interpret contents of such curriculum for proper delivery to learners. Therefore, teachers are often expected to have undergone several educational trainings for certain years to receive necessary competencies through certification before going into the teaching profession.

It is generally believed that no student can know more than his teacher. In other words, every teacher is expected to demonstrate his professional expertise towards making his students understand his lesson for better academic performances. For a teacher to achieve this, he must be ready to be disciplined and committed to work to allow efficiency on his part. However, it is significant to note that the teacher's efficiency or inefficiency in his profession is usually determined by the volume of his workload. This is the reason why the country's Ministry of Education has made provision for teacher-student ratio.

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In view of the above, this research work sets out to ascertain the level of sufficiency/insufficiency of French language teachers (FLT's) in public Secondary schools in selected local government areas of Niger State. *National Policy on Education* (FRN, 2013: 8-9) specified 1:35 and 1:40 as the teacher-student ratio for upper basic education and secondary education respectively. Considering its mandatory nature, this research work is to find out if the above official NPE policy benchmark on teacher/pupil/student ratio as well as what should be the official number of periods is followed in respect to the teaching and learning of French language in the selected local government areas of Niger State.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to investigate the sufficiency or insufficiency of teachers of French language in public junior secondary schools of Niger State using the selected Local Government Areas of the state as parameter. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine level of sufficiency or insufficiency of teachers of French language in junior secondary schools in Niger State using the selected local government areas as a case study.
2. Ascertain the impact of sufficiency or insufficiency of teachers of French language on the learners' academic performances junior secondary schools in Niger State.
3. Know the impact of sufficiency or insufficiency of teachers of French language on their efficiency or inefficiency in the subject in junior secondary schools of Niger State.
4. Know the level of compliance to the National Policy on Education (NPE) in the area of allocation of periods to French as a core subject in junior secondary schools within the selected local government areas of Niger State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of availability of French language Teachers in Junior Secondary school in Niger State?
2. To what extent has the availability or absence of French language teachers impacted on the learners' academic performance in French language at Secondary schools in Niger State?
3. How has the level of compliance with the National Policy on Education (NPE) in the area of allocation of class periods to French as a core subject in selected secondary schools affected teaching and learning of French language?
4. What factors are responsible for the death of French language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State?

Research Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated for this study:

There is no adequate number of French language Teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State of Nigeria.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employs the descriptive survey research methodology. As a descriptive research design, questionnaires were used as research instrument to collect data from respondents at the study locations. The research methodology will help the study to ascertain the quantity and quality of teachers in the selected public secondary schools of the study. The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Research questions were answered with the use of frequency counts and simple percentages

Population

The population of this study consists of the selected public secondary schools from the selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in zones A, B and C of Niger State. The sampled schools comprised 25 public secondary schools, possessing both junior and senior classes I, II and III. The sampled respondents consisted of both the teachers and students in the sampled schools.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

RQ 1: What is the level of availability of French language Teachers in Junior Secondary school in Niger State?

Table 1: Level of Availability of French language teachers in Niger State Junior Secondary Schools

Response						
S/N	ITEM	A (%)	SA (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Decision
1	There is no adequate number of French language Teachers in Junior Secondary schools in Niger State	88 (51.5%)	72(42.1%)	11(6.4%)	-	Agreed
2	Junior Secondary Schools students in Niger State do not have interest in French Language because there are no sufficient French language teachers	87(50.9%)	46(26.9%)	32(18.7%)	6(3.5%)	Agreed
3	Recruitment of French language Teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State is not taken with seriousness and commitment	79(46.2%)	67(39.2%)	21(12.3%)	4(2.3%)	Agreed
4	French language graduates are not interested in teaching French language in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State	65(38.0%)	43(25.1%)	48(28.1%)	15(8.8%)	Agreed

Source: Field work 2024

Table 1 shows that 88(51.5%) and 72(42.1%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that there was no adequate number of French language Teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State, while 11(4.5%) disagreed. The result equally shows that 87(50.9%) and 46(26.9%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that Junior Secondary Schools students in Niger State do not have interest in French Language because there were no sufficient French language teacher, while 32(18.7%) and 6(3.55) others disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. Likewise, it is clear from the table 1 that 79(46.2%) and 67(39.2%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that recruitment of French language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State was not taken with seriousness and commitment, while 21(12.3%) and 4(2.3%) others disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. Lastly, table 1 shows that 65(38.0%) and 43(25.1%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that French language graduates were not interested in teaching French language in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State, while 48(28.1%) and 15(8.8%) others disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. This implied that French language teachers were not adequate in number which hindered students' interest in the subject, cum lack of seriousness and commitment in their recruitment and lack of interest in teaching French language by graduates of the subject in Niger State Junior Secondary Schools.

RQ2: To what extent has the availability or absence of French language teachers impacted on the learners' academic performance in French language at Secondary schools in Niger State?

