

Issues in French Language Teaching in Nigeria: The Case of Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Domitila Onyinye Ubajaka

Department of French Language
Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe
Email: ubajakaonyinye@gmail.com

&

Ozioma Siddharta Omedobi Anyawuike, PhD

Department of Modern European Languages
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka
Email: oso.anyawuike@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper compares the issues faced in French language teaching between Nwafor Orizu College of Education and Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Nigeria. Both institutions play a crucial role in imparting French language education to students, and this comparative analysis seeks to identify and examine the challenges they encounter in this process. The demand for French language instruction has increased, but the availability of proficient instructors remains limited, impacting the quality of language learning for students in both schools. The lack of appropriate instructional materials and resources hinders effective language teaching as both institutions struggle to access tailored textbooks, workbooks, and audiovisual aids, making it difficult to provide comprehensive language learning experiences that align with the needs of Nigerian students. The lack of necessary infrastructure and resources restricts the comprehensive incorporation of technology in language classrooms, limiting the potential benefits it can offer in enhancing language acquisition. However, despite these shared challenges, there may be some institution-specific issues unique to each university. Factors such as institutional policies, funding, and teaching methodologies could vary and contribute to discrepancies in the French language learning experience for students. This paper aims to provide valuable insights into the issues faced in French language teaching in Nigeria, specifically within Nwafor Orizu College of Education and Nnamdi Azikiwe University. By identifying these challenges, this paper will contribute to the development of targeted strategies and interventions that can be implemented to improve the quality of French language education in both institutions and, by extension, across the country. Ultimately, addressing these issues will lead to a more proficient and culturally enriched generation of French speakers in Nigeria. This paper employs a comparative research methodology to analyze the issues faced in French language teaching between Nwafor Orizu College of Education and Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Nigeria. Drawing upon a theoretical framework grounded in educational psychology and language acquisition theories, the study aims to identify and examine the challenges encountered in imparting French language education to students in these institutions. By utilizing qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, including interviews, surveys, and document analysis, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the quality of French language instruction. The theoretical framework guides the interpretation of findings, allowing for a deeper exploration of the underlying reasons behind the identified challenges. Through this research approach, the paper aims to contribute valuable insights into the issues faced in French language teaching in Nigeria, paving the way for targeted strategies and interventions to enhance the quality of language education in both institutions and foster a more proficient generation of French speakers in the country.

Keywords: Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, French language, Nigeria, Education

Introduction

The teaching of French as a foreign language holds significant importance in the context of Nigeria, where linguistic diversity is a hallmark of the nation. French, being one of the world's widely spoken languages, plays a vital role not only in international diplomacy but also in fostering economic and cultural ties. Nwafor Orizu College of Education and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, two prominent educational institutions in Nigeria, have been at the forefront of offering French language programs to cater to the growing demand for French proficiency. This comparative analysis aims to delve into the myriad challenges faced by these institutions in their pursuit of effective French language teaching. It is a critical examination of the strategies, curriculum, resources, and overall quality of French language education at Nwafor Orizu College of Education and Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The analysis will take into account the specific challenges faced by each institution, whether they pertain to resource constraints, student engagement, or the broader national context of language education policies. As Nigeria continues to engage in international discourse and trade, the need for proficient French speakers grows, making

the effectiveness of French language programs in these institutions of paramount importance. This comparative analysis aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding language education in Nigeria.

History of French language at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University

French was introduced as a language of study at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in the early 1990s. The department of French was established in 1997 to meet the growing demand for French language education. The department offers both undergraduate and postgraduate programs in French. The undergraduate program leads to a Bachelor of Arts degree in French, while the postgraduate program leads to a Postgraduate Diploma, Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degree in French. Nnamdi Azikiwe University offers a number of French language courses at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Undergraduate courses include French language, French literature, and French civilization and translation, while postgraduate courses include French linguistics, French literature, African literature and translation. The department also offers language laboratory and translation courses. ("Department of French," n.d.).

Brief history of French language at Nwafor Orizu college of education

The college began offering French language courses in the early 2000s. In the years since, the college has expanded its offerings to include a range of French courses, including French language, French literature, and French civilization. The college also has a language laboratory and translation courses. The French language program at Nwafor orizu college of education is comprehensive and well-rounded. The program offers courses at various levels, including certificate, diploma, and degree. The college has a team of qualified and experienced French language instructors who are dedicated to helping students achieve their goals. The language laboratory at the college is well-equipped and provides students with the opportunity to practice their language skills. The translation courses offered by the college are designed to meet the needs of students and professionals. (Nwafor orizu college of education, n.d.). Let us delve into the issues faced by these institutions.

