
**Gender Differentials and Students' Academic Performance in French:
An Empirical Observation and Analysis**

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ABSTRACT

In view of the significance attached to the development of French language in Nigeria, it is important to take a look into the effect of a gender in the mastery of French language among learners of the language in Nigeria schools. Thus, the present paper reports the empirical study carried out to determine the effect of a gender in the mastery of French language. The sample consisted of one hundred and seventy-two male and female undergraduate students from eight Nigerian universities who were in the Nigerian French village, Ajara, Badagry for their French immersion programme. Stratified Random Sampling was used as population for the study. The instrument used was a 50 items multiple choice achievement test constructed by the researcher. The research questions were raised and attempt was made on the part of students to answer them. Also, formulated were two null hypotheses. However, from the analysis of result, there is clear evidence that, there is a significant difference between the performance of male and female students. Female students performed significantly better than the male students. Study concludes with some pertinent recommendations that could make French language attractive to male future learners of French and make them perform better in subsequent future examinations.

KEYWORDS: French, Gender differentials and Students' Academic Performance

Introduction

It is very obvious that the French language is one of the most spoken Romance languages used by most countries as a language of instruction. The French language is not new in Nigeria. It has been spoken for six decades now in Nigeria. It is interesting to note that since the introduction of French language in Nigerian schools, a lot has been written about its fortune such as Adelekan (1983) who gave an account on how French language was first introduced into Nigerian school in 1959, Araromi (1996) who took a look into French and the national policy on Education, Amosu (1995) who looked into linguistic interference French/Yoruba, Kwofie (1995)

who looked into linguistics interference French / English, Jimoh (1995) who focused on the problem facing Nigerian students on the identification of French vowels sounds, Alawode (2007) who gave an insight into the best way to handle teaching and learning of French grammar in Nigerian Schools, Ajiboye and Gbadamosi (2010) who looked into National language Policy and French language, Ajani (2015) who looked into teaching and learning of French in the south west of Nigeria and Ebiringa (2018) who took a look into various challenges facing teaching and learning of French just to mention few.

In all the above submissions from various scholars, common themes found in them are students' motivation, linguistic interference, alarming high failure in French examination, inadequate instructional materials, adequate teaching methodology, shortage of French teachers, necessary government backup etc. All these are depressing. One gets even more depressed upon reading reports of studies that have investigated learners' performance in French language as it appears in this study, very often, female students despite their large number in French class perform better than their male counterparts. This is a major factor among other factors that motivated the researcher to carry out an experimental study of this nature so as to suggest some pertinent points to encourage male students to also perform better.

According to Ade-Ojo (2002), French language is a language that owns its origin to France where it was adopted as the country official language in 1539 through a decree known as —ordonnance de villers-cotterets passed into law during the regime of Francois 1er. Aside the fact that French is an official language in France and all francophone countries in Africa except Maghrebien countries in Africa, from Ade-Ojo (1997) point of view, French shares the status of official language with another language in countries like Cameroon, Canada, Luxembourg, etc. And in the trilingual countries like Belgium, Switzerland and Seychelles, it is one of the three National Languages. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2015), the word Gender is a way of talking about men and women. Furthermore, based on Michael (2012) submission: While sex is the sum of characteristic structures and functions by which animal is classified as male or female, gender covers beyond the biological characterization, it transcends the ethics of sex as classification boundaries. It covers such concept as culture, expected behaviour of men and women based on tradition, ascribed to people on the basis of their sex.

From the above, gender study viewed from the larger picture, covers the realms of educational attitude which is the focus of this study. This study is a humble submission of an Academic Exercise based on the performance of male and female French learners in some Nigerian universities towards the mastery of French language. The theoretical framework adopted for this study is a theory based on mentalist orientation and according to Adegbija (1993), and Soyele (2007), mentalist orientation views language basically as an internal phenomenon that is always triggered off by stimulus including cognitive, conative and affective perspective. According to Soyele (Op.cit) the mentalist identifies instrumental motivation as a pointer of language performance. In a social context, human beings develop positive attitude to an attractive language. Problem of gender and learner's performance in French language in Nigerian institutions of learning.

