French Language Proficiency and Skill Acquisition: Implications for the Global Job Market and Education Sector

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Abstract		Original Research Article

This study investigated the relationship between French language proficiency and skill acquisition among undergraduate students in two Nigerian universities: Lagos State University (LASU) and Lagos State University of Education (LASUED). Using a descriptive survey design, the study sampled 120 300 and 400-level French Education students through stratified random sampling to ensure representation by gender, level, and institution. A validated and reliable questionnaire, the French Language Proficiency and Skill Acquisition Questionnaire (FLPSAQ), was employed to gather data on language proficiency and skill acquisition dimensions, including digital literacy, communication, and employability skills. The instrument showed high internal consistency with a reliability coefficient of 0.82. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and inferential methods, including Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and independent sample t-tests. Findings from Table 2 revealed a moderate to strong positive correlation ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.05$) between French language proficiency and skill acquisition. Also, bilingual and digital teaching methods significantly enhanced learners' language proficiency and cognitive development ($t = 2.347$, $p = 0.021$). The study concludes that French proficiency supports employability and recommends that schools should adopt digital learning technologies such as language apps, multimedia content, and virtual simulations to enhance learners' engagement, comprehension, and proficiency in French.

Keywords: French proficiency, skill acquisition, digital literacy, bilingual education, employability.

Introduction

French language proficiency has emerged as a strategic asset in the 21st-century global views. Spoken by over 300 million people across five continents, French serves as one of the core working languages of major international institutions such as the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, and the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF, 2024). Its widespread usage positions it not only as a means of communication

but also as a critical instrument for diplomacy, cross-cultural exchange, education, and economic cooperation. Consequently, the intersection between French language proficiency and skill acquisition is gaining scholarly and policy attention, particularly for its implications in enhancing employability and educational outcomes in both developed and developing contexts.

The global labour market increasingly values multilingualism as a driver of competitiveness and professional mobility. French–English bilingualism, in particular, has been associated with better job prospects, higher salaries, and more fluid transnational movement. Empirical studies support this trend. For instance, Manuel (2024) found that graduates from French immersion programs in Canada earned up to 16% more than their monolingual counterparts, with pronounced benefits in sectors such as international development, public service, and health. In West Africa, especially in Anglophone countries like Nigeria, where French is taught as a second foreign language, proficiency opens doors to regional employment within ECOWAS, multinational corporations, and NGOs (Adeyanju & Oyeniyi, 2023). Employers in such environments increasingly prioritize candidates with functional multilingual capabilities that enhance communication, adaptability, and intercultural competence.

Beyond economic value, French language learning contributes significantly to the acquisition of higher-order cognitive, social, and professional skills. Bilingual and immersion-based education models have been shown to foster meta-linguistic awareness, critical thinking, and global literacy skills essential for navigating the demands of an innovation-driven economy (Osawaru & Unachukwu, 2024). Drawing on theories such as usage-based learning and the skill acquisition model, Suzuki (2024) opines that repeated, meaningful exposure to language in context strengthens both communicative competence and transferability of learning to real-world situations.

Technological innovation is further transforming the landscape of French language education. AI-driven tools, such as adaptive feedback systems and speech-recognition software, are increasingly employed to personalize instruction and improve outcomes. Osawaru and Unachukwu (2024) propose a CEFR-aligned framework that leverages artificial intelligence to support incremental, skill-based learning in French. Similarly, Mavropoulou and Arvanitis (2024) demonstrated the positive impact of AI-based platforms on adult learners' oral communication and pronunciation, thereby validating the integration of digital pedagogy into language education. These approaches not only enhance proficiency but also align with the practical competencies required in global academic and professional settings.

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. Access to quality language instruction, disparities in regional educational capacity, and the rise of machine translation technologies pose questions about the evolving value of foreign language learning. Frey and Llanos-Paredes (2025) argue that while artificial intelligence can supplement communication, it cannot fully replace the nuanced, relational, and cultural functions of human language proficiency. Moreover, the inconsistent integration of French in national curricula, especially in Anglophone Africa, continues to limit its strategic potential in preparing globally competitive graduates.