Table 2: % impact of availability or absence of French language Teachers on learners' academic performance

Response						
S/N	ITEM	A(%)	SA(%)	D(%)	SD(%)	Decision
1	There is lack of interest by Junior Secondary students in Niger State because there are no French language teachers.	86(50.3%)	57(33.3%)	18(10.5%)	10(5.8%)	Agreed
2	Junior secondary schools students in Niger State perform poorly in National French language exam, because of shortage of French language Teachers in the State.	65(38.0%)	64(37.4%)	31(18.1%)	11(6.4%)	Agreed

3	If French language teachers are sufficiently available to teach, the performance of Junior Secondary school students in Niger State would be enhanced.	76(44.4%)	80(46.8%)	7(4.1%)	8(4.7%)	Agreed
4	The more people speak French language the more interested the Junior Secondary schools students in Niger State will become.	79(46.2%)	72(42.1%)	17(9.9%)	3(1.8%)	Agreed

Source: Field work 2024

In table 2, 86(50.3%) and 57(33.3%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that because there were no French teachers, there were lack of interest by Junior Secondary school students in Niger State, while 18(10.5%) and 10(5.8%) others disagreed and strongly disagreed on the opinion.

Also, 65(38.0%) and 64(37.4%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that Junior Secondary School students in Niger State performed poorly in national French language examinations because of shortage of French language teachers in the state, while 31(18.1%) and 11(6.4%) other respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed. In the same vein, 76(44.4%) and 80(46.8%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that if French language teachers were sufficiently available to teach, the performance of Junior Secondary School students in Niger State will be enhanced, but 7(4.1%) and 8(4.7%) other respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed. Lastly, 79(46.2%) and 72(42.1%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that the more people speak French language, the more interested the Junior Secondary School students in Niger State will become, but 17(9.9%) and 3(1.8%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed. This implied that absence of French language teachers caused lack of interest by Junior Secondary School students in the subject in Niger State, which led to their poor performance in National French language examinations whereas, the availability of French language teachers would have enhanced students' performance in the subject and the more people speak French language, the more interested the students become used to the language.

RQ3: How has the level of compliance with the National Policy on Education (NPE) in the area of allocation of class periods to French as a core subject in selected secondary schools affected teaching and learning of French language?

Table 3: % level of compliance with NPE on class periods allocation to French language.

S/N	ITEM	Response				Decision
		A(%)	SA(%)	D(%)	SD(%)	
1	Schools in Niger State have problem in the implementation of the NPE in French curriculum.	78(45.6%)	61(35.7%)	24(14.0%)	8(4.7%)	Agreed
2	Allocation of periods to French language as a core subject in Junior Secondary schools is haphazardly done.	84(49.1%)	44(25.7%)	32(18.7%)	11(6.4%)	Agreed
3	Irregular allocation of lesson time table affects the effective teaching and learning of French language.	82(48.0%)	54(31.6%)	30(17.5%)	5(2.9%)	Agreed
4	Effective monitoring for proper implementation of the NPE in French language curriculum in Junior Secondary Schools is not being carried out in Niger State.	70(40.9%)	62(36.3%)	24(14.0%)	15(8.8%)	Agreed

Source: Field work 2024

As displayed on table 3, responses on schools in Niger State having problems in the implementation of the NPE in French curriculum show 78(45.6%) agree, 61(35.7%) strongly agree, 24(14.0%) disagree and 8(4.7%) strongly disagree. On allocation of periods to French language as a core subject in Junior Secondary Schools being haphazardly done, responses that agreed were 84(49.1%), strongly agreed were 44(25.7%); disagreed were 32(18.7%) and strongly disagreed were 11(6.4%) respectively. For irregular allocation of lesson timetable as it affected effective teaching and learning of French language, there were 82(48.0%) agreed, 54(31.6%) strongly agreed, 30(17.5%) disagreed and 5(2.9%) strongly disagreed responses. On effective monitoring for proper implementation of the NPE in French curriculum in Junior Secondary Schools not being carried out in Niger State, 70(40.9%) respondents agreed, 62(36.3%) others strongly agreed, while 24(14.0%) and 15(8.8) others disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

This implied that the level of compliance to implementation of NPE with respect to French language curriculum was inadequate, since periods allocation to French language was haphazardly done alongside effect of irregular allocation of lesson time-table on effective teaching and learning and improper monitoring of the implementation of NPE in French language curriculum.

RQ4: What factors are responsible for the death of French language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State?

Table 4: % Factors responsible for the death of French language Teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State.

