FRENCH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIAN POLYTECHNICS – WHAT FUTURE FOR ORAL PROFICIENCY?

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Abstract

This study "French Language in Nigerian Polytechnics – what future for oral proficiency?" is an attempt at reversing the cheerless trend in the Nigerian students' achievement in oral French. Specifically, the primary objectives were to evaluate the present level of ND II secretarial studies students as potential secretaries and integral members of any organization from the standpoints of communication and human relations and, in the light of the findings, to make recommendations for improvement in the teaching and learning of the French Language in Nigerian Polytechnics. The data was generated from three Federal polytechnics in Nigeria, mainly the Federal Polytechnic, Offa (North Central); Federal Polytechnic, Owerri (South East) and Yaba College of Technology (South West). 286 volunteered students were used in the exercises that yielded the data. The methodology adopted was random sampling technique which was used in the Listening Comprehension and Oral Interview selections. The questionnaire approach was also adopted and was administered on the students and the teachers. The data was analyzed by simple percentages following the Oral Rating Scale from the Nigeria French Language Village model of 2015 and that of GOSSELIN Laura of 2011. An earlier Pilot Study had been carried out at the Lagos State Polytechnic. The result therefore provides a spring board for this present study. The findings revealed students' inability to make full sentences, insufficiency of French teachers, overcrowded classes, lack of standard syllabus, lack of teaching aids and the absence of motivation for learners and teachers alike. The study recommends sustainability of French Language in the polytechnics, French for specific purpose with immersion programs for the development of the language for greater personal, institutional and national benefits.

Key words: Evaluation, national diploma, polytechnic, secretarial studies, Spoken French competence.

1.0 Introduction And Background To The Study

Research has always been conducted on the teaching and learning of French in Nigerian institutions but none has ever focused particularly on the Polytechnic. This may probably be that the Polytechnic being technologically based has not considered the benefits of merging professional skills with French language spoken or written skills and may not have recognized the fact that most of the influential inventions are from France. French Language mastery will not only make polytechnic graduates bilingual but also more marketable in the global market. It is therefore a great relief as French was integrated in the Secretarial Studies department of the Polytechnics by

the National Board for Polytechnic Education. This research, **"French Language in Nigerian Polytechnics - What future for oral proficiency?"** evaluates the present level of communicative proficiency in the spoken French secretarial studies students to account for the factors responsible for their performance. The research draws its impetus from the fact that the French Language is important to the nation's education system as an international medium of communication.

Communication is very important in human relationship and language is an effective tool for its achievement in any social context. The secretary is the contact person between the boss and the public in any organization and the public could be both foreign and local. S/he is the image of the organization and as such portrays the good image of the establishment she/he represents. Good comportment and quality oral communication are necessary tools for portraying this good image. The public being both foreign and local provides the need for a Nigerian secretary to be fluent in at least one foreign language in addition to English given the country's position within the sub-region. These and many others are facts for integrating French – a modern language into the National Diploma curriculum of the secretarial studies in Nigerian polytechnics by the National Board for Technical Education. It is, therefore, expected that at the end of the program, the secretarial studies graduates should be able to express themselves adequately in French within a given framework. Communicative competence in the French Language will not only make them bilingual but also will add value to their profession as secretaries. Chikere (2016) adds that it will serve as additional coloration for the professional and make him or her more marketable and more desirable than other professional competitors anywhere. Mbanefo (2003 :70-81) supports this by adding that "le Français Appliqué est aussi nécessaire pour le besoin développemental d'une société donnée". (Applied French is also necessary for the developmental need of any given society).

French Language is also taught in other departments of Nigerian polytechnics such as the Catering and Hotel Management, Mass communication, Fine Arts, Book Publishing, Marine Engineering and Land Survey. Many other departments clamor for the integration of French into their curriculum having realized its importance, especially in this era of globalization. The Nigerian Polytechnics French Teachers' Association is not left out in this clamor for French in the polytechnics. At the end of their conference held in December 2016 in Anambara State, a communiqué was drawn demanding a serious integration of French Language into the polytechnic program of studies because French is not taught as a discipline in the polytechnics as it is in Nigerian universities. Consequently, students who would quite naturally like to study the language

in the polytechnics have no other option than to enroll in the universities in order to at least obtain a certificate in the study. These are part of what informed this research.

The Secretarial Studies Department now known as "Office Technology Management Department" is chosen as case study being the first to introduce French in its curriculum. The outcome of the research on French Language in this department would determine its sustainability in other departments that clamor for it. The focus is on the spoken aspect of the French Language as the first skill in any language learning process and the secretary is bound to acquire this skill to be able to communicate with the public.

