

EFFECTS OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATIVE FRENCH TEACHING MODEL ON STUDENTS' AFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO FRENCH

Prof. (Mrs.) T. N. KANNO

Department of Curriculum and Teacher Education,
Faculty of Education, Abia State University, Uturu

Dr. PRISCA COLETTE NKECHI EZENWA

Department of Curriculum Studies and Educational Technology,
Faculty of Education, Imo State University, Owerri

ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study set out to explore the effects of the Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Model (INCOFT Model) on students' interest in and attitude to French. Guided by one null hypothesis, the study had as its population two hundred and fifty-one thousand, eight hundred and seventy-three year two students in public junior secondary schools in Imo State. Sixty students of Urban Junior Secondary School Umuna, Orlu constituted the sample for the study. These were taught for six weeks in two intact classes constituting the experimental and control groups of thirty students each. An Affective Response to French Scale (AREFS) was the instrument for the study. It was validated using Cronbach Alpha Correlation Coefficient and a reliability index of 0.77 was realized. This test was administered to the subjects before and after the treatment. The data collected were analyzed using mean ratings and the t-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The INCOFT Model was found to be effective in enhancing the students' interest in and attitude to French. The researchers recommend, among other things, that teachers using the INCOFT model need to identify and use the techniques that most interest their students and motivate them to learn French.

INTRODUCTION

The learners' interest and attitude to language are students' affective attributes and are very important variables that affect foreign language learning. This has to do with the learners' disposition to study foreign language. Students need to be interested before they can learn language and it is this interest that motivates them and disposes them to learn. As a result, the teacher needs to use all the skills available in him or her to arouse and sustain the students' interest as well as improve their attitude to the language. Udousoro (2005) asserts that a foreign language learner's interest in the target language will largely affect and determine his or her oral performance in the language and she concludes that if the learner is not committed to the language he or she is learning, it is most likely that this lack of interest and commitment will adversely affect his or her oral fluency in the foreign language.

There is a general notion that secondary school students in Nigeria lack interest in French. Offorma (2002:217) observes that "they develop an antagonistic attitude towards the language." This negative attitude manifests itself in various ways. Most of the students do not have French textbooks or notebooks. They keep away from the French lessons and do not study French at home nor do their assignments in French. For the teachers of French, this negative attitude shows a lack of interest in the subject and does not encourage the teachers (Ezenwa, 2002).

However, the students' negative attitude to French may not necessarily be as a result of a lack of interest as it may stem from the linguistic environment in which they find themselves. Njoku and Izuagba (2001) assert that Nigeria has about 250 different ethnic groups speaking as many as about 450 different languages. None of these is spoken across the country. As a result, English is adopted as a lingua franca in Nigeria, used for government, politics, the press, inter-ethnic and international communication and for instruction in schools. In Nigeria, therefore, French is studied as a foreign language. The students do not use it for their daily communication needs. The use of French is limited to the classroom and the students do not require French for carrying out their daily activities outside the classroom including the school, the home and the larger society.

Part of why students have difficulties studying French could be that they are discouraged by the little importance attached to French in the schools. An instance is Imo State where the statistics of the Secondary Education Management Board (2007) show that there are only one hundred and seventeen (117) teachers of French out of the six thousand and four (6004) teachers serving in the secondary schools. French is

studied in only sixty-three (63) out of the three hundred and ten (310) schools. It is only in twelve (12) schools that French is studied up to the senior secondary level and that students sit for French in the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. Also there are only twelve (12) pilot schools for French. Many schools do not have teachers for French and those that have, do not have enough. Also, in the school, English is the medium of instruction even in the French class where conventional methods dominate instruction.

Despite this situation, the students perceive the importance of French in their future life. Imasuen (1988) studied the reasons for the study of French by students in secondary and tertiary institutions and found that their reasons ranged from opportunities to study in France, trade with France and getting a job with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). These reasons are enough motivation for the students and are likely to increase their interest in the language. Also, Ezenwa (2002) reports a high level of interest in French among secondary school students. They perceive the language as something useful and so they are eager to learn it. Contrary to general understanding, Nigerian secondary school students have interest in French.

Imasuen (1988) opines that Nigerians need to be motivated towards reading and using the French language and based on his findings on why Nigerians study French, he advises that learners should be encouraged in such a way that they know what to look for in studying French. This is because when the students know why they need to study French, the awareness becomes a source of motivation for them to learn the language (Ezenwa, 2006).