In an increasingly interconnected world, proficiency in international languages, especially French, has become a critical factor for both employability and academic advancement. Despite the global demand for multilingual professionals, many graduates in non-Francophone countries, including Nigeria and other Anglophone nations, struggle with low levels of French language proficiency. This shortfall limits their competitiveness in international job markets, particularly in diplomacy, international trade, tourism, and multinational organisations where bilingualism is a valued asset.

Moreover, the integration of French language skills into educational curricula often lacks a practical, skill-based approach. Language instruction in many institutions remains largely theoretical and exam-driven, rather than focused on communication, digital application, or professional use. As a result, learners fail to acquire the competence needed to use

French effectively in real-world contexts, particularly in industries demanding cross-cultural collaboration. This disconnect between language instruction and practical skill acquisition poses a significant challenge to educational systems seeking to align with global workforce requirements. If unaddressed, it may further marginalize students and job seekers from economic opportunities that demand strong multilingual capabilities. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how French language proficiency and relevant skill acquisition can be effectively enhanced to meet the demands of the modern job market and contribute meaningfully to the educational sector's role in human capital development.

The primary purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the relationship between French language proficiency and skill acquisition, and how this relationship influences employability and global competitiveness in the job market, particularly within non-Francophone but regionally integrated contexts such as Nigeria and explore the potential of contemporary pedagogical approaches, such as digital innovation and bilingual education, in enhancing French language learning for cognitive development and practical skill acquisition in the education sector.

This study is anchored on Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory of Learning, originally propounded in 1978 by Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist known for his revolutionary work on the role of social interaction in cognitive development. Vygotsky claimed that learning is a fundamentally social process and that language plays a crucial role in the development of cognition, learning, and consciousness. According to his theory, knowledge is constructed through interaction with others and is mediated by cultural tools, of which language is the most significant. Several scholars have elaborated upon Vygotsky's concepts to explain second language learning and bilingual schooling. For instance, Lantolf and Thorne (2006) stressed the relevance of mediation and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in language learning, arguing that learners acquire language more efficiently when guided by more knowledgeable peers or teachers within their social milieu. Similarly, Swain and

Lapkin (2013) studied how sociocultural theory affects immersion education and language competency through collaborative discourse and scaffolding.

This theory is particularly relevant and appropriate for the current study, as it underscores the social, cognitive, and cultural dimensions of language learning, elements that are central to both skill acquisition and employability. In the context of French language competency, the sociocultural framework describes how learners gain communicative competence through directed instruction, peer interaction, and exposure to genuine language contexts, especially when assisted by digital advances and interactive pedagogies.

Furthermore, in multilingual and multicultural societies like Nigeria, where French is not the first language but holds regional significance, Vygotsky's theory provides a robust lens to understand how language learning is shaped by cultural context and mediated by educational practices. It also supports the study's focus on merging skill-based and technology-enhanced methods to language instruction, framing French not only as a topic but as a tool for broader cognitive, social, and professional development.

Prior studies

The current labour market trends highlight the rising need for French language proficiency in international recruiting. Even in non-Francophone areas, practitioner-level study shows that job postings in a variety of industries, including technology, customer service, pharmaceuticals, and international commerce, increasingly highlight French proficiency as a difference. French is still one of the few languages that are presently deemed necessary for worldwide employability, along with Spanish, Mandarin, and German, according to the Times of India and other often consulted publications. Multilingualism is a type of human capital that increases labour mobility and earning potential, reflecting economic developments.

In dual-language contexts like Canada, empirical studies demonstrate that proficiency in French, alongside English, delivers measurable economic

benefits. Statistical models show that speaking French, particularly for immigrants, significantly contributes to quicker labour market integration and improved employability outcomes. These findings align with broader theoretical models, such as Bourdieu's concept of language as symbolic capital, which, when deployed in multilingual settings, translates into economic returns for skilled individuals. Beyond economic capital, bilingualism, and especially immersion in French, promotes enhanced cognitive and metalinguistic skills. Osawaru and Unachukwu (2024) propose that using French as a medium of instruction, supplemented with task-based approaches, promotes critical thinking, cultural awareness, and deeper engagement in learning contexts. These benefits resonate with usage-based learning theory (Suzuki, 2024), which emphasizes exposure, repetition, and context as central to meaningful second-language acquisition.