1.1 Statement of Problem

The French Language has never been an official language in Nigeria despite its declaration as such by the late General Abacha's government in 1996; although it is often preferred to any other foreign language taught in the tertiary institutions. Learners are already saddled with igbo, hausa and Yoruba – the three local languages spoken and taught in the country, including English. British colonization of Nigeria makes the development of oral competence in French difficult for both learners and teachers within the environment. Contact hour for the teaching of French in the polytechnics in particular does not exceed 2 hours in a week. Therefore, in a two-year program of 15 weeks lecture contact, students would have only 120 contact hours as against 240 to 300 hours recommended by the Conseil de l'Europe (2005). Results recorded at the end of a two-year French program in some polytechnics show a performance level of between 10 to 15 percent over 40 in spoken French. This is below expectation. This research therefore endeavors to address these recurring problems within the Nation's polytechnic system of which no proven research has neither previously been undertaken nor solution ever been proffered.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The research aims at evaluating the spoken French performance of National Diploma II secretarial studies students in selected Nigerian polytechnics in order to:

i determine the level of competence in spoken French of the students;

ii examine the linguistic and sociolinguistic factors that are responsible for their level of performance in French;

iii identify various ways whereby students' communicative competence in spoken French can be enriched and promoted and

iv determine ways by which teachers and curriculum can help to achieve the desired competence.

1.3 Research Questions

The Research questions guiding this study are:

i what is the competence level of National Diploma II secretarial students?

ii in what ways do linguistic and sociolinguistic factors contribute in determining students' oral communicative competence?

iii in what way can exposure to French language, either through practice, visit, radio, television etc, contribute to students' communicative competence?

iv in what ways do teachers and the present curriculum contribute to students' communicative competence in spoken French?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study is significant in developing oral communicative competence among French Language learners in the polytechnic. It would help in identifying existing lapses in the polytechnic French language curriculum which in turn, would assist in proposing the way forward to both French teachers and the Board in charge of polytechnics in Nigeria. The study would therefore be useful to curriculum developers, authors of books, inspectors of Education in the Federal Ministry of Education, evaluators and examiners within and outside the polytechnics concerned.

1.5 Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This research is limited to the three selected polytechnics within the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria: the Center, the South east and the South west because of the security situation in the country. The study is also specifically limited to the oral expression of the French Language because of its importance in everyday life apart from language pedagogical principles in education which place oral before the written skills.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The Theoretical Framework of this study is a blend of:

Theory of communication (Roman Jakobson's Model 1960). This theory centers on message in a verbal communication situation and sees teaching and learning in the light of active interaction

between the teacher and the learner. This model advocates classroom interaction that is simultaneous, circular and transactional.

Theory of Behaviorism (B.F. Skinner, 1904-1990). This theory is concerned with learning by positive reinforcement of the desired behavior. The behaviorist proposes this theory as a base for language development. The main concern here is learning through positive or negative reinforcement as the case may be. Thus the behaviorist teacher arranges stimuli that reinforce the desired behavior through imitation and repetition until it becomes automatic.

Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura (1977). Albert Bandura O. C is a psychologist known for Social Cognitive theory, self-efficacy, and social learning theory. Social learning theory focuses on learning that occurs within a social context. Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modeling.

Literature Review:

This review focuses on the following:

Competence

Communication in language involves communicative competence which according to the "European Framework" (2005) is an ability to communicate by means of a code. This code could be verbal or written and could be in any language. This research focuses on oral code of the French Language. Ajiboye (2010), Owhotu (2007), Tijani (2010) all testify to the importance of oral communications. It is important to emphasize that non verbal communication which plays an important role in verbal communication manifests during the oral communication. Stating the importance of non verbal communication, Simire (2011: 81-98) adds that it covers up to 65 to 70 percent of information. The competence that is being referred to here is the ability of a speaker to make and interpret statements in any given situation according to the social context of the given society.

Verbal communication classroom setting involves a competent teacher, a model who is knowledgeable not only on the subject matter but on "packaging" different activities that would motivate learners to participate in the "talking" exercises. In this setting, learners must be made to talk whether they talk sense or not because "C'est en forgeant qu'on devient forgeron" – practice makes perfect.

This brings to point the role of methodology which according to Sonaiya (2001) is a tool in the hand of the linguist, and ultimately, the teacher, via which the body of knowledge that needs to be presented to the learner is communicated. Kwofie (1995:9) supporting Sonaiya's opinion remarked: « *Le chercheur en linguistique est en droit d'appliquer n'importe quelle théorie ou méthode, ancienne ou nouvelle, avec modifications si besoin est, aux aspects de la langue de son choix au niveau phonologique, grammatical ou lexico-sémantique… »*

(The researcher is free to incorporate any theory or method, old or new with modifications if need be to any aspect of language of his choice be it at phonological, grammatical or lexisemantic level).