From the above research findings, we can deduce that although French is not needed for day-to-day communication in Nigeria, the students perceive the importance of studying the language and the role its knowledge can play in their future life. This situation justifies the inclusion of the language in the secondary school curriculum, as a core subject in the junior secondary school and a non-vocational elective at the senior secondary level and so calls for effective implementation of the French language policy. To achieve this, the teacher of French has a significant role to play in sustaining the students' interest in the language. He or she needs to employ the relevant skills and strategies to foster the students' interest and attitude to French. In order to achieve this, the teacher needs to use the appropriate methods and techniques for the classroom delivery of his or her lessons.

The relevance of any method for French hinges on its ability in ensuring the achievement of those objectives for the inclusion of French in Nigeria curriculum namely, the use of French in communication. The relevance of such a teaching method therefore lies in its ability to get the students interested in learning. Both Anyanwu (1998) and Ogike (2005) assert that the conventional methods for teaching French have been the direct and grammar-translation methods, used mainly through Government recommended textbooks and workbooks. The teachers took the students through translation of texts and mechanical repetitive drills but Offorma (2002) observes that these language drills were carried out without much thought from the students. The use of these textbooks did not help in enhancing the students' interest in French. Under this situation, the students could hardly learn the language nor use it to communicate.

In order to improve the classroom delivery of French and make it more interesting to the students, the Federal Ministry of Education (2001) designed a national curriculum for the teaching of French in the junior and senior secondary schools in Nigeria with the main objective of making the learners "to communicate in French language through the systematic use of the lively communicative method" (p i). The communicative approach emphasizes the building of learning activities around the needs and interests of the learners in order to achieve the aims of the programme. Sheils (1991) opines that communicative approach to language teaching is centred essentially on the learner. Its aim is to develop the learner's knowledge and experience and to use these to arouse in him or her, the desire to learn the target language. However, as found by Ezenwa (2007), most teachers of French do not use this approach in their classroom delivery as many of them are yet to undergo any training on the communicative approach to teaching French. Moreover, Ezenwa (2009) observes that some of the objectives of the model recommended in the syllabus are not those of the communicative approach. To make up for the lapses in the national curriculum and help the teachers of French in using the syllabus, the researchers propose the Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Model (INCOFT Model) for teaching French in Nigerian schools.

This INCOFT model is basically a learner-centred method within the communicative approach to second language teaching. As explained by Ezenwa (2008), it is a procedural sequence for communicative teaching of French in Nigerian schools. The idea of *indigenous* is reflected in the model's emphasis on building instruction on the learner's local needs, interests and experiences. The model recognizes all the attributes of the child as having some contributory roles to play in language learning. These attributes include all the intellectual, physical and psychological characteristics

of the child as well as the social and cultural realities of the child's environment. In using the model, the teacher coordinates all the learner attributes including his cognitive and affective attributes in order to help them learn language.

By proposing the INCOFT model, the researchers hope to help the teachers of French in their classroom delivery of the subject by equipping them with learner-centred techniques to increase and sustain their students' interest in French and thereby increasing the students' desire and readiness to learn the language. But it is still doubtful whether the model can be a good replacement for the conventional methods of teaching French in Nigeria. Can it be a way out of this problem of getting the students interested enough in French as to be well disposed to learn it? In other words, can the INCOFT model enhance the students' interest in and attitude to French? The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the effects of the Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Model on students' interest in French and their attitude to the language. The following hypothesis guided the study: There is no significant difference in the students' mean scores in an Affective Response to French Scale (AREFS) on application of the Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Model and the conventional method ($P. < 0.05$).

METHODOLOGY

The study was a quasi-experimental research that sought to establish the effects of the Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Model (INCOFT Model) on students' affective response to French. The research compared students' mean scores in an Affective Response to French Scale (AREFS) after being taught with the Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Model and the conventional method of teaching French. Students were taught in two intact classes that constituted the experimental and control groups. The study adopted the pre-test, post-test, non-equivalent-group design since randomization was not possible here because of the intact classes (Nwagu, 2005). All the two hundred and fifty-one thousand, eight hundred and seventy-three (251, 873) second year students in the junior secondary school during the 2007/2008 academic year in Imo State constituted the population of the study. Through random and purposive sampling techniques, Urban Junior Secondary School, Umuna, Orlu was selected for the study and sixty students in the school constituted the sample for the study. .

