



## Status of French Language Teachers' Professional Development and Students' Active Engagement in Secondary Schools in the North Central Zone of Nigeria

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### Abstract

*In Nigeria unlike North Central zone, French language teachers are faced with multifaceted challenges related to a lack of teaching materials, textbooks, and technology. Many schools struggle to find educators with proper language proficiency and teaching qualifications. Also, enrollments in French language classes are generally low, indicating a lack of interest among students. Most teachers in North Central expressed a desire for more opportunities for professional development and training in teaching methodologies and language proficiency. Therefore, this study investigates the status of French language teachers' professional development and students' active engagement in secondary schools in the North Central zone of Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was employed for the study. The population of the study comprised 120,644 students and teachers in secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau states respectively. The study employed stratified random sampling techniques to select 550 participants for the study. The data collection process was achieved through the use of questionnaires. Descriptive statistics was employed for the study. The findings reveal diverse perspectives among French language teachers on professional development, emphasizing the significance of training and workshops while highlighting dissatisfaction with institutional support. Challenges identified include insufficient funding, limited access to teaching materials, inadequate school administration support, and a lack of recognition. Shortcomings in teaching resources for French language instruction were observed, aligning with concerns about students' proficiency levels. However, positive perceptions were noted regarding the effectiveness of teaching methods and strategies. The discussion aligns with existing literature, emphasizing the importance of active engagement for students' proficiency and interest in the French language. Recommendations include addressing teacher dissatisfaction with professional support, tackling funding and resource challenges, and improving the availability of textbooks and infrastructure. Additionally, efforts should focus on enhancing students' proficiency through curriculum review, support mechanisms, and innovative teaching strategies.*

**Keywords:** French Language, Teacher Professional Development, Active Engagement.

### Introduction

The French language is not only a global lingua franca but also an essential component of the educational landscape in Nigeria. It is taught as a core subject in secondary schools across the country, with a particular emphasis on the North Central zone, where it plays a pivotal role in fostering cultural exchange and strengthening diplomatic co-existence between Nigeria and French-speaking countries. Thus, The North Central zone of Nigeria is encompassed by French-speaking nations, including Niger Republic to the North, Benin Republic to the West, Cameroon to the East, and Chad to the North-East. The importance of the

French language in this region is undeniable, as it holds substantial influence across social, political, economic,

and international aspects. The North central zone of Nigeria is culturally diverse and has historical ties with the Francophone world (Essien, 2016). The geographic area, which includes states like Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), hosts a considerable number of individuals learning the French language. The instruction and acquisition of French in secondary schools play a pivotal role, not just in promoting cultural interaction but also in equipping students with

an essential set of skills for navigating a globalized world (Yekini, 2016).

Language serves the fundamental purpose of enabling effective communication, fostering mutual comprehension between the originator and recipient, and facilitating practical, appropriate, and efficient actions, (Moody, 2010). Consequently, the language policies of all nations should address various aspects of communication, including internal, scientific, and technical forms (Okafor, 2008). The French language distinguishes itself as a prominent international language extensively employed in commerce, scientific and technological research, administration, education, literature, and various other domains. Ajiboye, (2010) affirmed that, the acquisition of proficiency in the French language equips Nigerians with the capability to collaborate effectively with Francophone countries in the realms of science and technology. However, achieving this cooperation is contingent upon the recruitment of qualified French teachers and providing them with the necessary encouragement to impart their language skills.

The integration of the French language into Nigeria's educational system took place soon after the introduction of English. In the past, efforts were made to introduce French as a subject in Nigerian secondary schools by bringing native French speakers from France and other Francophone nations for teaching purposes (Onyemelukwe, 2015). The Nigerian government has consistently expressed the intention to adopt French as the country's second official language. However, the adoption process, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, became intertwined with political considerations. During that period, many secondary schools in Nigeria offered French as a subject for at least the first three years. Nevertheless, despite the declaration of French as the second official language, a significant number of public schools in the country no longer include French as part of their curriculum. Before 1997, French was an optional foreign language in schools. In late 1997, the Nigerian government elevated the status of the French language to the nation's second official language, a declaration endorsed by the late General Sani Abacha, the former head of state, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in 1996. Binbo Fisayo, an educationist, emphasized the importance of proficiency in a second international language, particularly French (Daily Champion African News, 2005).