Sociolinguistic Position Of French Language In Nigeria:

Africa as a whole and Nigeria in particular has never been without language. The arrival of the Europeans and the partition that followed brought about the imposition of foreign languages in Africa. This resulted in linguistic conflicts and pidginization especially in the countries with many local languages as in the case of Nigeria.

Nigeria by geographical and historical implications is surrounded by and trades with French-speaking neighbors hence the great need to bridge the language gap that exists between Nigeria and her French-speaking neighbors in a variety of areas of international contact such as in conferences, economic and sporting activities, war against terrorism and corruption etc and also to further knowledge of the "other language" at higher level of education.

French as well as other foreign languages is taught in the universities but one can confidently say that French enjoys a more privileged status than others which resulted in the establishment of some resource and documentation centers as well as the Nigeria French Language Village in Badagry in order to solidify its status. Although with its privileged position, French is not Nigeria's official language even with its declaration in 1996 by the government of late General Abacha. It does not have any statutory nor social function except that it is more preferred than other foreign languages studied in Nigeria. Many French Language learners are often put off by the difficulties encountered at the beginning. This situation according to Opara (1998) has resulted in very slow growth in the language as very few learners make career out of it. These difficulties can be categorized as linguistic and sociolinguistic problems. There is also dearth of qualified French teachers and most importantly the lack of appropriate environment for practicing the language out of class hence the rise in lack of motivation.

The Nigerian learner of French is already bilingual or trilingual by the time he starts to learn French In addition, class contact hours, the methods used, lack of French teachers, teaching aids and motivation among many others are major obstacles confronting the successful teaching and learning of French language in Nigerian schools. There is no doubt that Nigeria needs the French Language to boost her economy and technological prowess and until these physical and human structures are put in place, the future of French Language in Nigeria remains questionable.

The French Language in Nigeria:

The learning of the French Language in Nigeria started in the 50s. French as well as other foreign languages is taught in the universities but one can confidently say that French enjoys a more privileged status than others which resulted in the establishment of some resource and documentation centers as well as the Nigeria French Language Village in Badagry in order to solidify its status. Although with its privileged position, French is not Nigeria's official language in as much as it is taught in Nigeria as a foreign language; it does not have any statutory nor social function except that it is more preferred than other foreign languages studied in Nigeria. However, its privileged position also led to its proclamation in 1996 by the late General Abacha's government as Nigeria's 'second official language'. This declaration intended that Nigerians should begin to learn French by making it compulsory in our schools. It is expected also that French will serve as instrument of good relationship with our neighbors. In as much as this is a very good intention however, many obstacles militate against its realization. For example, many French Language learners are often put off by the difficulties encountered at the beginning. This situation according to Opara (1998) has resulted in very slow growth in the language as very few learners make career out of it. These difficulties can be categorized as linguistic and sociolinguistic problems. Some of the learners also feel it is a waste of resources and energy since the English language is already an official language of the country. The claim that it is an indirect colonization by France coupled with the expensive nature of the course contribute to the negative attitude some learners of the language adopt. There is no special scholarship in form of financial assistance for students studying French along with their professional courses. Another problem is the dearth of qualified French teachers and the non-chalant attitude of the authorities over equipping institutions to facilitate the teaching and learning of the language. Furthermore, the Nigerian environment does not afford learners the opportunity of practicing the language out of class hence the rise in lack of motivation.

The Nigerian Polytechnics:

According to the National Board for Technical Education, there are at present 103 approved polytechnics in Nigeria: 25 Federal governments owned, 40 States owned and 38 private owned. There are enough polytechnics in Nigeria to cater for learners but the issue is that candidates often preferred the federal polytechnics for reasons of better physical and human infrastructures hence our choice of the 3 federal polytechnics in three out of the six geopolitical zones of the country. Objectives of the polytechnic education are to train candidates in areas of technology, science, and any other area of knowledge that is beneficial to the country. The Secretarial Studies Department, our case study area, trains students to be able to gain employment in Anglophone or Francophone organizations. French Language study in this department adds important value to the profession.

French Language in the Polytechnic:

French Language is not taught in the polytechnics as a discipline as it is in the universities. As a result, students who would quite naturally like to study the language in the polytechnics have no option than to enroll in the universities in order to at least obtain a certificate. The polytechnic authorities place French as an elective course hence the indifference to problems concerning its teaching and learning. The immersion program, essential for improving linguistic skills of learners is not included in the polytechnic curriculum. There is no common syllabus and the available ones do not lay emphasis on social functions relevant to essential everyday communicative needs. Emphasis is not laid on oral comprehension and production because of large class sizes and lack of qualified French teachers. As a result, methodologies are more of traditional than communicative or interactional. The program is so loaded with other courses that French class contact hours do not exceed 2 hours a week for a class of more than 60 students with no teaching aids to facilitate teaching and learning. One wonders what a learner can achieve under such situation. It is therefore not surprising the students' inability to form complete sentences. French Language in the Polytechnic is not a requirement for any course neither is it a discipline of its own but rather a course among other courses taken in the department. The West African Schools results in French from 2011 to 2015 shows good performance in candidates' scores for French and many would have preferred to learn French in the polytechnics as there are few spaces in the universities; but this is impossible as French is just an elective course. It is indeed a non-motivating situation that needs immediate solution otherwise the future of French Language in the Nigerian polytechnics remains bleak.