The Affective Response to French Scale (AREFS), designed by the researcher was the instrument for the study. The 20-item test measured the students' affective

response to French, that is, their interest in and attitude to the language. The questions included what motivated the students to study French and how they studied it. The instrument is a 4-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), 4 points; Agree (A), 3 points; Disagree (D), 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD), 1 point. For the face and content validity of the instruments, it was administered two times to subjects outside the study population, with two weeks interval. Also, it was subjected to structural analysis by being submitted to the scrutiny and vetting of experts in Measurement and Evaluation and French teaching and learning. To ensure the reliability of the instruments, the data collected from the test-retest of the instruments were subjected to statistical analysis using the Cronbach Alpha Correlation Coefficient and a reliability index of 0.77 was realized. The researcher made efforts to control the extraneous variables from the use of intact classes, teacher effectiveness, effects of the test-retest, Hawthorn effects and attrition.

The content of the six-week treatment was drawn from the *National Curriculum for Junior Secondary Schools French* and was based on the theme of *Buying and Selling*, for the second term of year two. During the treatment, the lessons were developed following the procedures of the two teaching methods under study. The treatment format consisted of the lesson plans which had details of the instructional procedures, the techniques and materials used as well as the activities carried out by the teacher and the students. Group One, the experimental group was taught with the INCOFT Model while Group Two, the control group and was taught with the conventional method.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from the study were statistically analyzed using the mean, standard deviation and the t-test. Maduabum (1999) asserts that the t-test is appropriate for comparing the mean scores of two groups. This study compared the mean scores of students taught with two different methods. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

The results of the test of the hypothesis are as presented in table 1 below.

Table 1: Analysis of t-test of students' performance in Affective Response to French Scale (AREFS)

N	\bar{x}	SD	Std error	t _{cal}	t _{critical}	Significance
30	68.87	10.91	2.65	4.40	1.96	Reject H ₀
30	57.20	9.55				

From table 1, the t-test calculated value of 4.40 is higher than the t-test table value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The alternative hypothesis is upheld; there is significant difference in the students' mean scores in an Affective Response to French Scale (AREFS) on application of the Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Model and the conventional method. The students' mean score was higher on application of the Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Model (68.87) than on application of the conventional method (57.20).

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis that guided the study was rejected because there was significant difference in the students' mean scores in an Affective Response to French Scale (AREFS) on application of the Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Model and the conventional method. The students' mean scores were higher on application of the Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Model than on application of the conventional method. These findings confirm that the teacher's method has effects on students' interest and attitude to language as past studies show that the teacher's method can positively affect students' interest to learn foreign language. This can be done through the use of indirect influence by the teachers (Agbor 2005).

Research studies show that Nigerian junior secondary school students appreciate their need for French and are interested in studying it (Imasuen, 1988; Ezenwa, 2002). This being the case, the teacher needs to use appropriate methods and techniques to sustain and even increase the students' interest in and attitude to the language. The Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Method is effective in achieving this as it is a communicative model that is learner-centred. Its aim is to develop the learner's knowledge and experience and use these to arouse the students' interest in the language. (Sheils, 1991).

Moreover, the model emphasizes the use of interactive activities that promote communication in the students. The interaction between the teacher and the students

and among the students is through activities that interest students such as songs, games, role-plays and teacher-pupil rapport (Offorma 2005c). Part of the techniques that evoke students' interest is the emphasis on the learners' immediate environment in the selection and use of instructional materials. Besides, these activities are presented in stages so that the students can expect what stage they are to participate in at every given time. This makes them to be more involved in the activities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Model is effective in enhancing students' interest and attitude in French. This implies that the model can sustain the interest of the students in learning French and thereby achieve the Government's objective to include French in the school curriculum.

Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. In using the Indigenous Communicative French Teaching Model, teachers need to make the students to realize their need to learn French and communicate in it. They need to use all the techniques available to them to arouse and sustain their interest in the language.
2. The teachers need to emphasize the students' use of the language both within and outside the classroom. This will fascinate the students and increase their zeal to study French.
3. There is need to involve the students in the collection of instructional materials for use in the class. These real materials from their own environment will make the lessons more natural to them and make them more disposed for participating in the learning activities.
4. To arouse more interest in the students, the teachers of French should not limit themselves to the French language classroom for teaching the students. They could also take them on teaching sessions around the school to enable the students to also interact with the natural objects around the school.
5. As a way of arousing and sustaining the students' interest as well as giving them the opportunity to speak French, teachers can organize for the students to visit French language centres around their states like Alliance Française, where French is the language of communication.

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