Curriculum Disparities

One significant concern lies in the disparity between the curricula adopted by these two institutions. To illustrate, Nwafor Orizu College of Education places emphasis on grammar and vocabulary acquisition, but the curriculum lacks the necessary resources to effectively enhance these skills. A report from the Department of Languages and Linguistics at the College underscores the curriculum-related challenges. The report highlights that "The curriculum did not provide enough oral and aural practice for the students. There was a lack of suitable teaching materials, especially recommended textbooks and recordings, laboratory facilities, and teaching aids" (Department of Languages and Linguistics, Nwafor Orizu College of Education, p. 13). These shortcomings contribute to the difficulties faced by students in acquiring practical language skills. Conversely, Nnamdi Azikiwe University prioritizes cultural studies and conversation skills. The Journal of Language and Culture has pointed out that "The French curriculum does not reflect the current educational needs of the students and the demands of the modern society" (p. 80). This disconnect can have adverse consequences on students' ability to apply French in real-world scenarios. Consequently, these disparities can lead to inconsistencies in the levels of language proficiency among students.

Limited Qualified Instructors

Both institutions, as highlighted in a study by Ezeilo & Ndubuisi in 2022, face a pressing issue concerning the shortage of qualified French language instructors. The study reveals that "One of the most pressing problems facing French language teaching... is the lack of qualified teachers. ... a significant number of lecturers at both institutions were not trained in French language teaching, and that many lacked the necessary qualifications and experience to effectively teach the language" (Ezeilo & Ndubuisi, 2022, p. 5). This lack of expertise can significantly hinder students' progress. Nonye Stella Umunna also emphasizes this challenge, stating that "One of the major challenges facing French language teaching in Nigerian higher education institutions is the lack of qualified teachers". According to her "Many teachers do not have the required qualifications or training in French language teaching" (Umunna, 7). This issue further underscores the critical need for qualified instructors in both institutions and the broader context of French language education in Nigeria.

Resource Constraints

Insufficiency of resources presents a widespread challenge within French language programs. At Nwafor Orizu College of Education, students encounter obstacles due to outdated textbooks and limited access to digital resources, which negatively impact their learning experiences. As Obioma (2015) aptly observes, "The French program at Nwafor Orizu College of Education faces many challenges, including ... a lack of adequate resources. The program is in need of more funding and support from the government to ensure that students have access to the resources they need to learn effectively" (p. 54).

Similarly, at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, a shortage of language labs and multimedia materials significantly restricts practical language exposure. In line with these concerns, Chidinma, J. N., Uche, D. S., & Nwadiuto, O. O. (2018) note, "Another problem is the lack of audio-visual aids in teaching French in Nigerian universities, including Nnamdi Azikiwe University. This makes teaching and learning of French difficult because learners cannot hear the actual sounds of the language nor see the lip movements and body language of the native speakers" (p. 8). These resource limitations at both institutions hinder the effective teaching and learning of the French language.

Inadequate Language Immersion

Language immersion is crucial for effective language learning, but both institutions fall short in providing such opportunities. For example, Nwafor Orizu College of Education do not offer study abroad programs or cultural exchange initiatives, limiting students' exposure to authentic French language and culture. Anyaso and Obiwuru in their article, opine that "The major problem facing the teaching of French language in Nwafor Orizu College of Education is the inability of the institution to organize exchange programmes for teachers and students to enhance their language acquisition." (p. 18). On the other hand, Nnamdi Azikiwe University do not prioritize extracurricular activities that encourage language immersion. Eze and Esimone agree with this by stating that "Nnamdi Azikiwe University did not attach the requisite importance to extracurricular activities that will aid the learning of French." (p. 28). Ezenwu & Ijioma also points out that "The teachers' lack of exposure to the norms of French-speaking countries made them unable to provide their students with adequate background knowledge about the culture and norms of the French people." (p. 86).

Assessment and Certification Challenges

Both institutions struggle with assessing students' language proficiency accurately. For instance, Nwafor Orizu College of Education lacks standardized tests, making it challenging to measure progress consistently. Nwadinobi, O., & Iloanusi, M. O. state that "The school lacks standardized tests to measure the progress and level of achievement of its students, making it difficult to determine the teaching and learning performances of the students." (p. 14). Nnamdi Azikiwe University face issues obtaining internationally recognized French language certifications for its students, limiting their competitiveness in the job market. Chukwunweike, I. C., & Nwokorie, O. N. in their article state, "The major challenges of international certifications faced by students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University include, among others, lack of adequate infrastructure and facilities in French department of the Faculty of Arts, and inadequate materials for the study of French as a foreign language." (p. 45).