Methodology:

The study examines here the procedural method used in evaluating and determining the performance level of National Diploma II Secretarial studies students of selected Nigerian Polytechnics in spoken French which leads to obtaining information on factors responsible for their not too encouraging competence in oral communication.

Population:

The population is made up of all the National Diploma II Secretarial Studies students and the French teachers in the three Federal Polytechnics in three zones. They are the Federal Polytechnic, Offa (North Central); Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri (South East) and Yaba College of Technology, Lagos (South West). Our choice for them is mainly for the fact that
they have had French in their curriculum for a minimum of five years. It is expected therefore that they would give accurate information needed for this study.

Sample consists of 286 ND II secretarial studies students who voluntarily presented themselves for the exercise: 40 from Offa, 121 from Owerri and 125 from Yaba, Lagos and their 10 French teachers: 2 from Offa, 3 from Owerri and 5 from Yaba, Lagos. However, random sampling technique is applied in the listening comprehension and oral interview tests exercises that were later conducted after the administration of the students' questionnaire.

Research Instruments for collection of data for the work are **Students' questionnaire** made of 20 questions including information on the students' attitude towards the language, tests their interests as well as few questions which afforded them the opportunity to speak French outside the classroom settings. Some other questions were based on seeking their opinion on the way French was delivered to them. **Teachers questionnaire,** made up of 20 questions as well and to seek information on their qualifications, the methodology used in teaching and the materials of instruction used in facilitating teaching. Some of the questions were aimed at seeking information on their attitude towards teaching French. **Listening Comprehension Test** was taken from the text book: "New Practical French Workbook for Students Book 3" by SAM-Pratt OBhêly-Quénu (1968). Longman. This short piece was modified to suit the level of the students. The test aimed at determining the efficacy of their listening skills.

O**ral Interview,** an interactive discussion based on topics picked by each student. These topics written in French were dropped in a purse and each candidate was obliged to pick one randomly.

The topics were based on everyday French which covered the following: introducing oneself, a friend, family or neighbor; interactions in one's school, profession, likes and dislikes and several others. **Rating Scale for Speech Production - a** sample of oral rating scale was adapted from the Nigeria French Language Village, Badagry (2015) and also from Laura GOSSELIN (2011). The scale which is on intelligibility, grammar, vocabulary, fluency; gestures was used to assess each candidate by the assessor. Each candidate's total score in each of the areas afore mentioned was thereafter compared with the CECR's model in order to have a full grasp of his or her eventual level.

Pilot Study:

A pilot study was carried out on 20 National Diploma II Secretarial studies students of the Lagos State Polytechnic. Some modifications in the area of the listening comprehension were made based on recommendations provided by experts in the organization of the West African School Examinations in Oral French as well as other specialists in the department of European Languages and Integration Studies, University of Lagos who assisted in this pilot study.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Results:

Table 1. Sex of respondents

Polytechnique	Masculin	%	Féminin	%
Offa	10	25	30	75
Owerri	18	14.9	103	85.1
Yaba	39	31.2	86	68.8
Total	67	23.4	219	76.6

Result of the students questionnaire showed that 67 (23.4%) were male while 219 (76.6%) were female. One can say based on this fact that the secretarial profession is much valued by female than by male.

Table 2. Age of respondents

Polytechniques	Variables	Masculin	%	Féminin	%
Offa	15 – 24	4	40	17	56.7
	25+	6	60	13	43.3
Total		10	100	30	100
Owerri	15 – 24	11	61.1	87	84.5
	25+	07	38.9	16	15.5
Total		18	100	103	100

Yaba	15 – 24	35	89.7	83	96.5
	25+	04	10.3	03	3.5
Total		39	100	86	100

It was also noted that the ages of the respondents range from 25 years and above. The overgrown respondents were however traced to the Federal Polytechnic, Offa where the respondents were made up of both full-time and part-time students. Language is faster assimilated by younger people and at 25 years, learners would have unconsciously acquired ethnic or other languages' idiosyncrasies which could be a form of interference in learning a new language.

Research Question 1:

What is the competence level of ND II secretarial studies students of Nigerian Polytechnics in spoken French?