Considering the geographical, economic, political, diplomatic, and educational aspects of Nigeria, there has been a recognized need to prioritize

the teaching and learning of the French language (Emordi, 1996). Consequently, Nigeria officially became an English/French bilingual country, as documented in the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1998 (Ogunkeye, 2007). In 2016, the Federal government reaffirmed the importance of teaching French across all levels of the country's education system, from primary to tertiary, stating that courses in French language must be offered (Daily Trust, 2016). In a recent development, the Nigerian government has initiated steps to discontinue the teaching of the French language in secondary schools. Consequently, there is a noticeable scarcity of native French-speaking teachers, and those who were previously engaged in teaching French have been repositioned to instruct other subjects, such as English, social studies, literature in English, history, and a few others. The prevailing attitude among Nigerians regarding the study of French in our schools seems to be characterized by a lack of awareness about the language's significance in the educational framework as an international means of communication (Oguebune-Okwenu, 2014).

In spite of French language inclusion in Nigeria's system of education, there is a chronic shortage of qualified French language teachers in secondary schools. This issue is explored in-depth by Lavoie (2019) in "addressing the French teacher shortage. French language teachers' active engagement is vital for ensuring students' proficiency and interest in the language. The status of French language teachers' active engagement in secondary schools is crucial for the success of French language programs. According to Lyster, (2015) French language teachers often face pedagogical challenges related to teaching grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. These challenges can affect student engagement and learning outcomes (Lyster, 2015). So, the motivation and job satisfaction of French language teachers play a significant role in their engagement while the choice of pedagogical approaches affects teachers' engagement (Malo and Boisvert, 2018)

Many secondary schools lack adequate resources, including textbooks, digital tools, and authentic materials, making it difficult for teachers to create engaging lessons (Menard, 2018). Policy decisions and funding can affect the availability of material for teaching and engagement of French language teachers in secondary schools (Gentry, 2019). French language teachers can enhance engagement by incorporating technology, such as language learning apps and online resources, into their teaching (Ducate & Lomicka,

2017). Encouraging cultural immersion through activities like French clubs, exchange programs, and field trips can boost students' interest and engagement in the language (Vann, 2019). Active engagement of French language teachers positively correlates with higher levels of language proficiency in students (Beacco, 2016). French teachers' active engagement contributes to increased student motivation and interest in the language, leading to better retention rates (Gregersen, 2019).

The geographical location of Nigeria has necessitated the need for French language learning in the country. Onyemelukwe (1995) highlighted that acquiring knowledge of French is crucial for Nigeria to maintain healthy relations with its Francophone neighbours. According to Igonor (2011), establishing mutually beneficial relationships with these nations requires Nigeria to communicate with them in their official language, French, to some extent. Onyemelukwe and Adie Offiong (2004) further emphasized the significance of bilingualism, stating that it facilitates communication not only with Francophone neighbours but also with other French-speaking countries worldwide, promoting global communication in various aspects of life, including education, commerce, religion, and politics. Despite the importance attached to French language learning, several problems hinder its effective teaching and learning in secondary schools in the North Central zone of Nigeria. These challenges, as identified by Daily Trust (2016) and others, include a lack of an adequate number of teachers, ineffective implementation of French curriculum, financial and economic constraints, difficulties faced by learners, insufficient infrastructure, challenging learning environments, and inadequate instructional time.