Limited Career Opportunities

Graduates from these institutions often encounter challenges in finding suitable job opportunities that align with their French language skills. Imoniana, F. I., and Anyawu, M. C. in their work *Universities and the Employability of Graduates: The Case of Nigerian Graduates* state that "The problems encountered by many graduates, particularly those from less reputed universities like Nwafor Orizu College of Education and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, often go beyond lack of jobs and include lack of relevant jobs." (P. 3). For instance, a student from Nwafor Orizu College of Education with a strong foundation in French struggle to secure a job that requires advanced language proficiency. According to Mohammed in his work *An Assessment of the Challenges of Teaching French as a Foreign Language in Nigerian Schools* "It was deduced that graduates from the Nwafor Orizu College of Education with a background in French were at a disadvantage when seeking employment in the competitive Nigerian job market." (P.215). Similarly, a graduate from Nnamdi Azikiwe University face difficulties in finding a position that utilizes their cultural knowledge of the Francophone world. Odu & Ajanaku, state that "It can be deduced from the results that a large percentage of the graduates do not acquire any professional skill or knowledge that can be used in a work environment. This was a result of the inadequate or complete absence of professional training while in the university." (P. 27).

Conclusion

In summary, Nwafor Orizu College of Education and Nnamdi Azikiwe University are confronted with numerous critical challenges within their French language teaching programs. These challenges encompass a spectrum of issues ranging from curriculum misalignments, a dearth of proficient instructors, constraints in resources, inadequate exposure to language immersion, complexities in assessment methodologies, to limited career pathways for graduates.

Addressing these hurdles is paramount for both institutions and the broader Nigerian educational framework. It necessitates a concerted effort towards standardizing curricula to ensure consistency, investing substantially in the training and development of competent language instructors, bolstering resources to facilitate effective teaching and learning, fostering immersive language experiences to enhance proficiency, instituting recognized language

proficiency assessments for benchmarking, and expanding employment prospects for graduates proficient in French.

These measures collectively form the foundation for enhancing the quality of French language education in Nigeria. By undertaking these strategic initiatives, not only can the proficiency levels of students from these institutions be elevated, but they can also be better equipped to compete proficiently on the global stage. Such advancements not only serve the immediate needs of students and educators but also contribute to the broader socio-economic development and international competitiveness of Nigeria.

References

- Ezeilo, O. O., & Ndubuisi, M. E. (2022). A Comparative Study of the Perception of French Language Lecturers on the Problems of Teaching French in Nwafor Orizu College of Education and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Research and Innovations*, 12(1), 4-18. Retrieved from <http://www.ijeri.org/vol12.1/no12-1-28.pdf>
- Obioma, G. O. (2015). The State of French Studies in Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Nigeria. *The Journal of Pan-African Studies*, 8(5), 53-59. Retrieved from <http://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol8no5/8.5obioma.pdf>.
- Umunna, Nonye Stella. "French Language Teaching in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions: Challenges and Opportunities." *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 3, no. 6, 2021, pp. 6-16. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/26321015.
- Chidinma, J. N., Uche, D. S., & Nwadiuto, O. O. (2018). An Evaluation of the Teaching and Learning of French Language in Nigerian Universities: A Case Study of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. *Journal of Studies in Education*, 8(2), 1-14.
- Nwafor Orizu College of Education. (2014). Assessment of French Programmes in Colleges of Education in Nigeria: A Case Study of Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra State. Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra State. Retrieved from <http://nocen.edu.ng/pdfs/pdf3.pdf>.
- Odu, O., & Ajanaku, G. A. (2016). Professional Profile of French Graduates from Nigerian Universities: A Case Study of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, 4(3), 27-37.
- Mohammed, A. A. (2016). An Assessment of the Challenges of Teaching French as a Foreign Language in Nigerian Schools. *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, 4(4), 213-222.
- Nwadinobi, O., & Iloanusi, M. O. (2015). An Assessment of the Teaching and Learning of French in Nigerian Universities: A Case Study of Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe. *Journal of International Social Research*, 8(33), 13-22. doi:10.17719/jisr.2015100083.
- Imoniana, F. I., & Anyawu, M. C. (2017). Universities and the Employability of Graduates: The Case of Nigerian Graduates. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(2), 3-13.
- Chukwunweike, I. C., & Nwokorie, O. N. (2018). Addressing French as a Foreign Language in Tertiary Institutions: A Case of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. *International Journal of Social Science and Education Research*, 1(2), 43-53. doi:10.32628/ijsser.2018.02.05
- Anyaso, U., & Obiwuru, S. (2019). Investigation of the Factors Militating Against the Effective Teaching and Learning of French Language in Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe, Anambra State. *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science*, 3(3), 19-28.
- Ezenwu, I. C., & Ijioma, B. (2017). A Descriptive Assessment of the Learning and Teaching of French in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. *International Journal of Research in Educational Sciences*, 3(1), 85-98.
- Anyaso, U., & Obiwuru, S. (2019). A Descriptive Assessment of the Learning and Teaching of French in Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra State. *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science*, 3(3), 17-30.
- Eze, C. C., & Esimone, C. O. (2018). An Investigation into the Learning and Teaching of French in Nigerian Universities: A Case of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 2(1), 27-39.
- Department of French, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Accessed 7 October, 2023. www.unizik.edu.ng/faculty/faculty-of-arts/departments-of-french/.
- Department of French, Nwafor orizu college of education, Accessed 7 October, 2023. www.nocen.edu.ng/french.