Communication in language involves communicative competence. Evans (1972:18-28) opines that the truly competent person in communication is one who is "aware of what the aim is, and of the abilities, outlooks and interests of other people with whom he communicates". Kwofie (1985) also states that competence is considered to apply to any use of language which is efficient or sufficient and the degree of efficiency or sufficiency of language used depends largely on the degree of linguistic mastery of the interlocutors in the given speech situation. Ability is seen as a sort of intellectual competence and Flavell and Wohwill (1969) refer to intellectual competence as the individual's true level of ability. It is a theoretical level in as much as it cannot be measured directly, but can be approximated by an individual's performance on a set of tasks. On this basis, our learners' competence is measured by their performance on the **Listening Comprehension test** extracted from "New Practical French Workbook for Students Book 3" by SAM Pratt OBhely-Quenu (1968). Students listened to this passage once which was read by the researcher while not looking at the printed questions given to them. Then they were given one minute to glance at the questions and set them aside. At the end of the second reading, they were asked to answer the printed questions given to them. The whole exercise lasts fifteen minutes and tests the efficacy of their listening skills.

Table 3. Listening Comprehension results according to polytechnics

	20	**18**	**16**	**14**	**12**	**10**	**08**	**06**	**04**	**02**	**00**
Offa	-	-	-	-	-	-	02	04	05	04	03
%	-	-	-	-	-	-	11.2	22.2	27/8	22.2	16.7
Owerri	-	-	02	11	25	33	25	08	03	01	-
%	-	-	1.9	10.2	23.1	30.6	23.1	7.4	2.8	0.9	-
Yaba	-	04	20	37	14	25	14	08	01	01	-
%	-	3.2	16.1	29.8	11.3	20.2	11.3	6.5	0.8	0.8	-

A total of 250 students participated in this exercise: 18 from Offa, 108 from Owerri and 124 from Yaba, Lagos. The selection was purposive in nature, which means on the correct way the questionnaire was completed. Total mark was fixed at 20 and a pass mark was 10. Results showed that only 171 students (68.4%): 71 (28.4%) from Owerri and 100 (40%) from Yaba, Lagos were able to attain a pass performance level of 10 and above. No student from Offa was able to make this cut off mark.

Research Question 2:

In what ways do linguistic and sociolinguistic factors contribute in determining oral communicative competence of ND II secretarial studies students?

Linguistic competence as recommended by the European Framework (2005) requires learners at this level to be able to show knowledge of some vocabulary and mastery of some grammatical rules and structures in making sentences within a given situation. It also involves the ability to organize sentences in a logical order.

Sociolinguistic competence on the other hand involves the ability to use appropriate words for appropriate situations with respect to status, sex, social groups and norms of a given society e.g the uses of ‘tu’ and ‘vous’. These uses were embedded in discussion questions during oral interview which centered on describing and introducing one’s self, other people, everyday life, likes and dislikes, domicile, etc in very simple French language. The interviewer leads the learners slowly in the course of discussion. This is in accordance with the European Framework requirement for A1 level within which the respondents are grouped. Students should therefore be able to show mastery of these traits and be confident in their uses during interaction.

Oral Interview:

Students were expected to speak for 3 minutes either on a topic picked from a purse or have an oral interaction with the interviewer. The Listening score was raised to 14 marks as cut-off point for the selection of candidates for this exercise. A total of 74 students (43.3%): 13 from Owerri and 61 from Yaba were selected to participate in the oral interview with the researcher and her assistants based on the new scores. A rating scale based on intelligibility, grammar, vocabulary, fluency was adapted from that of the Nigeria French Language Village Badagry (2015) and also from Laura GOSSELIN (2011) and modified to suit our situation. Gesticulations were based on correct impression. Assessment was based on how often students are able to demonstrate linguistic and sociolinguistic competences in their choice and use of words.

Table 4: Oral interview scores

Items	Often	%	Often enough	%	Less often	%	Rarely	%
Clarity	-	-	34	46	37	50	03	04
Appropriateness	-	-	29	39	41	56	04	05
Fluency/Intonation	-	-	30	41	37	50	07	09
Nonverbal signs	-	-	44	60	27	36	03	04

Results showed that 46% of the respondents were often clear enough in the expression of the subject matter; 50% were less often clear and 04% were rarely clear in their expression of it. In the use of appropriate word for appropriate situation, 39% often had enough good choice of words; 56% did so less often and 05% rarely did so. Fluency and intonation were often observed by 41% of students; 50% did that less often and 09% rarely observed these features. The use of nonverbal signs was demonstrated often by 60% of the students; 36% did that less often and 04% rarely used them. In addition, timidity and inability of expression in complete sentences manifested chiefly by the use of mono-syllabic words such as ‘yes’ and ‘no’ with many gesticulations. English language interferences were recorded in areas of word borrowing and structure. It is important to note here that majority of the students objected to our use of video camera because of timidity coupled with noisy environment. It is our opinion that better performance could have been recorded were the students previously exposed to conversation exercises in the classroom. An extract from oral interview gives an idea of some expressions used by the students.