To address these challenges, there is a pressing need to prioritize the teaching and learning of the French language at the secondary school level in the North Central zone of Nigeria. Proactive measures are essential to prevent the exacerbation of the identified problems, as the realization of high-quality French language education in the region is at stake. Nigeria must recognize the importance of studying French not only for international mutual understanding and cooperation but also for the socio-economic and technological development of both Anglophone and Francophone neighbours. A key strategy involves the re-training of French teachers through seminars, workshops, and in-service programs. This will

contribute to enhancing their skills and competence, fostering effective teaching and learning practices in the classroom. Additionally, collaboration with experienced French language educationists should be encouraged, with the aim of developing textbooks that integrate students' learning experiences with their daily activities (Ogunkeye, 2007). By implementing these measures, Nigeria can pave the way for the actualization of its goals in promoting qualitative French language education in the North Central zone.

Many individuals mistakenly assume that investing time in learning French is unnecessary. This misperception has influenced both students and parents, leading to a diminished interest in pursuing the language in their educational pursuits (Banjo, 2010). Therefore, it is on these premises the need arises, to inculcate the knowledge of French in secondary school students necessitating the researcher to investigate the status of French language teachers' active engagement in secondary schools across the North Central Zone of Nigeria.

### **Problem Statement**

Many secondary schools face challenges in providing adequate resources and materials to support effective language teaching. Teachers may lack the necessary tools and technology to engage their students actively. Active engagement extends beyond merely delivering curriculum content; it involves a teacher's ability to motivate and inspire students, adapt teaching methods to diverse learning needs, and stay updated with the latest pedagogical approaches. In the North central zone of Nigeria. French language teachers often face heavy workloads and administrative demands, leaving them with limited time and energy to devote to interactive teaching methods and extracurricular activities that can enhance student engagement. Also, the availability and accessibility of professional development opportunities for French language teachers may be insufficient. This can impede their ability to stay updated with contemporary teaching methods and effectively engage students. The motivation levels of secondary school students learning French can vary widely.

Though, teachers may encounter difficulties in engaging students with varying interests and language proficiency levels. The assessment and accountability systems in place for language teachers may prioritize academic outcomes over active engagement, potentially leading to a focus on exam results to the detriment of holistic language education. The assessment of the

status of French language teachers' active engagement in secondary schools is not only vital for ensuring the quality of French language education but also for nurturing a future generation proficient in this global language. Consequently, this research is critical in guiding educational policymakers, school administrators, and teachers towards effective strategies that promote the active engagement of French language teachers, ultimately benefiting students and facilitating cross-cultural exchange and global communication. Therefore, this study investigates the status of French language teachers' active engagement in secondary schools in the North Central Zone of Nigeria.

### Research Questions

This study provide answers to the following research questions.

1. What are the professional development of French language teachers in the North Central zone of Nigeria?
2. What are the challenges faced by French language teachers in secondary schools in North Central zone of Nigeria?
3. What are the availability and adequacy of teaching resources for French language instruction in North Central zone of Nigeria?
4. What are the level of students engagement and proficiency in the French language instruction in North Central zone of Nigeria?

### Methodology

This study employ a descriptive survey design for the study. The study was conducted within the North Central region of Nigeria. North central region is made up of, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau states. The population of the study consists of 62,431 students and teachers in secondary schools in Kwara state and 58,213 students and teachers in Niger states respectively to make up a total of 120,644 collectively to form the population under investigation. The study employed stratified random sampling techniques to select 550 participants for the study. These techniques ensure that the sample accurately reflects the diversity and variability in the population. Also, The questionnaire was used to collect useful information from the students and teachers in the two secondary schools in Kwara and Two in Niger state to make up six (4) schools for the study. The instrument was validated by two experts in the French Department at Nassarawa State University, Keffi. A pilot study was conducted, in which the instrument was administered as a trial test and repeated after some weeks as a posttest in order to determine the reliability of the instrument with the aid of three (3) research assistants. In the research, descriptive statistical methods, specifically Mean and Standard Deviation, were employed to address the research question.

