

Factors Influencing The Choice Of French As A Course Of Study Among University Undergraduates In Southeast, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the key factors that influence university undergraduates in Southeast Nigeria to choose French as their field of study. It specifically focused on personal, parental, and peer influences; career prospects and economic opportunities; institutional factors; the challenges tied to selecting French; and potential solutions to these challenges. A descriptive survey research design was utilized, with a population consisting of undergraduate students enrolled in French programs at selected universities in Southeast, Nigeria. A sample of 350 respondents was gathered through a multistage sampling technique. Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire named the Factors Influencing the Choice of French Questionnaire (FICFQ). Analytical methods included descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. The results indicated that personal, parental, and peer factors significantly impacted students' decisions regarding studying French, reflected in an overall grand mean of 3.01. Career prospects and economic opportunities stood out as primary motivations, particularly regarding job openings in international organizations (84.3%), competitiveness in the job market (82.9%), and employment prospects with multinational corporations (80.0%). Institutional factors were also highlighted, achieving a grand mean of 3.03, as students recognized the importance of well-qualified lecturers, the reputation of their institutions, and the availability of learning resources. Additionally, the study identified various challenges related to choosing French, including the perception of the language as difficult (85.7%), negative views about French being a challenging subject (82.9%), and limited chances for practical immersion (80.0%). In response to these challenges, respondents suggested raising awareness about the career advantages of knowing French (90.0%), hiring more qualified lecturers (87.1%), enhancing job opportunities for graduates (85.7%), and improving language learning facilities (84.3%). In conclusion, the decision to study French among students is shaped by a mix of social, economic, and institutional elements. The study recommends a greater investment in French language education, improved awareness programs regarding career opportunities, increased institutional support, and the development of practical language-learning experiences to boost enrollment in French programs...

Keywords French language, course choice, undergraduates, career prospects, institutional factors, Southeast Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's geographic position—bordered by French-speaking countries such as Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon—gives the French language strategic importance in national policy. As a result, the Nigerian government has designated French as the country's second official language to support regional cooperation, diplomatic engagement, trade, and international relations. Nevertheless, university enrolment in French programmes continues to lag behind that of other academic fields. This situation underscores the need to understand the underlying factors shaping students' decisions to pursue or avoid studying French. A range of

personal, social, economic, and institutional influences affect undergraduate course selection, including perceived job opportunities, family expectations, peer dynamics, individual interests, societal views on certain disciplines, and the standard of available learning resources. Research by Badmus and Jita, (2023) highlights the impact of career goals, economic aspirations, and environmental context on academic choices, while Adeyanju et al., (2020) point to broader socio-economic and institutional factors in shaping educational decisions. More recent work on language learning in Nigeria also shows that attitudes, motivation, perceived status, and expectations about future prospects significantly influence students' preferences for foreign languages (Oladele and Ajayi, 2026).

Interest in French studies across Nigerian universities has fluctuated over time. While knowledge of French can open doors in diplomacy, international business, translation, tourism, education, and cross-border commerce, many students still regard it as offering limited professional pathways. Continuing, Abiodun-Eniayekan et al., (2020) attribute low enrolment to widespread misunderstandings about the field and insufficient awareness of its practical relevance, while Arowosadini, (2024) further suggests that French should be repositioned not just as a subject for academic study but as a valuable asset for economic growth and global competitiveness. Motivation also plays a critical role in academic decision-making. According to Gardners (2010, 2001, 1985), socio-educational model, positive attitudes toward a language and practical motivations strongly affect the decision to learn it. Studies by Olaleye and Xiao, (2026) indicate that students are more inclined to study foreign languages when they anticipate financial benefits, receive encouragement from parents, and learn in supportive environments. Similarly, Gardner, (2010) identify prestige, usefulness, social recognition, career potential, and exposure to educational opportunities as key factors influencing young Nigerians' use and uptake of French.

Institutional conditions also shape student choices. Access to trained instructors, language labs, scholarships, exchange initiatives, and targeted outreach efforts can increase interest in French as a field of study. Omonkhua et al., (2025) stressed that reforms in policy and curriculum design can have a meaningful impact on both French language acquisition and student enrolment. At the same time, prevailing societal attitudes and the overwhelming dominance of English contribute to the declining appeal of French. Despite Nigeria's advantageous location and the rising value of multilingual skills in global affairs and commerce, there remains a scarcity of empirical research focused specifically on what drives undergraduates to choose French as a course of study. This study therefore aims to explore the various personal, social, economic, and institutional factors that influence this decision.