Enseignant: Présentez-vous. (Introduce yourself)
Apprenant : Not talking, only smiling (Silence et souriant)
Enseignant: Comment tu t'appelles? (What is your name)?
Apprenant: Funke (Funke)
Enseignant: Comment ça va Funke ? (How are you Funke) ?
Apprenant : Très bien, merci. (Very well, thank you).
Enseignant: Quelle est ta profession ? (What is your profession) ?
Apprenant : Moi, étudiant (I, student)
Enseignant: Tu as un ami ? (Do you have a friend)?
Apprenant: Oui. (Yes)
Enseignant; Comment s'appelle ton ami (e) ? (What is your friend's name)?
Apprenant: Kemi (Kemi)
Enseignant: Tu aimes Kemi? (avec beaucoup de gestes pour expliquer le mot aimer)
Apprenant ; Oui (Yes)
Enseignant; Pourquoi tu aimes Kemi ? (Why do you like Kemi)?
Apprenant; Kemi comprend moi. (Kemi understands me). (English structure interference)
Enseignant: Quelle heure est-il ? (What is it by the time)?
Apprenant: (Looking at the wrist watch) Deux heures (2 o'clock); another English interference.

The above are just few extracts from different interactions with the students. Majority is too shy to speak hence the withdrawal of the video but this did not solve the problem of timidity. From the above, one could observe gross manifestation of inability to make complete sentences hence the use of monosyllabic words. English structure is seen in the sentence 'Kemi comprend moi' instead of 'Kemi me comprend'. 'Deux heures' instead of 'il est 14h' ie 14 o'clock as the French would say. 'Deux heures ie 2 o'clock' signifies 2o'cloci in the mid-night whereas the interview took place in the afternoon! These and many more were observed and noted.

It could, therefore, be concluded based on the result that students' performance was not fully enhanced by linguistic and sociolinguistic phenomena. This general low level of performance is traced entirely to environmental factors. It is common knowledge that Nigeria is an Anglophone country and this makes the learning of French language difficult. The French learner is already bilingual or trilingual by virtue of the environment he finds himself in the country. He neither has the opportunity to speak French at home nor in the society and at times not even within the school setting. This failure is clearly shown in the fact that 60% of those engaged in interview often used nonverbal signs to fill up the gaps where words could have been used. This phenomenum confirmes Tijani's (2010:133) position that « …le plus souvent, dans les situations de communication en face à face, les partenaires ont toujours recours à des procédés paralinguistiques tels que le geste, l'expression facials, etc pour assurer l'intercompréhension ». (… most often, interlocutors in a face to face interactive situations, make use of paralinguistic activities such as like gesticulations, facial

expressions, etc to facilitate comprehension). Gesticulations are permitted in verbal communication but should not take complete position of words as one is not interacting with physically challenged individuals.

It is therefore suggested that learners should as part of learning activities, be exposed to immersion program at the beginning and at the end of the whole course period. This could be integrated in the curriculum and being part of the program the financial implication should be part of the school fees. French language environment could be created within the department by mapping out a section where learners could relax and listen to nothing but French programs either through the radio or the television. The language for interaction in this section should be strictly French. Inscriptions like "Ici on parle français" should be written everywhere clearly in order to remind learners of what is expected of them in this section. Defaulters should be penalized accordingly as deemed fit. This kind of environment will enable hearing unconsciously and motivate learners to speak because practice makes perfect.

Research Question 3:

In what way can exposure to the French Language, either through practice, visit, radio, television etc contribute to students' communicative competence?

Table 5

Question Number	Items	Frequency	%
3	French as first choice	70	24.5
6	Rating French interesting	141	49.3
7	Aspect liked	Conversation 116 Grammar 89	41 31
8	Teacher often speaks French in class	114	40
10	No French-speaking friend	215	75
11	Never visited francophone country	248	87
13	Never watch French films	144	50
14	Rarely read French novels	137	48
15	Never listens to French radio	179	63

Responses provided by the respondents to questions 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15 in the questionnaire undoubtedly helped to deduce partly the required answers. A glance at the table shows that only 24.5% of the entire students chose French as a preferred course while almost 50% rated it as an interesting subject. If French could be rated interesting by this number of students it then falls upon the teacher to sustain this interest by making French more appreciated by the

