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Article

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PERCEPTION OF SOFT AND TECHNICAL SKILLS IN THE FRENCH PROGRAMME BY STUDENTS OF *RSU* AND *IAUE* IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This paper examines the level of awareness and acceptance of soft and technical skills by students of French in 200 level at the Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (hereinafter called *RSU* and *IAUE*, Port Harcourt). To elicit responses from our respondents, a questionnaire containing seven (7) relevant questions demanding a *Yes* or *No* answer was administered on the students who were chosen haphazardly. The results indicated that most students lacked the information about necessary skills which could boost their chances of securing jobs easily on graduation. The study therefore recommended a review of the French programme at the university level to conform with the economic, social and technological changing times in not only in Nigeria but also the world. went further to recommend a review of the French programme at the university level to conform with the economic, social and technological changing times in not only in Nigeria but also the world.

Keywords: Soft and Technical Skills, Employability, Programme, Awareness, Foreign Language.

Introduction

French language teaching and learning have undergone some transformations in the areas of core aspects of linguistics and literature. A very strong factor that has made it to be so is the foundation of its teaching and learning since it was not intended at the beginning to be vocational both in conceptualization and implementation. This situation accounted for most French graduates ending up in the classrooms be it at the primary, post-primary or the tertiary level. As much as it is important to transmit knowledge from generation to

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generation which is the basis of education, changing times occasioned by man's improvement through science and technology have altered a lot of human existence, hence the need to change with the times since it is often said that the only constant thing in life is change itself. The programmes of French studies across educational institutions have been tailored around the four cardinal skills in language acquisition namely: reading, writing, listening and speaking without any recourse to other emerging trends and skills which would help the graduates to be in good stead and remain competitive in a dynamic society like ours. Today, the importance of what is known as technical and soft skills has added an impetus to the growing demand for restructuring of French programme in line with the changing times. As more and more institutions of higher learning in Nigeria (colleges of education, polytechnics and universities) offer courses in French at not only the NCE level but also Degree, Master and Doctorate, it follows that more graduates are being churned out on a yearly basis and they would like to find places to render their services to earn a living. This situation opens the need to possess certain qualities and skills that attract employers in both the formal and informal sectors.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study include to:

- i. determine the level of awareness and acceptance of soft and technical skills in the university programme of French students.
- ii. make recommendations that would help curriculum planners and stakeholders in achieving a more robust, sustainable and impactful programme that would not only motivate the learners of French at the tertiary level but also make them multi-tasking and employable in the competitive labour market.

Statement of the Problem

French studies at the university level have always concentrated on four skills of language learning namely reading, speaking, writing and listening. From these four skills, the graduates/students are made to study aspects of literature, translation and linguistics, all culminating into an expertise in the language. It should be noted that the above scenario started from the foundation of French programmes which were rooted as a secondary school subject by few missionaries in elite secondary schools in the 40's shortly before Nigeria gained its independence from its former colonial master Britain. The implication of this is that most graduates end up as classroom teachers in primary and secondary schools apart from a few 'lucky' ones who found themselves in government agencies, ministries (like the foreign service) and parastatals (like government media houses). The researchers of this study feel that widening the horizon or scope of French studies at the tertiary level by including soft and technical skills in the programme would go a long way in making the graduates multi-tasking thereby opening up the space for employment and sustainability in a very challenging environment which has been the lot of Nigerians. It is believed by the researchers also that if these very important skills are interwoven with the foreign language skills in French studies, it would go a long way in manpower sourcing and development across the sectors of the Nigerian economy. After all, versatility in man opens the door of ability and competence in life with the view to surviving.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant in so many ways. The essence of the research is to find out the level of awareness and acceptance of soft and technical skills in French programmes at the

tertiary level considering the changing times and sophistication that have accompanied the labour market. The research is expected to go a long way in helping future French graduates to drive towards the acquisition of some cutting-edge skills necessary in the course of their programme. The research will also assist curriculum planners to design a more sustainable system that engender French graduates who are multi-tasking and adaptable in a changing and challenging world. Education policy makers will also find the data collected useful in designing a future oriented programme devoid of living in the past.