Although French holds official status and Nigeria shares borders with several francophone nations, participation in university-level French programmes remains modest. Many students gravitate toward disciplines seen as more financially rewarding or employment-oriented. Additional barriers include social misconceptions, parental guidance that favors other fields, lack of information about career options in French, and underdeveloped teaching infrastructure. While prior research has examined French language instruction, learner attitudes, and multilingualism, few studies have directly analyzed the specific factors guiding undergraduates' choice of French as an academic major. As a result, there is limited evidence on how different factors interact in shaping these decisions. Addressing this gap is the central objective of the present study. The general objective of this study is to investigate the factors influencing the choice of French as a course of study among Nigerian undergraduates. Specifically, the study seeks to: a). determine the personal factors influencing students' choice of French as a course of study; b). examine the influence of parental and peer factors on students' choice of French; c). investigate the effect of career prospects and economic opportunities on students' decision to study French; d). determine the influence of institutional factors on students' choice of French; e). identify challenges associated with the choice of French as a course of study among Nigerian undergraduates, and f). proffer solutions to the challenges associated with French as a course of study. This research holds importance as its results will offer valuable insights to educational planners, curriculum designers, university administrators, and French language instructors regarding the factors shaping students' decisions to study French. It will also support the National Universities Commission and policy makers in developing initiatives to advance French language education in Nigeria. Additionally, the findings will help inform students and parents about the career prospects linked to studying French. The study will further enrich current academic literature and serve as a foundation for future research in the field of foreign language education.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This research is grounded in Gardner's Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition and is bolstered by modern motivation theories, particularly Self-Determination Theory (SDT). According to Gardner's Socio-Educational Model, the successful learning of a second language is impacted by learners' attitudes towards the community where the target language is spoken, their motivation, and the social context in which learning takes place. The model highlights that language proficiency is not solely determined by cognitive capacity but is also influenced by social and environmental factors like family backing, interactions with peers, educational background, and resources provided by institutions (Gardner, 1985; 2001). Consequently, learners who receive positive social backing and ample institutional support are more likely to develop stronger motivation and achieve higher language proficiency. Similarly, Self-Determination Theory posits that learners' motivation is boosted

when their psychological needs for independence, competence, and connection with others are met. Personal interest in learning French, the perceived utility of the language, self-assurance in one's abilities, and supportive learning environments all contribute to intrinsic motivation, which subsequently enhances language learning and proficiency. These theoretical frameworks directly guided the formulation of the study's hypotheses. Specifically, the study proposed that:

- Personal aspects (like interest, attitude, and learning drive) have a positive impact on French language proficiency.
- Social elements (including peer influence and family support) positively affect French language proficiency.
- Economic factors (such as financial capability to acquire learning materials or attend additional classes) significantly influence language proficiency.
- Institutional factors (comprising the presence of qualified instructors, learning resources, instructional materials, and institutional backing) significantly impact students' French proficiency.

Together, these theories indicate that proficiency in the French language is a multifaceted outcome shaped by learners' inner drive and external environmental circumstances (Deci and Ryan, 1985; 2000).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

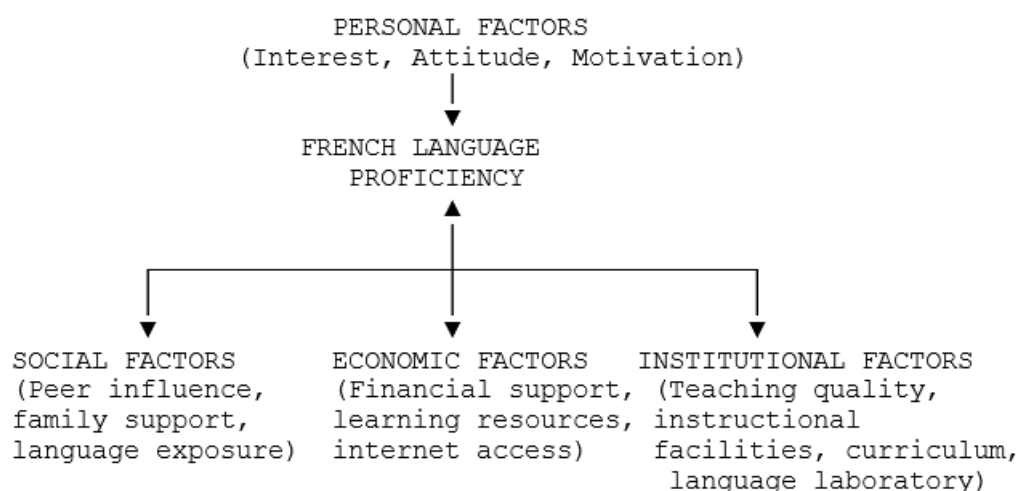


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework diagram showing how the independent variables relate to French language proficiency.

Explanation of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework demonstrates that proficiency in the French language (outcome variable) is impacted by four primary groups of variables that are independent: personal, societal, economic, and institutional elements. Personal aspects influence the drive and dedication of learners; societal factors offer social and emotional backing; economic elements decide the availability of educational materials; and institutional factors establish the conducive learning environment crucial for effective language learning. Following Gardner's Socio-Educational Model and Self-Determination Theory, the framework posits that enhancements in these variables boost students' drive and educational possibilities, ultimately resulting in increased levels of proficiency in the French language.