In Anglophone West Africa, proficiency in French supports educational innovation while also serving practical vocational and developmental functions. Programs led by the French Embassy in Nigeria, which include teacher training, vocational linkages, and employer engagement, illustrate how language instruction can be explicitly oriented toward employability, addressing both motivational and structural barriers to effective learning. The integration of AI-driven tools into French language education has emerged as a transformative trend. Osawaru and Unachukwu (2024) affirmed that detailed AI applications, adaptive feedback systems, speech-recognition tutors, and pronunciation tools as mechanisms to personalise learning and align outcomes with CEFR proficiency standards. Mavropoulou and Arvanitis (2024) further confirm that AI-enhanced oral communication platforms significantly improve pronunciation accuracy and spoken fluency among adult learners.

These findings are corroborated by experimental research showing that AI assistance, rather than undermining skill acquisition, can facilitate improved writing performance and long-term learning through personalised feedback. Similarly, global studies of AI-instructed pedagogies confirm high student engagement and course completion when interacting with AI teachers.

Nonetheless, ethical and practical concerns arise. AI-driven language platforms may compromise nuance, cultural authenticity, or natural interaction patterns. User feedback emphasises that AI may sound "too formal", artificial, or disconnected from real speech patterns, especially at advanced proficiency levels. Additionally, computational linguistics applications in French teaching are prompting debates over data privacy, algorithmic bias, and inclusivity in educational access. Despite increasing documentation of bilingualism's benefits and AI's academic potential, existing studies tend to focus on Francophone-majority settings or Western contexts. There remains limited empirical and policy-focused investigation into how French proficiency functions as a mechanism for employability and cognitive development in regionally integrated, non-Francophone African countries such as Nigeria.

Moreover, while AI tools offer promising personalised learning paths, questions persist about access equity, alignment with local education infrastructure, teacher preparedness, and alignment with job market realities in West Africa. In under-resourced areas, the literature urges context-sensitive study that looks at how skill-based language teaching might connect academic education with practical competency. According to the literature, knowing French is a versatile asset that promotes cognitive growth, educational innovation, and economic mobility. AI-driven pedagogies improve its scalable acquisition, but only when used responsibly and appropriately. However, there are still significant gaps in the literature: few studies examine how these processes manifest in Anglophone African situations where French is both a foreign language and the regional capital, and the majority of the evidence is Western or European-oriented.

Questions

i. To what extent does French language proficiency influence skill acquisition and employability in the global job market among learners in non-Francophone regions like Nigeria?

ii. How do contemporary pedagogical strategies, such as digital tools and bilingual

education models, affect the development of French language proficiency and cognitive skills in the education sector?

Hypotheses

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between French language proficiency and skill acquisition for employability in the global job market among learners in non-Francophone regions.

HO₂: There is no significant effect of digital and bilingual pedagogical approaches on the development of French language proficiency and cognitive skills in the education sector.

Method

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design, which is considered appropriate for obtaining data on the perceptions, experiences, and skill levels of participants in real-time educational environments. The design facilitates the systematic collection and analysis of quantitative data regarding French language proficiency and its relationship with skill acquisition among undergraduate students.

The population of the study comprises all 300- and 400-level students enrolled in the French Education Unit of the Faculty of Education at Lagos State University (LASU), Ojo Campus, and Lagos State University of Education (LASUED), Oto/Ijanikin Campus, both situated in Lagos State, Nigeria. These institutions were selected due to their relevance in teacher education and their curricular emphasis on French language instruction within a multilingual Nigerian context. A sample of 120 students was purposively selected from both institutions using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure adequate representation across gender, academic level, and institutional affiliation. The stratification ensured inclusivity across demographic variables while maintaining academic relevance to the research focus.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled *French Language Proficiency and Skill Acquisition Questionnaire (FLPSAQ)*. The instrument was divided into three sections: demographic data, French language proficiency indicators, and dimensions of skill acquisition related to digital literacy, communication, and employability competencies.