Literature Review

Guest (www.pearson.com) believed that soft and technical skills are factors that play vital roles in shaping and determining career success and progression. Although hard skills are the core which shows one's qualifications for a position and therefore takes him nearer for job consideration, soft skills are equally important in a challenging world of ours today. In other words, when a candidate for a job possesses certain hard and soft skills, his chances of succeeding professionally are very possible. Birt(2025) in elucidating the necessity of technical skills reasoned that technical skills are important because they enable employees to effectively use the tools, programmes and processes required for their roles, making them more competitive and capable in a wide range of jobs. Just like Guest(op cit), Birt equally agreed that technical skills are equally hard skills in that they rank among the 'required' skills while the soft skills are often termed 'desired' by employers. Diplomat (2025, in *Indeed Career Guide* posits that hard skills are:

... Qualities acquired for performing physical or digital tasks and they are now essential across many industries. There has to be industry relevant technical knowledge which can make one a stronger applicant, improve performance and open up more career.

Birt (2025) explained further that both the *required* and *desired* technical skills are necessary. What this means is that while required skills are essential in carrying out the role expected of the job seekers, desired skills are not directly essential but can give the candidate a competitive edge. We can equally deduce here that the 'required skills' are technical in nature while the 'desired' ones are ranked among soft skills; however both go hand in hand to enhance job prospects. Furthermore, Birt(2025) enumerated the core soft skills of candidates to include Adaptability: the candidate must endeavor to adjust to new conditions, work flows or technology. Critical thinking: He must be able to objectively analyse information to make informed decisions. Emotional intelligence: this is the ability to understand, manage and utilize one's emotions. In other words, no matter your perceptions or thoughts however diverse they may be, you should keep it aside and face your job professionally. In terms of the hard or what is known as technical skills, the following are useful for employability in the 21st Century: Computer programming, Data analysis, Graphic designs, foreign language proficiency, Project management and Technical writing (Birt, 2025).

It should be noted here that hard or technical skills are quantifiable and teachable abilities specific to a job or industry and they are acquired through formal education, training programmes and practical experience like studying French at the university but soft skills are developed from exposure, interpersonal relationships and socialization. The latter skills here are not necessarily acquired but learned and developed with time and they are associated with open embrace with people and contacts in the course of both formal and informal interactions. For instance, communication skill being the ability to convey information clearly and effectively is an attitude cultivated with time and not necessarily

studied at the four walls of a university, so also are teamwork and problem-solving technics of the individual. The acquisition of language like French at the university is a skill in that it is technical in nature but at the same time foreign language skill like French language is often classified as a hard or required (Diplomat, 2025). In Nigerian universities, many Departments of French do not have a curriculum that boast of training the graduates to be multi-tasking but the programmes are more often than not structured to reflect aspects of linguistics, translation studies and literary knowledge in French. The four year programme (sometimes five in some universities) is often tailored around the acquisition of the four language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, ditto for the Master and Doctoral studies. The researchers of this study believe strongly that this posture is not in itself unprogressive but concerted efforts should be made to reflect the changing times in a challenging society. Contextualising the teaching and learning of French language at the university level, Lemchi (2021, p.23) remarks that:

In Nigerian universities, the policy for foreign language studies recommends that English remains the medium of instruction while French which is pertinent to us in this study is offered as either a General Studies Course or in some case compulsory course in a few selected faculties like the humanities, social and management.

The objective of this policy is to produce bilingual graduates who may find themselves in the oil, civil and diplomatic sectors of the economy. However, there are some students who offer the language course at degree level in which they spend four or five years depending on the university not also forgetting "a year abroad" embedded in the programme. This last group identified here forms the core of our study and thus our population.

Methodology

Data Collection: The data for this study were collected by using the quantitative approach. Quantitative research method in language study and research involves the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data. Among others, this research method includes the use of questionnaires, chi-square tests, t-tests, and corpus analysis 25. Quantitative research is particularly valuable in language acquisition studies where it helps in identifying patterns and testing hypothesis about language learning processes. The method equally provides objective, measurable data that can support or refute theoretical claims (Vasishth et al, 1986). The researchers have thus chosen the quantitative research method through which they structured appropriate questionnaires to elicit data and analyse them with the view to finding out the perception of university French students towards the inclusion of soft and technical skills in the core of their studies. To achieve this objective, the researchers visited the universities to identify with the students and get approval from the Heads of Department so that our activities do not distort the university programme. Our questionnaire contained seven multiple choice questions in conformity with our research methodology.

Method of Data Analysis

The researchers of this study established the research questions through the use of questionnaires where they prepared seven multiple choice questions that demanded the respondents to choose an option between *Yes* or *No* to a particular question, the collection and capturing of the data were meticulously done so as to maintain the integrity of the study. This was done in order to avoid any typos, data capturing errors, outliers, or anomalies that

might affect our dataset. The researchers analysed the data finally to get result from the multiple choice questions. Depending on the option chosen by the respondents for each question, the item was calculated using the overall population of study. This helped the researchers to determine the level of acceptance and awareness for the inclusion of soft and technical skills in the degree programme of selected university French students.