METHODOLOGY

The South-East geopolitical zone, one of Nigeria's six such zones, is primarily populated by the Igbo ethnic group and comprises five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Strategically situated in southeastern Nigeria, it borders the South-South zone to the south, the North-Central zone to the north, and the Republic of Cameroon to the east (NPC, 2023). Encompassing an area of about 29,000 square kilometers, the region features a tropical climate with marked wet and dry seasons, which leads to significant rainfall. This climate supports farming activities, including the cultivation of yam, cassava, cocoyam, maize, rice, and palm produce (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2024), alongside major economic pursuits like agriculture, commerce, manufacturing, and entrepreneurship. Domestically, the South-East is predominantly Igbo-speaking and is celebrated for its vibrant cultural heritage, robust entrepreneurial spirit, and extensive trade networks. Key urban centers, such as Onitsha, Aba, Owerri, Enugu, and Abakaliki, act as crucial commercial, industrial, and educational centers within Nigeria (NBS, 2024). The region is also home to numerous higher institutions, including universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, which play a vital role in enhancing human capital development in Nigeria, consistently achieving higher literacy rates and educational levels relative to many other areas of the country. This research utilized a descriptive survey methodology to explore the factors that influence university undergraduates in Southeast Nigeria to choose French as a course of study. This approach was deemed suitable as it allowed for

direct input from respondents about their perceptions, experiences, and views regarding what drives their choice of studying French. The research was conducted across several federal and state universities within the region that offer French language programs. The study targeted all undergraduate students currently enrolled in these programs, with a sample size of 350 students selected through a multistage sampling process. Initially, specific universities known for their French offerings were selected, including Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Ebonyi State University, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Abia State University. To ensure diverse representation, a proportionate stratified sampling technique was employed, followed by simple random sampling to choose individuals from each group. Data collection was facilitated through a questionnaire designed by the researcher, named the Factors Influencing the Choice of French Questionnaire (FICFQ). This tool gathered information on various influences, such as personal, parental, and peer factors, along with career prospects, economic opportunities, institutional aspects, challenges faced, and potential solutions regarding the study of French. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with various statements on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). Questions related to challenges and solutions were structured with multiple-choice options. To validate the questionnaire, it underwent face and content validation by three experts in relevant fields. Their feedback was integrated into the final instrument. A pilot study involving 30 French students from outside the primary research area confirmed the questionnaire's reliability, achieving a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.84. This indicates that the tool is well-suited for data collection.

Justification for the Selection of the Universities:

The research utilized a complex sampling method to guarantee that the chosen participants were a fair representation of undergraduate students studying French in universities in Southeast Nigeria. Initially, universities with French language programs were purposefully selected based on specific criteria: (i) full accreditation by relevant authorities, (ii) offering French language or French education programs at the undergraduate level, (iii) having a registered population of French language students, and (iv) being situated in the Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The chosen universities were deemed suitable as they collectively mirrored the variety of higher education institutions in the area, encompassing both federal and state-owned universities. These institutions attract students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, providing a comprehensive view of French language learners in Southeast Nigeria. By focusing on factors influencing French language proficiency among university students in the region, selecting universities with established French programs ensured that respondents had the necessary background to provide accurate and dependable information. Therefore, the chosen universities are reasonably representative of those in Southeast Nigeria that offer French language programs, enhancing the study's external validity and generalizability. In the subsequent phase, proportional stratified sampling was used to distribute respondents based on each university's French language student population. Within each institution, students were categorized by academic level to ensure diverse representation of various student cohorts. Finally, participants were selected from each group using simple random sampling, minimizing bias in selection and ensuring that every eligible student had an equal chance of being included. The sample size of 350 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula, which is widely used in survey research involving finite populations. The questionnaires were distributed directly by the researcher and trained research assistants. Remarkably, all 350 questionnaires were fully completed and returned, achieving a response rate of 100 percent. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, employing frequency counts and percentages to address challenges and solutions, while means and standard deviations were utilized for examining responses on parental, peer, career, and institutional influences. The survey went through a thorough validation process to ensure it accurately assessed the aspects examined in this research. Expert review confirmed the relevance and comprehensiveness of the questionnaire. Three specialists, each with expertise in French Language Education, Educational Measurement and Evaluation, and Educational Psychology/Research Methodology, reviewed the initial draft. After expert validation, the modified questionnaire was tested with 30 undergraduate students studying French language at a different university but similar to the target group. The pilot aimed to evaluate the questionnaire's clarity, estimated completion time, detect unclear items, and gather initial evidence of reliability. Feedback from the pilot study led to minor adjustments in wording and question order, enhancing the questionnaire's usability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Personal Factors Influencing Students' Choice of French as a Course of Study

Table 1 showed personal factors influencing French Language as a course of study. It indicates that personal factors had mean scores exceeding the threshold of 2.50, suggesting they played a significant role in students' decisions to study French. The most influential factor was the desire to travel and pursue education abroad ($\bar{x} = 3.16$), followed by expectations of better job prospects ($\bar{x} = 3.15$) and the perceived prestige of being multilingual ($\bar{x} = 3.12$). With an overall mean of 3.08, the results highlight the considerable impact of personal motivations on

students' enrollment in French language courses. Supporting the above, Le Roux and Horne, (2025) opined that a key reason students opt for French is the career advantage they associate with knowing multiple languages. Fluency in French is seen as beneficial in fields like international business, diplomacy, tourism, translation, education, and global companies. In Nigeria, the country's location near several French-speaking nations adds practical value to learning French, especially for regional trade and diplomatic engagement. Many students see French as a way to stand out in the job market and expand their professional options. Others are drawn to the language because it opens doors to higher education abroad, including scholarships, exchange programs, and study opportunities in Francophone countries. The goal of pursuing undergraduate or graduate degrees overseas often drives enrollment in French courses. Studies show that learners are motivated by French's global role and its usefulness in accessing academic institutions in French-speaking regions (Rahman, 2024).