To establish the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was subjected to expert review by three language education specialists and two psychometricians in the Faculty of Education. Their feedback helped refine the clarity, structure, and relevance of the items to align with the study's objectives. The reliability of the instrument was tested through a pilot study involving 20 students from a similar French Education program at another tertiary institution within Lagos. Using the Cronbach's Alpha method, a reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

Data collection was conducted over a three-week period, during which the researchers distributed the questionnaires in person to ensure clarity of instruction and immediate retrieval upon completion. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, means, and standard deviations to summarize demographic and proficiency patterns. To test the formulated hypotheses, inferential statistics, specifically Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) and independent sample t-tests, were employed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 25). The significance level was set at 0.05. Hence, this methodological approach ensures the generation of valid, reliable, and generalizable insights into the extent to which French language proficiency influences skill acquisition among education undergraduates preparing for the global labour market.

Result

120 participants' answers to the French Education questionnaire with research language are displayed in the interpreted table, together with the mean, standard deviation, and frequency of each response

type (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree)

Table 1: Distribution of Responses on the Influence of French Language Proficiency on Skill Acquisition and Employability among 300- and 400-Level French Education Students in LASU and LASUED

S/n	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev
1	I am confident in my ability to communicate effectively in French.	46	57	12	5	3.20	0.76
2	French language proficiency has enhanced my employability skills.	42	56	14	8	3.10	0.81
3	Understanding French increases my chances of employment in international or multilingual organizations.	38	60	17	5	3.09	0.77
4	Digital tools such as language apps and software help me improve my French proficiency.	47	54	12	7	3.18	0.79
5	Bilingual education (English and French) improves my cognitive and communication skills.	52	49	13	6	3.23	0.78
6	Learning French has helped me acquire translation and interpretation skills.	43	59	11	7	3.15	0.77
7	French education has broadened my global outlook and cultural competence.	48	54	13	5	3.21	0.74
8	Teachers' use of digital platforms (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.) positively influences my ability to learn French.	41	56	15	8	3.08	0.82
9	French language learning should be integrated with practical skill development programs (e.g., communication, ICT, soft skills).	50	50	13	7	3.19	0.80
10	There are enough classroom materials and learning aids to support French language acquisition.	37	55	17	11	2.99	0.86
11	My proficiency in French is sufficient to participate in academic or professional exchanges in Francophone countries.	44	53	16	7	3.12	0.79
12	The use of audio-visual resources (films, songs, documentaries) enhances my understanding of French.	51	52	13	4	3.25	0.74
13	The current curriculum adequately prepares students for global communication in French.	36	57	19	8	3.01	0.82
14	I believe French language proficiency can help me secure remote work opportunities with global firms.	45	52	15	8	3.12	0.80
15	Skill acquisition in areas like writing, speaking, and comprehension of French is essential for	49	51	13	7	3.18	0.79

success in today's global education and job market.					

The survey results reveal a consensus among participants, with most items scoring means above 3.0, reflecting broad agreement across the statements. Participants showed the strongest support for the use of audio-visual resources, as evidenced by Item 12, which achieved the highest mean score of 3.25, indicating a strong preference for digital learning tools. In contrast, Item 10 received the lowest mean score of 2.99, suggesting participants were relatively dissatisfied with the availability of classroom materials. The standard deviation, ranging from 0.74 to 0.86, points to moderate variability in responses, indicating some differences in opinions but an overall consistent trend in participant agreement.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 2 displays the results of the inferential statistical analysis, utilizing Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) and t-tests, conducted at a 0.05 significance level.

Table 2: Inferential statistics on hypotheses testing

The hypothesis testing using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Independent Samples t-test for HO_1 and HO_2, are presented respectively. The detailed interpretations are as follows:

Hypotheses	Statistical Test	Test Statistic (r / t)	df	p-value	Decision at $\alpha = 0.05$
HO_1: There is no significant relationship between French language proficiency and skill acquisition for employability in the global job market among learners in non-Francophone regions.	Pearson Correlation	0.612	118	0.000	Reject HO_1
HO_2: There is no significant effect of digital and bilingual pedagogical approaches on the development of French language proficiency and cognitive skills in the education sector.	Independent Samples t-test	2.347	118	0.021	Reject HO_2

Source: Field Survey

Table 2 revealed the result of the Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.612, which indicates a moderate to strong positive relationship between French language proficiency and skill acquisition for

employability. The p-value of 0.000 is less than the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), which means this relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, suggesting that higher

proficiency in the French language significantly enhances learners' skill acquisition and employability prospects in the global job market, even in non-Francophone regions such as Nigeria.