Iheacho (1988) and Ajani (2011) stated that boys and girls have differential abilities. The boys are very good in numerical aptitude science reasoning while the girls are very good in

verbal fluency. Similarly, Ado and Nana (2014) are of the opinion that boys are superior to the girls on numerical subject but found no similar difference between the performance of the two groups in the verbal aptitude and Francis (2014) confirmed the effect of sex in mastery of French. However, Musa (2015) and Traoré (2017) opine that sex differences has little or no effect on performance while Thomson (2018) in his empirical study found inconsistent result as regards sex differences in mathematics and English language.

Purpose of the Study

This study intends to determine the effect of gender attitude on students mastering of French language. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Examine the difference in the academic performance of male and female students in French language

Research Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the academic performance of male and female students in French language

Methodology

The study adopts descriptive research design using an ex-post facto type. Ex-post facto research design is the systematic empirical inquiry in which the researcher does not have direct control of the independent variables because their manipulations have already occurred or because they are inherently not manipulative. The target population for the study consists of all students in Nigerian Institutions of learning who were offering French language. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 172 students for the study. The cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of the students was the major data used in the study. The data were analysed using t-test statistical tool.

Results

As it could be seen from the above table, the subjects were made up of 86 Male and 86 Female Undergraduate Students from eight Nigerian Universities who are all in the Nigeria French Language Village for their language immersion programme 2019. The 172 undergraduate students used in the sample were randomly selected. They were all three hundred level students with a mean average age of 19 years. The subjects were carefully selected to reflect equal representation from the two sets. Thus, there are 86 males and 86 females. Some Colleagues in the French village were highly involved in the administration of the instrument and supervised the students taking the test under a strong watchful eyes of the researcher.

Table I: Mean standard deviation, t-table and t-calculated for male and female students exposed to the treatment

Group	N	X	SD	TT	TC
Female students	86	4.93	45.19	1.26	1.96
Male students	86	3.72	34.11		

The above table gives a breakdown of the mean ranking, standard deviation, t-table and t-calculated obtained from the participated performance exposed to the treatment. Result presented

in tables needs a brief discussion in relation to the Researcher's assumption about the effect of gender attitude on student's mastery of French language as well as the assumption available in the literature reviewed. The result on table I showed the value of calculated $t_c = 1.96$ at 0.05 significant level while that of table II = 1.26 at 0.05 significant level and since the calculated t_c is higher than the table t_c , our first hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion

The result revealed that mean of female students is higher than the male students that show that there is a significant difference between the Performance of Male and female students. Hence, the second hypothesis is rejected. The implication of this study like Oloyede (1996) submission, points to the fact that apart from infrastructure, man power, teaching material, the effect of gender in mastering a language should not be neglected most especially a foreign language like French. However, it rejects Smith (2009) and Abu (2011) that opined that gender had little or no effect on performance of students in their various subjects. From all indications, Female French students seem to develop a positive attitude towards the learning of French language and this always make them to perform better and this could be seen from their performances.

Conclusion

From the finding of this study, one could see that while the female French learners performed better, the male French learners performed below expectation and this is a reflection of what is going on in our French classes in Nigeria. This study went ahead in suggesting some recommendations that if followed will end up encouraging male French learners to have a positive mind towards French and eventually lead to their better performance in French language.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, the following recommendations are hereby put forward.

1. From the finding of this study, male French language learners need a lot of motivation. They need to be exposed to a lot of opportunities and encouragement; all these will go a long way in having positive mind towards learning French language and further lead to their good performance in the language.
2. More scholarships should be given to students to read French language. Most especially the males among them. This will go along in motivating male students to perform better like their female counterpart.
3. Automatic employment should made available to French graduates especially the males among them.
4. French teachers in all our schools both public and private should be given special allowance; this will further encourage the males to always struggle to perform better in French language.

5. There should be a disparity in male and female candidates' score seeking admission to read French in the higher institutions. The cut off mark for male students should be lower compared to their female counterparts.

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