Personal interest also plays a major role in choosing French. Students who enjoy language learning, value linguistic variety, or find French appealing in sound or structure are more inclined to study it. The satisfaction gained from mastering a new language can support long-term commitment and academic performance. Research consistently highlights personal curiosity and internal motivation as central to both enrolling in and continuing with French studies (Le Roux and Horne, 2024). The cultural richness of French-speaking communities also influences decisions. Many learners are drawn to French literature, music, film, fashion, food, and traditions. Encounters with Francophone culture often spark a desire to learn the language and connect more meaningfully with its speakers. Evidence suggests that admiration for French culture and the wish to experience life in French-speaking societies are strong motivators (Rahman, 2024).

Geographic closeness further enhances French's appeal. Nigeria borders Francophone countries such as Benin, Niger, and Cameroon, making French useful for cross-border communication, travel, commerce, and regional cooperation. This proximity increases the language's practical relevance, particularly in West and Central Africa, where French often functions as a common means of communication (Koumje, 2024). The quality of instruction also shapes student interest. Teachers who are passionate, skilled, and use interactive methods can positively influence attitudes toward French. Supportive classrooms and dynamic teaching approaches encourage students to continue studying the language. Schools that offer cultural events, language clubs, or international exchanges tend to generate greater enthusiasm for French programs. Social influences matter too—family members who value multilingualism or work in French-dependent roles may encourage students to take up the language. Peer groups can also reinforce positive views of French by highlighting its benefits and opportunities.

French holds a prominent place worldwide as an official language in many international bodies. Students often view it as a tool for global communication and broader participation in international affairs. Its role in diplomacy and global institutions makes it an attractive choice (Rahman, 2024). Confidence in one's ability to learn a language also affects decisions. Learners who believe they can succeed in mastering a foreign language are more likely to choose French. This sense of self-efficacy impacts both initial enrollment and continued effort in language studies. As globalization grows, so does the demand for professionals who can navigate diverse linguistic and cultural environments. More students now see language skills as valuable assets, choosing French as a strategic step toward future career success. It enables access to global markets and strengthens potential for international collaboration.

Table 1: Determine the Personal Factors Influencing Students' Choice of French as a Course of Study

S/N	Personal Factors Influencing Choice of French	Mean	SD
1	Personal interest in learning foreign languages influenced my choice of French.	3.09	0.97
2	Desire to communicate with French-speaking people motivated my choice.	3.07	0.94
3	Perceived employment opportunities influenced my decision to study French.	3.15	0.93
4	My previous exposure to French in secondary school encouraged me to choose the course.	2.98	1.01
5	The desire to travel and study abroad influenced my choice of French.	3.16	0.94
6	The prestige associated with being multilingual motivated me to study French.	3.12	0.92
7	My academic strengths and language abilities influenced my choice.	3.02	0.97
8	Interest in French culture and literature motivated my choice.	3.06	0.95

Influence of Parental and Peer Factors on Students' Choice of French

The findings on table 2 suggests that both parental and peer influences had a notable impact on students' decision to study French (Grand Mean = 3.01, SD = 0.97). The most strongly endorsed statement was "My parents encouraged me to study French because of its career prospects" (Mean = 3.09), followed by "My parents provided financial support that encouraged my study of French" (Mean = 3.07). Peer influence also played a role, especially through encouragement from friends and positive stories shared by classmates. With all item means exceeding the threshold of 2.50, participants generally agreed that support from parents and peers significantly contributed to their choice of studying French. The choice to study French as an academic subject is strongly shaped by social influences, especially those from parents and peers. These relationships affect how students view, value, and engage with foreign language learning, influencing their motivations, attitudes, and long-term educational goals. Current research highlights that encouragement from parents and interactions with peers are key in determining whether students develop an interest in French and ultimately decide to pursue it academically.