### Results

**Table One: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the Professional Development of French Language Teachers**

| S/N | Items  | N550      |      |          |
|-----|--|-----------|------|----------|
|     |  | $\bar{X}$ | SD   | Decision |
| 1   | The training and workshops provided for French language teachers are beneficial to enhance teaching skills.        | 3.33      | 1.41 | Accepted |
| 2   | Opportunities for continuous professional development in French language teaching are easily accessible.           | 3.19      | 1.26 | Accepted |
| 3   | The support from educational institutions for the professional growth of French language teachers is satisfactory. | 2.25      | 1.27 | Rejected |
| 4   | In-service training programs contribute significantly to the professional advancement of French language teachers. | 3.51      | 1.49 | Accepted |

The data in Table One presents the mean and standard deviation of responses regarding various aspects of professional development for French language teachers. The items in the table correspond to statements related to different aspects of professional development, and the respondents have provided their

ratings on a scale. For example, in Item 1, the mean rating of 3.33 suggests that respondents, on average, find the training and workshops beneficial, and the standard deviation of 1.41 indicates some variability in responses. The "Accepted" decision suggests that, overall, respondents agree with the statement.

Conversely, for Item 3, the mean of 2.25 and the "Rejected" decision suggest that respondents, on average, did not find the support from educational

institutions satisfactory for the professional growth of French language teachers.

**Table Two: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the Challenges Faced by French Language Teachers in Secondary Schools**

| S/n | Items   | $\bar{X}$ | SD   | Decision |
|-----|---|-----------|------|----------|
| 1   | Insufficient funding poses a challenge to effective French language instruction in secondary schools.                   | 3.45      | 1.33 | Accepted |
| 2   | Limited access to teaching materials and resources hinders the quality of French language education.                    | 3.21      | 1.35 | Accepted |
| 3   | Inadequate support from school administration negatively impacts the teaching environment for French language teachers. | 3.32      | 1.33 | Accepted |
| 4   | Lack of recognition and appreciation for French language teachers' efforts is a significant challenge.                  | 3.18      | 1.24 | Accepted |

Table two provides the results of a survey on the challenges faced by French language teachers in secondary schools in North Central zone of Nigeria. In summary, the table suggests that French language teachers in secondary schools in the North Central zone of Nigeria face challenges related to insufficient

funding, limited access to teaching materials, inadequate support from school administration, and a lack of recognition and appreciation. The "Accepted" decision indicates a general agreement among the respondents regarding the presence of these challenges.

**Table Three: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the Availability and Adequacy of Teaching Resources for French Language Instruction**

| S/n | Items   | $\bar{X}$ | SD   | Decision |
|-----|---|-----------|------|----------|
| 1   | The availability of textbooks and instructional materials for teaching French is satisfactory.                                      | 2.17      | 1.11 | Rejected |
| 2   | Technological resources, such as computers and language learning software, are adequately provided for French language instruction. | 2.11      | 1.15 | Rejected |
| 3   | The physical infrastructure of language labs and classrooms is conducive to effective French language teaching.                     | 2.10      | 1.28 | Rejected |
| 4   | The variety and availability of authentic French language learning materials meet the diverse needs of students.                    | 3.14      | 1.37 | Accepted |

Table three presents the results of a survey on the availability and adequacy of teaching resources for French language instruction in North Central zone of Nigeria. In summary, the findings suggest that, according to the respondents, there are shortcomings in the availability and adequacy of teaching resources for

French language instruction in the North Central zone of Nigeria. While issues are identified in the availability of textbooks, technological resources, and physical infrastructure, there is a positive perception regarding the variety and availability of authentic learning materials.