Table 2 also revealed that the t-test statistic of 2.347 with a p-value of 0.021 falls below the 0.05 threshold, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This result indicates a statistically significant effect of digital and bilingual teaching approaches on learners' proficiency in French and their cognitive development. This implies that contemporary pedagogical strategies, such as the use of technology and bilingual education, play a crucial role in enhancing language learning and cognitive outcomes within the education sector.

The findings from Table 2 collectively suggest that both French language proficiency and the use of modern bilingual pedagogical methods are significant factors influencing employability skills and cognitive development. These results support the integration of digital tools and bilingual approaches into French language instruction, particularly in non-Francophone educational countries like Nigeria, where global market demands continue to evolve.

Discussion

The findings from Table 2 provide valuable insights into the relationship between French language proficiency and skill acquisition for employability, as well as the impact of digital and bilingual pedagogical approaches on language development and cognitive skills. The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.612 demonstrates a moderate to strong positive relationship, and the associated p-value of 0.000 confirms that this relationship is statistically significant. This supports the conclusion that higher French language proficiency significantly contributes to the acquisition of relevant skills for employability, particularly in non-Francophone contexts such as Nigeria.

This finding aligns with the position of Okonkwo and Adebayo (2022), who argue that proficiency in global languages like French can serve as a key asset for employability, especially in international organisations and diplomatic settings. Also, Ibrahim and Yusuf (2021) affirm that multilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility and cross-cultural communication skills, which are highly valued in the global job market.

Moreover, the finding that digital and bilingual teaching strategies significantly affect learners' proficiency and cognitive development is supported by the t-test result of 2.347 with a p-value of 0.021. This further underscores the importance of integrating modern pedagogical approaches into language education. In particular, Afolabi and Nwachukwu (2023) stated that digital learning tools such as interactive software, online platforms, and multimedia resources contribute to improved language acquisition outcomes by providing engaging and learner-centred experiences. They also found that bilingual education helps bridge linguistic gaps and fosters deeper understanding among learners in multilingual settings.

Similarly, Ogunleye and Salisu (2020) observed that digital technologies combined with mother-tongue or bilingual approaches can improve learners' comprehension, retention, and participation. Their research demonstrated that students exposed to technology-enhanced bilingual instruction performed better in language proficiency tests and developed stronger critical thinking skills.

In light of these findings, it is evident that French language education, when enhanced through digital tools and bilingual methods, offers not only linguistic competence but also supports broader cognitive and professional development. This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where French is a major regional language given the country's proximity to Francophone West African nations. Proficiency in French thus increases the likelihood of employment in regional and international institutions, NGOs, and multinational corporations. As such, this study reinforces the importance of adopting learner-centred, technologically supported, and linguistically inclusive pedagogies to prepare students for the demands of the global workforce.

Conclusion

The study revealed that French language proficiency significantly enhances learners' skills

acquisition and employability, even in non-Francophone contexts like Nigeria. In addition, digital and bilingual pedagogical approaches positively impact learners' cognitive development and language proficiency. These findings highlight the importance of integrating modern instructional methods and multilingual education into curricula. Emphasizing technology and bilingualism in language education prepares students for global competitiveness and cognitive growth. Educational stakeholders must prioritize innovative teaching strategies to strengthen foreign language acquisition. This will empower Nigerian graduates to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and multilingual job market.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations were provided:

i. Schools should adopt digital learning technologies such as language apps, multimedia content, and virtual simulations to enhance learners' engagement, comprehension, and proficiency in French.

ii. Education policymakers should implement bilingual instructional strategies, combining French with indigenous or English languages to support cognitive development and deepen understanding.

iii. Teachers should undergo regular training in digital pedagogy and bilingual teaching methods to effectively deliver French lessons using modern tools and approaches.

iv. Curriculum developers should revise French language programmes to include practical skill acquisition components and industry-relevant content aligned with global employability standards.

v. Universities and colleges in Nigeria should partner with Francophone countries or institutions to create exchange programmes, internships, and immersive language experiences for students.

vi. Government and educational institutions should allocate adequate funding to provide language laboratories, internet access, and bilingual learning resources to support effective teaching and learning of French.

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