S/N	ITEM	Response				Decision
		A(%)	SA(%)	D(%)	SD(%)	
1	Poor remunerations of French language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State is responsible for the death of French teachers in Niger State.	65(38.0%)	60(35.1%)	29(17.0%)	17(9.9%)	Agreed
2	Lack of career foresight in the study of French language is one of the reasons for lack of interest in the French language in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State.	86(50.3%)	66(38.6%)	13(7.6%)	6(3.5%)	Agreed
3	Lack of sufficient French language teachers is part of the reasons for lack of interests of Junior Secondary School students in Niger State.	71(41.5%)	75(43.9%)	18(10.5%)	7(4.1%)	Agreed
4	General shortage of French language teachers is as a result of poor salary package.	58(33.9%)	44(25.7%)	43(25.1%)	26(15.2%)	Agreed

Source: Field work 2024

Results on table 4 show that the respondents' view on poor remunerations of French language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State responsible for the death of French language teachers varied along 65(38.0%) agreed, 60(35.1%) strongly agreed, 29(17.0%) disagreed and 17(9.9%) strongly disagreed respectively. Similarly, 86(50.3%) and 66(38.1%) respondents agreed and strongly agreed that lack of career foresight in the study of French language was one of the reasons for lack of interest in the subject in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State, while 13(7.6%) and 6(3.5%) other respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed. Lack of sufficient French language teachers as part of reasons for lack of interest of Junior Secondary School students in Niger State obtained 71(41.5%) agreed and 75(43.9%) strongly agreed responses as well as 18(10.5%) and 7(4.1%) disagreed and strongly disagreed responses. Lastly, 58(33.9%) and 44(25.7%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that general shortage of French language teachers was due to poor salary package, while 43(25.1%) and 26(15.2%) other respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed accordingly. The summary of these responses implied that among the factors responsible for the death of French language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Niger State are poor remunerations, lack of career foresight, lack of efficient French language teachers and poor salary package.

In a bid to seek for possible variance among public schools, the data obtained in this study were further processed for the significance difference of the variables considered through regression analysis with two major predictors such as schools where French language was taught and educational qualification of French language teachers in Niger State.

Table 5: Regression of school and Educational Qualifications on Availability level, impact, NPE compliance and factors for death of French language teachers in Niger State.

Predictor	Dependent variable	Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Name of school	Availability level of French language Teachers	Regression	1.115	1	1.115	.305	.582
		Residual	617.739	169	3.655		
		Total	618.854	170			
	Impact of absence of French language Teachers	Regression	6.771	1	6.771	2.025	.157
		Residual	565.205	169	3.344		
		Total	571.977	170			
	NPE Compliance level	Regression	.305	1	.305	.059	.808
		Residual	868.853	169	5.141		
		Total	869.158	170			
	Factors for Death of French language Teachers	Regression	.956	1	.956	.181	.671
		Residual	893.337	169	5.286		
		Total	894.292	170			
Educational Qualification	Availability level of French language Teachers	Regression	1.541	1	1.541	.422	.517
		Residual	617.313	169	3.653		
		Total	618.854	170			
	Impact of absence of French language Teachers	Regression	.037	1	.037	.011	.917
		Residual	571.940	169	3.384		
		Total	571.977	170			
	NPE Compliance level	Regression	7.890	1	7.890	1.548	.215
		Residual	861.267	169	5.096		
		Total	869.158	170			
	Factors for death of French language Teachers	Regression	1.600	1	1.600	.303	.583
		Residual	892.693	169	5.282		
		Total	894.292	170			

Table 5 reveals that there was no significant difference on the availability level of French language teachers in Niger state with regards to schools ($f=305$ at $\alpha=.582$) and educational qualifications ($f=1422$ at $\alpha=.517$) of French teachers in the school. Likewise, no significant difference on the impact of absence of French language teachers based on schools ($f=2.025$ at $\alpha=.157$) and educational qualifications ($f=.011$ at $\alpha=.917$) of French teachers in Niger State schools.

Also, no significant difference was deduced on the level of NPE compliance with respect to schools ($f=.059$ at $\alpha=.808$) and educational qualifications ($f=1.548$ at $\alpha=.215$) of French teachers in Niger State secondary schools.

Lastly, there existed no significant difference as well on factors for death of French language teachers in Niger state as related to schools ($f=.181$ at $\alpha=.671$) and educational qualifications ($f=.303$ at $\alpha=.583$) of French language teachers.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study showed that Niger State public secondary schools are generally confronted with insufficient French language teachers which have impacted consequentially on the interest and academic performance of the learners in addition to non-compliance level of NPE with similar factors for death of French language teachers in the state. This

study discovered that teachers of French language in private secondary schools are more than those in public secondary schools in Niger State. This is because many private school owners took advantage of the government's policy (i.e. making French a core subject from primary four to Junior Secondary school level) to promote and market their schools.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should enforce full compliance towards implementation of her policy enshrined in the *National Policy on Education* (NPE) regarding the teaching of French language as a core subject at upper basic level in all public schools in Nigeria.
2. More teachers of French should be employed. In this regard, only competent graduates in French from the Universities or Colleges of Education should be considered for the job.
3. As a core subject at upper basic level of education, French language should be weekly accorded adequate allocation of periods on the time-table like other compulsory subjects such as English language and Mathematics.
4. Government should ensure regular payment of salary to teachers of French.
5. Government should give scholarship to Students who tend to further their education in French at any of the higher institutions in the country.
6. Government should urgently see to the review of the *National Policy on Education* (NPE) to make French a core subject as well at Senior Secondary School level. This would enable continuity for students who would like proceed to higher institutions to study French and also make future careers out of it after graduating.

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