Parents play a central role in guiding students' educational paths. Their perspectives on education, language acquisition, and career development often impact the subjects students choose. Those who see multilingualism as beneficial—economically, academically, and socially—are more inclined to support their children in learning French. This support can take various forms, such as offering advice, providing financial resources, creating access to language programs, or simply acknowledging and praising progress (Le Roux and Horne, 2025). Studies show that parental expectations about future careers significantly affect students' decisions to enroll in French courses. Many parents view French as a practical skill that opens doors in fields like diplomacy, international business, tourism, education, and regional trade—especially relevant in countries like Nigeria, which borders several Francophone nations (Rahman, 2024). As a result, students whose parents emphasize professional growth and global readiness are more likely to select French. Moreover, parents with higher levels of education tend to place greater importance on learning languages and gaining international experience. They often encourage French because they recognize its value in accessing scholarships, studying abroad, and communicating across cultures (Kankam, 2021). Evidence also suggests that parental involvement boosts students' motivation, confidence, and perseverance in language studies. Additionally, when family members speak French or use it professionally, they can serve as real-life examples, inspiring students to follow a similar path. This kind of observational learning fosters favorable views of the language and increases the chances that students will choose to study it.

Peers also play a critical role in shaping academic and career decisions. During adolescence and young adulthood, students often look to their peer groups for approval and support. Consequently, friends can strongly influence opinions about school subjects, including foreign languages. Students are more likely to opt for French if their peers express interest in it or are already studying it. Encouragement from friends can build confidence and ease the stress often associated with learning a new language (Koumje, 2024). A positive peer environment fosters engagement and helps sustain interest over time. Research on motivation in language learning indicates that students are influenced by the academic habits and achievements of those around them. When peers benefit from studying French—through exchange programs, cultural events, or better job opportunities—others may be inspired to do the same.

Furthermore, peer networks support collaborative learning through study groups, language clubs, cultural organizations, and classroom discussions. These settings offer valuable chances to practice, exchange knowledge, and give mutual encouragement, all of which strengthen motivation. According to Le Roux and Horne, (2025) feeling socially connected and included in language-learning communities plays a major role in students' commitment to studying a foreign language. However, peer influence can also be discouraging. If friends view French as challenging, unimportant, or less prestigious than other subjects, students may be less likely to enroll. Negative attitudes within peer circles can weaken motivation and lead students toward different academic paths. Parental and peer influences frequently work together in shaping students' choices. While parents typically provide long-term direction regarding education and careers, peers exert more immediate, day-to-day social pressure. Students are most likely to choose French when both family and friends hold positive views about language learning (Kankam, 2021). The combined effect of parental support and peer approval creates a supportive context that nurtures interest and helps maintain dedication to studying French. Modern theories of motivation suggest that encouragement from important people in a student's life—particularly parents and peers—enhances both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. This kind of social backing strengthens self-belief, promotes favorable attitudes toward French, and increases the likelihood of selecting it as a field of study.

Table 2: Influence of Parental and Peer Factors on Students' Choice of French as a Course of Study

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD
1	My parents encouraged me to study French because of its career prospects.	3.09	0.94
2	My parents believe that French proficiency enhances educational opportunities.	3.04	0.95
3	The educational background of my parents influenced my choice of French.	2.96	0.97
4	My friends motivated me to enroll in French courses.	3.04	0.96
5	I chose French because many of my peers were studying it.	2.89	1.00
6	Discussions with friends increased my interest in studying French.	3.00	0.98
7	My parents provided financial support that encouraged my study of French.	3.07	1.00
8	Positive experiences shared by peers influenced my decision to study French.	2.99	0.97

Effect of Career Prospects and Economic Opportunities on Students' Decision to Study French

Table 3 shows that career prospects and economic incentives played a major role in students' choice to study French. The most commonly cited reason was improved job opportunities within international organizations (84.3%), followed by greater competitiveness in the job market (82.9%) and higher chances of employment in multinational firms (80.0%). A significant number of respondents also believed that knowing French could boost their earning capacity (78.6%) and support professional growth (77.1%). Overall, these findings indicate that students see French not merely as an academic pursuit, but as a practical asset for expanding employment options, advancing economically, and accessing global career pathways.

This is in line with OIF, (2024) who posited that career prospects and economic opportunities are key influences on students' decisions to pursue French as an academic subject. In today's interconnected economy, fluency in French is increasingly seen as a valuable asset that boosts job prospects, supports career progression, and opens doors to international roles. As an official language in many countries and global institutions, French offers graduates an edge in fields such as diplomacy, international trade, tourism, education, translation, and work with development organizations. Many students choose to study French because they see it as a route to better employment. Employers are placing greater value on professionals who can navigate diverse linguistic and cultural environments. Knowing French allows graduates to pursue careers in multinational companies, diplomatic missions, NGOs, and international bodies where the language is commonly used (Mwaniki and Orodho, 2023). As a result, those aiming for global careers are more inclined to specialize in French.

Economic factors also significantly shape educational decisions. In West Africa, especially Nigeria, French holds particular economic importance due to the country's geographic and economic ties with neighboring Francophone nations like Benin, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. The expansion of regional trade and deeper economic cooperation within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has heightened the need for individuals capable of communicating in French. Students understand that proficiency in the language can support cross-border business, strengthen entrepreneurial ventures, and improve access to regional markets (Adebayo and Yusuf, 2024). Additionally, the possibility of studying, working, or relocating to French-speaking countries is a strong incentive. Many learners view French competence as a gateway to scholarships, exchange programs, and job opportunities overseas. Studies show that students are more likely to commit to learning a foreign language when they believe it will lead to tangible economic benefits (Dorneye and Ryan, 2023). From the perspective of human capital theory, individuals pursue education and skills like language learning to enhance future income and career standing. French is often regarded as a form of linguistic capital that can improve productivity, job market competitiveness, and earning potential in a globalized workforce (Norton, 2022). Thus, students focused on career advancement and economic gain are more likely to enroll in French language programs.

