

Research

The Impact of French Language Proficiency on Employability Prospects Among Nigerian Graduates.

Abu Patrick Akomaye¹, Bangbose Johnson Adejobi²

¹Department of Modern Languages and Translation Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Calabar, Nigeria.
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-37643647>

²Department of Modern Languages and Translation Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Calabar, Nigeria.
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-5417-8007>

Correspondence should be addressed to: patrickabukamus@gmail.com

Abstract: This study investigates the impact of French language proficiency on employability prospects among Nigerian graduates. It addresses the growing demand for multilingual skills in the global job market. The objective is to assess how French language skills influence job opportunities, determine the extent to which proficiency in French enhances employability, identify barriers to acquiring French language skills, and explore employers' preferences for multilingual candidates. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative surveys of 300 recent graduates and 50 HR professionals across various industries with qualitative interviews to gain nuanced insights. Data analysis involves descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and thematic coding. The findings show that French language proficiency significantly enhances employability, particularly in international organizations and businesses with French-speaking clients. The study concludes that improving French language proficiency can significantly increase job opportunities.

Keywords: French, Language proficiency, Employability, Multilingual

Introduction

Nigeria, a multilingual nation with over 500 languages spoken, is strategically positioned within the African continent, where the French language plays a crucial role in diplomatic and economic relations, especially with neighbouring Francophone countries like Cameroon, Benin, and Togo. This study analyses the correlation between French

language proficiency and employability in Nigeria against the backdrop of global trends in multilingualism.

The French language has become greatly significant, especially in a globalised job market. Nigerian graduates who seek to be employed in multinational companies, diplomacy, and international organisations, etc. The ability to speak French is seen as an added advantage or an asset that can enhance job opportunities, increase competition, and expand career opportunities. However, the level of French language proficiency among Nigerian graduates varies widely, and there is a need to better understand the relationship between French language skills and employability. Although there is an increasing relevance of competence in French in the Nigerian job market, there is still a noticeable gap in research focusing on how the proficiency of Nigerian graduates in the French language impacts employment opportunities. While anecdotal reports suggest that French language skills can be a vital factor in securing job opportunities, there is a lack of empirical studies that explore a thorough relationship. This research, therefore, aims to address these gaps by investigating the impact of French language proficiency on the employability prospects of Nigerian graduates. By examining the relationship between language skills and employability outcomes, this study seeks to provide valuable insights into the importance of French language proficiency in the job market and offer recommendations for enhancing language learning programmes and policies to prepare graduates to face the competition in the job market.

The reason for the choice of this topic, “the impact of French language proficiency on employability,” is pertinent for several reasons:

1. Economic Growth: Nigeria's economy is increasingly shaped by its relationships with Francophone countries; thus, understanding the language skills required for job seekers is crucial.
2. Policy Development: This study can inform educational policies aimed at improving language learning in Nigerian schools and universities.
3. Globalisation Trends: As globalisation continues, multilingualism emerges as an essential skill in international business, signifying the need for research in this domain.

Problem Statement

Despite Nigeria's rich cultural diversity and growing economic ties with Francophone countries, there is a significant lack of emphasis on French language education. This leads to a gap in job readiness among Nigerian graduates, who may lack

proficiency in French, which limits their employment opportunities both locally and internationally. This study addresses the question: How does French language proficiency impact employability prospects for job seekers in Nigeria?

Several empirical studies underscore the relevance of foreign language, French inclusive, in enhancing job opportunities. Research conducted by Akinwale and Adeyemi (2018) found that graduates with bilingual skills, including French, had higher chances of gaining employment in Nigeria's multinational companies and diplomatic services. In a similar way, Olaniyan (2019) affirmed that French language skills significantly increased the likelihood of Nigerian graduates securing jobs in sectors such as tourism, international trade, and development agencies that collaborate with francophone countries.

Obasi (2023), in his studies on the relationship between language proficiency and employment opportunities among job seekers in Nigeria, found a significant positive correlation between English language proficiency and employment chances ($p < 0.01$). Applicants with high proficiency were 35% more likely to secure employment than those with limited skills.

Adesina (2022), in his studies on the impacts of multilingualism with a focus on French language proficiency on employment opportunities in Nigeria, reveals that graduates' proficiency rate in French had a 35% higher employment rate compared to non-proficient peers, and that French-speaking employees commanded an average salary premium of 20% across survey sectors. His results show that multilingual employees, especially those fluent in French, facilitated international partnerships and expanded business opportunities.

Akinwale (2019) examined the relationship between French language acquisition and employability among Nigerian graduates, emphasising that proficiency in French opens up job opportunities in international organisations, embassies, and companies operating in Francophone countries. The study also reveals that the lack of adequate French language skills remains a challenge to employment in such sectors and advocates for reforms to incorporate more training on French language skills in our institutions of learning.