learners. On the aspect of the language liked, 41% preferred conversation while 31% preferred grammar exercises. This preference by the students was not really made manifest during the interactive session as majority of them could rarely make complete sentences. Fifty (40%) claimed that their teachers often spoke French in class but one wonders why this was not reflected in the students' interactive performance. About 75% do not have francophone friends or relatives and 87% never visited any Francophone country. More information obtained shows that 48% never read French novels while 50% never watched French films.The above result from students' perspective is far from contributing positively to competence in students' oral French. Further findings revealed that teachers do not make much effort to enforce teaching. They complain of overcrowded class, lack of French teachers, teaching materials, motivation to mention but a few. Teachers, as a matter of fact, have major role to play in bringing about desired change in students' performance in French, especially the spoken French. Training of teachers affects their teaching style and consequently affects meaningful learning by students. Two deficiencies result when the teacher is poorly trained: poor knowledge of content and poor teaching methods. Most teachers rush to finish the syllabus thereby neglecting the important aspect of teaching which is teaching for understanding. French is an interesting language even as confirmed by the students and it can be made to be very appreciated through good methods and by making learners know its usefulness. It is, therefore, suggested that teachers of French should be those with a minimum teaching qualification. The professional training will expose them to different methods of language teaching as well as to certain difficulties a French language learner is bound to face and this will enable him/her, to understand, minimize or eliminate these difficulties through appropriate methods. Durojaiye (1970) advised that learners should be allowed to talk under controlled situations created by the teacher. Talking does not mean an unorganized noise but free expression at every given opportunity; and teachers should create one when there is none. Speaking must be encouraged even when it is too imaginative bordering on lies or expressing undesirable emotions such as "I hate you" or inelegant language referring to sex. These must be corrected of course but only with a good-humored matter-of-fact attitude and not by ridiculing or punishing the student. As learners become socialized, they improve on the content of their language. It is therefore assumed from this that one must not insist on grammatical expressions all the time. Even bad grammar will be understood! Textbooks could be used to update the knowledge of content and they influence positively the method of teaching. The use of audiovisual aids is equally important for in as much as they facilitate learning, they also make it very interesting. A conscientious teacher should not

wait for authorities to supply; he can make his own, like postal cards, figurines, flannel graphs, etc. He can take his recorder to class because his concern should always be to give his best to his students. He too gets satisfaction in his job by so doing. The aids could even be made in class with students, oral communication goes on and students would talk as well as learn new words. This communication must of course be in French. Finally, apart from immersion program being integrated in the curriculum for six months duration, opportunities should again be provided for all learners of French to visit a Francophone country for a week or two at the end of the entire program. This can be organized by the French Club as a sort of end of year activity instead of spending the Club's money on parties; the experience gained would consolidate all they have learned. This type of experience is summarized in Adetoye (1970:23):

> *"Nous avons passé la nuit du retour à Lagos et regagné Ibadan, fatigués mais très contents, après avoir appris en dix jours beaucoup plus qu'au cours de toutes les leçons suivies en quatre ans"!*

Trente-quatre Passagers et une Camionnette (Compte-rendu d'un voyage au Togo).

> *"We spent the night of our trip back at Lagos and finally arrived Ibadan, tired but very happy after having learnt in ten days much more than all we were taught in four years"!* (Translation mine)

Research Question 4:

How can teachers and the present curriculum contribute to students' communicative competence in spoken French?

Curriculum signifies a set of coursework and their content, and any extra activities that bring about learning of any course. Generally, curriculum includes course contents, teachers'/students' activities, teaching materials including methodologies and evaluation. Questions 5 – 13 of the teacher's questionnaire answers are used to answer the above research question.

Table 6

Question Number	Items	Frequency
5	Number of teachers	10
6	Student population in a class	60+
7	Methodology	Communicative approach 08 Interactional approach 09 Traditional approach 07 Laboratory – Other materials 06
8	Emphasized competence	Listening comprehension 07

		Oral production 05
9	French Club	01
10	Visit to Francophone countries	Once in 2 years (01)
11	Assignment	Once in a week
12	Evaluation	Once in a week
13	Teachers participation at workshops	05

Table 6 on the teachers' questionnaire indicates that 10 teachers are recorded for the 3 polytechnics. Further information states that three out of the ten are about to retire from service having attained 60 years and above. One cannot therefore expect much from them. The majority of them use the communicative and traditional approaches in teaching with no laboratory in any of the schools. Six of the teachers used posters and songs as teaching aids. Seven out of the 10 teachers claimed laying emphasis on listening comprehension and 5 on oral production. We however find these claims unacceptable as our interaction with the students at oral interview did not prove these claims right. One Polytechnic only has a French Club and students of this same Polytechnic visit a Francophone country once throughout their program's duration. Teachers give assignment once in a week or during class period and same with evaluation apart from the school general examinations. Five teachers out of 10 indicated participating often in workshops and seminars. In addition, it was observed that there was no uniform curriculum; each polytechnic had its own course content provided by the teachers. Teachers are curriculum implementers and a mal-informed teacher will have nothing to offer. One can therefore confidently conclude, based on the above information that the present curriculum has not contributed to students' oral competence in French.