Table 3: Effect of Career Prospects and Economic Opportunities on Students' Decision to Study French

S/N	Career Prospects and Economic Opportunities Factors	Frequency	Percentage
1	Better employment opportunities in international organizations	295	84.3
2	Increased chances of securing jobs in multinational companies	280	80.0
3	Opportunities for cross-border trade and business activities	265	75.7
4	Enhanced prospects for diplomatic and foreign service careers	250	71.4
5	Higher earning potential associated with bilingualism	275	78.6
6	Opportunities for scholarships and study abroad programmes	245	70.0
7	Increased competitiveness in the labour market	290	82.9
8	Access to economic opportunities in Francophone countries	260	74.3
9	Career advancement and professional mobility	270	77.1
10	Opportunities in tourism, translation, and interpretation services	235	67.1

Influence of Institutional Factors on Students' Choice of French

The findings indicate that various institutional factors significantly impacted students' decisions to enroll in French courses, resulting in an overall mean of 3.03 with a standard deviation of 0.96. The item with the highest rating was "The availability of qualified French lecturers influenced my choice of French," which had a mean of 3.10 and a standard deviation of 0.93. Close behind was the item "The reputation of the institution's French programme influenced my decision to study French," scoring a mean of 3.06 with a standard deviation of 0.95. Other notable factors included the accessibility of learning resources, exchange programs, language labs, and institutional support for bilingual education. Since all item means surpassed the benchmark mean of 2.50, it's clear that the respondents widely agreed that these institutional factors played a crucial role in their choice to study French. Institutional factors play a pivotal role in guiding students' choices to study French. The educational system influences these decisions through various aspects such as the quality of teaching, access to learning resources, curriculum design, institutional policies, and opportunities for language engagement. These elements can either motivate or deter students from following French at the university level.

Supporting the above, Macaro et al., (2024), said one of the key factors is the expertise and effectiveness of French language teachers. When educators use engaging teaching methods, show enthusiasm for their subject, and create vibrant learning environments, students are more inclined to select French. Positive experiences in the classroom help cultivate favorable attitudes toward the language and boost motivation to delve further into it. On the flip side, ineffective teaching methods can dampen students' interest and confidence in learning French. Access to educational resources is another significant influence on students' choices. Institutions that invest in well-equipped language labs, libraries filled with relevant materials, multimedia resources, and digital platforms foster an environment conducive to language learning. This kind of support not only enriches students' educational experiences but also encourages them to enroll in French courses (Ushioda and Dornyei, 2023). Additionally, modern technologies, like online learning tools and virtual exchanges, have sparked a growing interest in studying foreign languages. Curriculum design is equally essential. Programs that offer thorough French studies, including practical language applications, cultural explorations, internships, and opportunities to study abroad, tend to attract a larger number of students. A curriculum that connects language learning with career pathways and global prospects amplifies the appeal of French to potential students (European Commission, 2024). Furthermore, institutional support through scholarships, grants, and exchange programs plays a crucial role in shaping students' decisions. Financial assistance alleviates the economic pressure linked to higher education and serves as a motivator for students to pursue specialized programs like French. Experiences in exchange programs with Francophone nations offer students genuine language immersion, enhancing the allure of French studies (Marginson, 2023)

The reputation of an institution plays a significant role in the courses students choose. When universities and colleges are recognized for their exceptional language programs, skilled faculty, and successful graduates, they naturally attract students eager to study French. Many students believe that attending such esteemed institutions will offer them better academic preparation and enhance their job prospects after graduation (Marginsin, 2023). In places like Nigeria, where French holds a vital role in regional integration and global communication, schools that actively promote the language—through required courses, cultural events, and partnerships with Francophone organizations—spark greater interest and awareness among students (AUF, 2024). Beyond the classroom, extracurricular activities such as French clubs, language competitions, cultural festivals, and international collaborations provide students with valuable hands-on experiences in the French language and culture. These opportunities not only bolster their language skills but also fuel their passion for studying French (FME, 2024).