Eze et al. (2020) revealed that Nigerian graduates with French proficiency exhibited better communication skills and cultural competence, making them more attractive to potential employers.

Adebiye (2015) carried out research on the role of French language proficiency in enhancing employability among Nigerian graduates in Nigeria. The research shows that

proficiency in French significantly increases employment opportunities, particularly for graduates in multinational companies and diplomatic services, and requires bilingual skills. He emphasised the importance of integrating French language instruction into tertiary education curricula to improve graduates' opportunities to secure jobs.

Ojo and Oladipo (2017) investigated the influence of French language skills on the employment of students in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Their research shows that students with French language skills had a higher likelihood of securing jobs, especially in sectors such as international organisations, diplomacy, and tourism. Their study recommended increased emphasis on French language training in Nigerian universities to boost graduates' competitiveness.

Efah (2020) emphasised that French is one of the official languages of numerous international organisations, including the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation, and the International Monetary Fund. This underscores its geopolitical and economic significance. In his findings, he indicates that proficiency in French significantly correlates with increased trade volume, highlighting the language's role in reducing transaction costs and fostering trust. The study shows that firms with French language capabilities are 35% more likely to engage in cross-border trade within the region.

Objectives

1. To investigate the current level of French language proficiency among Nigerian graduates.
2. To analyse the demand for French-speaking professionals in various industries in Nigeria.
3. To assess the impact of French language skills on the employability and career progression of individuals.
4. To identify barriers to learning French in Nigeria and recommend strategies to improve French language education.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research.

1. Survey: A structured questionnaire was distributed to 500 graduates from various universities across Nigeria to gather data on their French language proficiency, employment status, and perceptions of language skills in the job market.

2. Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with HR professionals and recruiters from both local and multinational companies to understand their perspectives on language requirements for employment.

3. Focus Groups: Focus groups were organised with students from language institutions to discuss their experiences with learning French and its perceived value in securing jobs.

4. Data Analysis: Statistical methods were employed to analyse survey data, while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data from interviews and focus groups.

Results

Preliminary findings reveal the following insights:

1. Proficiency Levels: Only 25% of respondents reported having a functional proficiency in French, with most indicating that they learned French as a second language in school but lacked practical application.

2. Employment Opportunities: HR professionals identified that proficiency in French significantly enhances job prospects in sectors such as diplomacy, tourism, and international business, with 40% of positions requiring such skills preferably filled by candidates who speak French.

3. Perceived Demand: Candidates who could demonstrate French proficiency were perceived as more competitive, with a reported 30% higher likelihood of securing job interviews.

4. Learning Barriers: Key barriers identified include a lack of qualified French teachers, inadequate resources, and limited exposure to French-speaking environments.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant impact of French language proficiency on employability in Nigeria, indicating that better language skills are linked to greater job opportunities. Addressing the existing gaps in French language education and fostering a culture of multilingualism will not only benefit individuals in their careers but also enhance Nigeria's competitive stature in the global job market. Continued research in this area will be vital to adapting educational strategies to meet the evolving needs of the economy.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

1. Curriculum Development: Educational institutions should integrate French language courses into their curricula, emphasising conversational skills and practical usage in business contexts.

2. Training for Educators: Investments should be made in training qualified French teachers who can provide effective language instruction.

3. Partnerships: Forge partnerships between Nigerian universities and Francophone institutions to facilitate exchanges and internships, giving students exposure to French-speaking environments.

4. Awareness Campaigns: Initiate campaigns to raise awareness among students and job seekers regarding the benefits of learning French in enhancing employability.

References

1. Adebeye, O.O. (2015). The impact of French language proficiency on the employability of Nigerian Graduates. *Journal of Languages and Education*, 4(2), 45-53.
2. Adesina, A. (2022). The role of Multilingualism in Nigeria's Economic Development. *Journal of Languages and Economics*, 15(2), 45-60.
3. Akinwale, O. (2019). French language skills and Employability in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. *Journal of Education and Language Studies*, 3(4), 112-121.
4. Akinwale, A.A., & Adeyemi, O. (2018). The role of bilingual proficiency in employment opportunities among Nigerian graduates. *International Journal of Language and Communication*, 6(2), 45-49.
5. Effah, E. A. (2021). The Role of the French Language in Global Business: Opportunities for Nigeria. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*.
6. Ministry of Education, Nigeria (2022). Policy Reports on Language Education in Nigeria.
7. Obasi, I. (2023). Language and Employment: A Case for French in Nigeria's Job Market. *Nigerian Academy Review*.
8. Ojo, O.J., and Ladipo, O. (2017). French Language and Employability in Nigeria: An Empirical Study. *International Journal of Languages and Communication*, 5(1), 78-86



© 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).