**Table Four: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the Students Engagement and Proficiency in the French Language Instruction**

|     |  | N550      |      |          |
|-----|--|-----------|------|----------|
| S/n | Items  | $\bar{X}$ | SD   | Decision |
| 1   | The current proficiency levels of students in French language are satisfactory..                                     | 2.39      | 1.12 | Rejected |
| 2   | The teaching methods employed in French language classes effectively engage students in the learning process.        | 3.44      | 1.41 | Accepted |
| 3   | Continuous assessment and feedback contribute to the improvement of students' French language proficiency.           | 3.23      | 1.21 | Accepted |
| 4   | Students' interest and enthusiasm for learning French are positively influenced by the teaching strategies employed. | 3.31      | 1.38 | Accepted |

Table four presents the results of survey on the level of students engagement and proficiency in the French language instruction in North Central zone of Nigeria. In summary, the findings suggest that, according to the respondents, there are concerns about the current proficiency levels of students in the French language. However, there is a positive perception regarding the effectiveness of teaching methods, the contribution of continuous assessment and feedback to proficiency, and the positive influence of teaching strategies on students' interest and enthusiasm for learning French.

## Discussions

In research question one, the study found that French language teachers in the North Central zone of Nigeria have varying perspectives on professional development. Some aspects, such as training and workshops, were deemed beneficial, while support from educational institutions was perceived as unsatisfactory. The finding is in support of Lavoie (2019) study which emphasizes the crucial role of French language teachers' active engagement in students' proficiency and interest in the language. This aligns with the findings related to varying perceptions of professional development.

In research question two, French language teachers in secondary schools in the North Central zone face challenges related to insufficient funding, limited access to teaching materials, inadequate support from school administration, and a lack of recognition and appreciation. This findings is in corroboration with the study of Gentry (2019) who emphasizes how policy decisions and funding can affect the availability of material for teaching, aligning with the study's findings on challenges faced by French language teachers.

In research question three, the study found shortcomings in the availability and adequacy of teaching resources for French language instruction in the North Central zone of Nigeria. The findings is in line with the study of Menard, (2018) who stated that many secondary schools lack resources, making it difficult for teachers to create engaging lessons. This supports the study's findings on the availability and adequacy of teaching resources.

In research question four, while there are concerns about the proficiency levels of students in the French language, there is a positive perception regarding the effectiveness of teaching methods and strategies. Gregersen, (2019) study review emphasizes on the importance of teachers' active engagement in enhancing students' interest and proficiency in the French language This aligns with the positive perceptions regarding teaching methods and strategies found in the study. In summary, the study's findings align with existing literature, supporting the need for active engagement of French language teachers and the challenges they face in terms of resources and support. The rejection of null hypotheses indicates significant differences in the perceptions and experiences of French language teachers in the North Central zone of Nigeria.

## Conclusion

French language teachers in the North Central zone of Nigeria generally find training, workshops, and in-service programs beneficial for enhancing their teaching skills. However, there is dissatisfaction with the support provided by educational institutions for their professional growth. French language teachers in secondary schools face challenges related to insufficient funding, limited access to teaching

materials, inadequate support from school administration, and a lack of recognition and appreciation. These challenges can impact the quality of French language education. There are shortcomings in the availability and adequacy of teaching resources for French language instruction in the North Central zone of Nigeria. While there are concerns about textbooks, technological resources, and physical infrastructure, there is a positive perception regarding the variety and availability of authentic learning materials. There are concerns about the current proficiency levels of students in the French language. However, there is a positive perception regarding the effectiveness of teaching methods, continuous assessment, feedback, and the positive influence of teaching strategies on students' interest and enthusiasm for learning French.

### Recommendations

1. Educational institutions should address the dissatisfaction among French language teachers regarding support for their professional growth. Providing more comprehensive and tailored support can contribute to teacher development.
2. Policymakers and school administrators should address the challenges related to insufficient funding, limited access to teaching materials, and inadequate support. Allocating more resources and implementing effective policies can improve the teaching and learning environment.
3. Efforts should be made by the Federal government of Nigeria to address the identified shortcomings in the availability of textbooks, technological resources, and physical infrastructure. Investing in these resources can positively impact the quality of French language instruction.
4. Strategies should be implemented to address concerns about the proficiency levels of students in the French language. This may involve reviewing and adjusting the curriculum, providing additional support for struggling students, and promoting innovative teaching methods.

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