Table 4: Influence of Institutional Factors on Students' Choice of French (N = 350)

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD
1	Availability of qualified French lecturers influenced my choice of French.	3.10	0.93
2	The reputation of the institution's French programme influenced my decision to study French.	3.06	0.95
3	Availability of French language learning resources encouraged me to choose French.	3.04	0.94
4	The institution's encouragement of foreign language studies influenced my choice.	3.00	0.98
5	Access to language laboratories and learning facilities motivated me to study French.	2.99	0.97
6	Availability of exchange programmes and international collaborations influenced my decision.	3.04	0.98
7	Advice from academic staff and guidance counsellors influenced my choice of French.	2.97	0.96
8	Institutional policies promoting bilingual education encouraged me to study French.	3.00	0.98

Interpretation of Findings Using the Theoretical Framework (Summarizing tables 1 - 4)

The study's results back Gardner's Socio-Educational Model and Self-Determination Theory. Personal factors strongly impact learners' motivation and attitudes, crucial for second language acquisition. Students with high interest and motivation tend to achieve better French proficiency. Social factors, such as support from peers and family, play a significant role in creating a conducive learning environment, in line with Gardner's emphasis. Institutional factors, like qualified instructors and supportive environments, enhance students' competence and learning outcomes. Additionally, economic factors play a part in supporting motivation theory, as students with financial resources can access various educational tools for practice and proficiency improvement. In summary, the findings highlight that French language proficiency is influenced by personal motivation and social, economic, and institutional factors, supporting Gardner's Socio-Educational Model and Self-Determination Theory.

Challenges Associated with the Choice of French as a Course of Study among Nigerian Undergraduates

Table 5 highlights various challenges that Nigerian undergraduates face when choosing French as a field of study. The primary concern reported by students was the perceived difficulty in mastering French language skills, with 85.7% indicating this as an issue. This was closely followed by a general belief that learning French is inherently challenging (82.9%) and a lack of opportunities for practical language immersion (80.0%). Additional significant challenges included limited job prospects specifically requiring proficiency in French (78.6%) and strong competition from other courses that are perceived to offer better career outcomes (77.1%). Moreover, the shortage of adequate learning facilities and resources was noted by 75.7% of participants. Altogether, these insights point to a combination of academic hurdles, institutional limitations, and students' attitudes towards the language, which together impact the appeal of French as a major among Nigerian undergraduates. One significant challenge facing students who wish to pursue French studies in Nigeria is the prevalent belief that these programs offer limited career opportunities. Many students and their parents tend to favor more direct employment paths associated with fields like medicine, engineering, law, and information technology. As a result, French is often seen as a less appealing academic choice, even though it plays a crucial role in areas like diplomacy, international relations, translation, tourism, and regional trade (Lamb et al., 2023).

Additionally, the shortage of qualified French language teachers and a lack of adequate teaching resources is a major issue. Numerous educational institutions across Nigeria struggle with insufficient language laboratories, modern learning materials, and trained educators, all of which are essential for effective language acquisition. These gaps can dampen students' enthusiasm and self-confidence when considering French as a major (AUF, 2024). Another challenge arises from the varying degrees of proficiency and foundational knowledge in French that students bring from their secondary education. Many schools offer inconsistent or ineffective French instruction, leaving students with limited language skills as they transition to higher education. This lack of a solid foundation can lead to anxiety and a perception that French is difficult, which discourages students from enrolling in related degree programs (Lamb e al., 2023). Societal and parental expectations also play a significant role in shaping students' academic decisions. Oftentimes, parents push their children toward courses that are viewed as more prestigious or lucrative. Similarly, peer pressure can deter students from choosing French, especially when it is perceived as less marketable than fields related to science and technology (Le Roux and Horne, 2025). Moreover, the limited visibility of career opportunities available for French graduates is another barrier. Many students are not aware of the wide range of prospects in international organizations, multinational companies, translation services, education, diplomacy, and cross-border trade. This lack of awareness can diminish their motivation to study French (OIF, 2024). Lastly, financial constraints also play a critical role. Engaging in language immersion programs, educational exchanges, and study-abroad opportunities often requires significant financial investment. Consequently, students from less economically advantaged backgrounds may find it challenging to access activities that could further enhance their interest in French studies (Marginson, 2023).

Table 5: Challenges Associated with the Choice of French as a Course of Study among Nigerian Undergraduates

S/N	Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
1	Limited employment opportunities specifically requiring French language skills	275	78.6
2	Perceived difficulty in learning French language skills	300	85.7
3	Inadequate French language learning facilities and resources	265	75.7
4	Shortage of qualified French lecturers	250	71.4
5	Negative perception of French as a difficult course	290	82.9
6	Lack of financial support for language programmes and excursions	245	70.0
7	Limited opportunities for practical language immersion	280	80.0
8	Competition from other courses perceived to offer better career prospects	270	77.1
9	Inadequate awareness of the benefits of studying French	260	74.3
10	Insufficient institutional support for French language programmes	235	67.1

Solutions to the Challenges Associated with French as a Course of Study among Nigerian Undergraduates