Conclusion:

This work has established many challenges in the teaching and learning of French in Nigerian Polytechnics and some suggestions have been proffered. Findings from both learners and teachers show that French Language is very important for the polytechnic students but proper structures have to be put in place for its sustainability by providing enough experienced trained teachers. The inevitable issue of more than 60 students in French Language class duration of 2 hours can be handled by the teacher dividing the class into two groups and allotting one quality hour of teaching to each group. An experienced teacher can make use of the students' approved French club period to increase her contact hours by visiting and interacting with them during this period. The aim should not be 'how much' but 'how well' learners have acquired the language. It is our opinion that both teachers and authorities should put heads together to effect the desired change.

Recommendations:

This study recommends the following:

- An official integration of proper French Language program tailored to learners' specific areas of studies be instituted as addition of French language skills to the students' professional skills will definitely open wider opportunities for the students especially in this era of globalization.
- Curriculum to be drawn based on these specific areas and should emphasize at least 4 contact hours a week and not more than 30 students in a class.
- More teachers to be employed trained and retrained in appropriate methodology as well as motivated on the job to be able to implement this special task.
- Sustainability of French Language in the polytechnics with appropriate structures, both physical and human put in place; otherwise the future of French Language in Nigerian polytechnics remains bleak.

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Copies of Tests attached

Annexe 1 : Epreuve de compréhension auditive

Voir ci-dessous un petit texte extrait du « *New Practical French, Workbook for Students' Book 3* par SAM Pratt and O Bhêly-Quénum. Longman p.31 adapté à notre étude pour l'évaluation de compréhension auditive.

Un soir un vieux patron qui s'appelle Monsieur Gérard est assis sur une chaise dans son bureau mais il ne dort pas. Il entend un bruit et il se lève brusquement. Il voit que c'est un voleur qui essaie de voler son argent. Le vieux patron a peur. Il ne peut pas crier. Mais il a un sifflet. Il donne un coup de sifflet. Le voleur se sauve. Les agents arrivent tout de suite. L'homme et les agents se battent. Le voleur reçoit un coup de bâton sur la tête. Il tombe et ne bouge pas. Enfin les agents l'arrêtent. Le vieux monsieur rit car il n'aime pas les voleurs. Mais quand il se couche il ne peut pas dormir. Le matin, il raconte à son voisin et sa secrétaire qu'il y a une importante somme d'argent dans son bureau. La secrétaire lui dit de la déposer à la Banque. Il le fait.

Questions liés au texte

Vrai ou Faux Cochez	**Vrai**	**Faux**
Le vieux monsieur est un patron.		
Le vieux monsieur est au lit.		
Il ne dort pas.		
Le voleur vole son agent.		
Le vieux monsieur n'a pas peur.		
Il donne un coup de sifflet.		
Les agents arrêtent le voleur.		
Le vieux monsieur dort après l'arrêt.		
Le matin, il ne raconte l'histoire à personne.		
A la fin, il ne dépose pas l'argent à la Banque.		

2. Choisissez les corrects verbes ou mots pour les suivants

a Le fieux/vieux patron s'appelle Monsieur Gérard/Monsieur Gérant.
b. Il est/êtes au lit.
c. Il entend/attend un bruit.
d. Il fois/voit que c'est un voleur.
e. Le fieux/vieux Monsieur ne peut/ne peux pas crier.
f. Il a/as un sifflet.
g. Les agents arrive/arrivent tout de suite.
h. Le voleur reçois/reçoit un coup de bâton sur la tête.
i. Le fieux/vieux monsieur lit/rit car il n'aime pas les voleurs.
j. La secrétaire lui dis/dit de déposer l'argent à la banque.

Annexe 11 : Epreuve de conversation

Pour la conversation interactive, les apprenants parlent des sujets suivants qu'ils tirent au sort.

- Présentez-vous.
- Présentez ton ami(e)
- Quelle est votre profession ?
- Décrivez votre école.
- Décrivez votre maison.
- Vous aimez le français, pourquoi ?
- Vous aimez la profession de secrétariat, pourquoi ?

Annexe III : Grille d'évaluation

La grille d'évaluation est adaptée à celle prc ar L. GOSSELIN (2011), www.moncartable.ca du site static.wistatic.com et modifiée à notr on. La modification est faite en points alloués.

Echelle d'appréciation

1. Toujours (5)
2. Assez souvent (4)
3. Moins souvent (3)
4. Rarement (2)

La note : 5 4 3 2

a) Exprime ses propos avec clarté	1	2	3	4	
b) Emploie un vocabulaire correct	1	2	3	4	**Commentaire de l'enseignant(e)**
c) Ajuste le débit et l'intonation de sa voix	1	2	3	4	
d) Réflexes non-verbales	1	2	3	4	
			(20 points)		