Table 6 revealed that participants put forth a variety of suggestions to tackle the challenges of learning French in Nigerian universities. The most commonly recommended strategy was to raise awareness about the career advantages of studying French, supported by 90.0% of respondents. This was closely followed by calls for more qualified French instructors (87.1%) and boosting job prospects for French graduates (85.7%). Other significant proposals included enhancing language laboratories and educational facilities (84.3%), increasing government investment in French programs (82.9%), and incorporating practical language immersion experiences into the curriculum (81.4%). These findings suggest that a multifaceted approach—including better institutional support, greater awareness, improved career options, and enhanced learning resources—could greatly heighten students' interest in and dedication to studying French. Addressing the challenges of studying French among Nigerian undergraduates demands a unified approach involving government agencies, educational institutions, parents, and other stakeholders. By implementing effective interventions, we can reshape students' views on French, improve academic results, and boost enrollment in French language courses. This is in line with AUF, (2024), who maintained that significant step toward this goal is to enhance French language instruction at the primary and secondary school levels. Providing early exposure to French fosters essential language skills and builds confidence, preparing students for their higher education journey. Employing effective teaching methods and continuously refining the curriculum can alleviate student anxiety and better equip them for university-level French studies. Another vital initiative is the recruitment and ongoing professional development of qualified French teachers. Skilled educators play a crucial role in creating engaging learning environments and positively influencing students' attitudes toward the French language. Regular workshops, seminars, and training programs

can empower teachers with innovative teaching methods and contemporary language instruction techniques (OIF, 2024).

Moreover, educational institutions should commit to providing sufficient instructional resources and language-learning facilities. Establishing language laboratories, multimedia centers, online platforms, and modern teaching materials can greatly enrich the learning experience and boost student motivation. Utilizing technology in language education has been proven to enhance learner engagement and proficiency (Ushioda and Dornyei, 2023). In addition, career awareness and advocacy programs should be stepped up to inform students and parents about the wide-ranging opportunities available for French graduates. Universities and language departments should host career fairs, public lectures, and mentorship initiatives that showcase potential careers in diplomacy, international business, tourism, translation, media, and international development organizations. Raising awareness can help challenge misconceptions regarding the employability of French graduates [16].

Finally, offering scholarships, bursaries, and exchange programs presents another effective strategy. Financial assistance can motivate students to engage in French studies and participate in immersive language experiences. Partnerships between Nigerian universities and Francophone institutions can facilitate student exchange programs, granting authentic language exposure and intercultural learning opportunities (Marginson, 2023). Educational institutions should actively foster French language clubs, cultural festivals, debates, and other extracurricular activities. These initiatives create valuable opportunities for students to practice the language and engage with diverse cultures, ultimately sparking greater interest and motivation to learn French. Studies indicate that meaningful social interactions significantly boost language acquisition and deepen students' dedication to foreign language studies (Akinyemi and Omoniyi, 2024; Adesina and Oladipo, 2023). Support from the government is crucial as well. Policymakers must ensure that Nigeria's language policy is effectively implemented and that sufficient funding is directed toward French language education. Strengthening partnerships with Francophone nations and international organizations can also elevate the status and importance of French in Nigeria's educational landscape (AUF, 2024). Moreover, it's essential for institutions to weave career-oriented and interdisciplinary elements into their French programs. By connecting French studies to fields such as international relations, business, technology, tourism, and communication, the practical relevance of the language can be enhanced, attracting more students. This approach aligns language education with the current demands of the job market, ultimately boosting graduates' employability (Adezina and Oladipo, 2023).

Table 6: Solutions to the Challenges Associated with French as a Course of Study among Nigerian Undergraduates

S/N	Proposed Solutions	Frequency	Percentage
1	Provision of more qualified French lecturers in universities	305	87.1
2	Improvement of French language laboratories and learning facilities	295	84.3
3	Increased government funding for French language programmes	290	82.9
4	Creation of awareness on the career benefits of studying French	315	90.0
5	Establishment of exchange programmes with Francophone countries	280	80.0
6	Provision of scholarships and financial support for French students	275	78.6
7	Integration of practical language immersion activities into the curriculum	285	81.4
8	Strengthening institutional support for French departments	265	75.7
9	Enhancing employment opportunities for French graduates	300	85.7
10	Organizing career seminars and mentorship programmes for French students	270	77.1

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that university students in Southeast Nigeria are shaped in their decision to study French by various factors, including parental support, peer motivation, economic aspects, and institutional conditions. Parents and friends play a crucial role in encouraging students, while the promise of enhanced career opportunities linked to French proficiency—such as roles in multinational companies, international organizations, and

tourism—significantly influences their choices. The research also points out that institutions need to provide essential resources like qualified lecturers and language labs to spark interest in the language. Despite these influences, students face challenges such as the perception of French as difficult, societal stereotypes, and a shortage of qualified teachers. To address these barriers and boost enrollment in French programs, collaboration among government, educational institutions, and stakeholders is vital to raise awareness of the advantages of learning French and improve support and resources in academic settings. The results of this research indicate that boosting enrollment in French courses necessitates cohesive strategies rather than individual efforts. Decision-makers need to focus on consistent investment in French language instruction by providing specific funding, grants, and implementing policies. Developers of curricula should update French programs by incorporating digital skills and content geared towards careers. Leaders of institutions should enhance the quality of teaching, educational facilities, and partnerships with international entities to foster encouraging learning atmospheres. By implementing these research-backed approaches, it will increase students' drive, enhance the appeal of studying French, and aid in producing graduates proficient in multiple languages to support Nigeria's regional integration, global diplomacy, and competitiveness.

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