Area of Study

The study was carried out in Obio-Akpo LGA of Rivers State. The researchers chose this area because they lived close to the universities where the research was carried out and the researchers were assisted by a lecturer in the Department of French which helped them to have contacts with colleagues and subsequently the students who participated in the study.

Population of the Study

The population comprised a group of respondents that meet a designated set of criteria and in this study. It includes 200 level students in the Department of French at two universities namely Rivers State University (RSU) and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) all in Obio-Akpo Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Sample and Sample Technique

The respondents were drawn from students in the Department of French of the universities in Obio-Akpo Local Government Area of Rivers State. Both universities are state government owned and they are mixed but their numerical strength was not the same and our limitation to use only students in 200 level formed the inequality in population. At Rivers State University, hereinafter called RSU for the purpose of this study, 33 students participated while at Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, 28 students were involved bringing the whole population to a total of sixty-one students.

Instrument for Data Collection

In this study, the researchers used structured questionnaire to elicit responses from the respondents/participants. The questions comprised seven items designed to obtain information from the students of French Department to determine the level of perception for the inclusion of soft and technical skills in their language programme. These questions are the following:

- i. Do you think that only aspects of language, literature and translation are enough to enable you secure a job after graduation?
a. Yes b. No
- ii. Would you like a vocation/skill other than language, literature and translation to be included in your studies?
a. Yes b. No
- iii. Do you think that if a separate skill apart from language, literature and translation is introduced to your studies it would enhance your job prospects after graduation?
a. Yes b. No
- iv. In practical terms, do you think that lack of soft and technical skills limit the chances of French graduates to secure jobs easily?
a. Yes b. No
- v. Are you knowledgeable about soft and technical skills?
a. Yes b. No
- vi. I prefer soft skills to be added in my French programme.
a. Yes b. No

- vii. I prefer technical skills to be added in my French programme.
 a. Yes b. No

The result of analysis of data on the questionnaire administered and conducted on French students to find out the level of acceptance and awareness of the inclusion of soft and technical skills in the programme at the Department is summarized in Table 1.:

Table 1: Results of Respondents’ Responses on Inclusion of Soft and Technical Skills in French Programme at RSU and IAUE, Rivers State

S/N	Description of Items	Options		Percentage (%)		Remark
		YES	NO			
1.	Do you think that only aspects of language, literature and translation are enough to enable you secure a job after graduation?	18	43	29.5	70.4	Nil
2.	Would you like a vocation/skill other than language, literature and translation to be included in your studies?	39	22	63.9	36.0	-
3.	Do you think that if a separate skill apart from language, literature and translation is introduced to your studies it would enhance your job prospects after graduation?	51	10	83.6	16.3	-
4.	In practical terms, do you think that lack of soft and technical skills limits the chances of French graduates to secure jobs easily?	48	13	78.6	21.3	-
5.	Are you knowledgeable about soft and technical skills?	11	50	18.0	81.9	-
6.	I prefer soft skills to be added to my French programme.	28	33	45.9	54.0	-
7.	I prefer technical skills to be added to my French programme.	43	18	70.4	29.5	-

The analysis of the data from the table above shows that a greater number of French students do not think that their programme as presently constituted with literature, linguistics and translation can actually help them satisfactorily to secure good jobs going by the 70.4% representing 43 respondents of them answering in the negative. To the researchers, this gives a sense of insecurity about job prospects without relevant skills needed in the field. However, the remaining 18 respondents representing 29.5% think otherwise though the questionnaire did not ask the reason for this. On the necessity to include vocation/ soft and technical skills in the French programme, a higher number of the students responded in the affirmative. Thus, 39 students representing 63.9% are favourably disposed to this item as against 22 respondents representing 36.0% who thought otherwise. On the third item which dwelt on the probability that an inclusion of a separate skill would enhance job prospects after their graduation, more (88.5%) are of the opinion that it would

help them while 16.3% representing only 10 students thought otherwise. The implication of this scenario is that there may be curriculum insufficiency in their current programme vis-à-vis employment prospects.

Apart from the factors analysed above, 48 students representing 78.6% think that lack of soft and technical skills in their programme limited their chances to start plum jobs easily. The implication being that more and more graduates of the discipline are like endangered species in the labour market. However, only 21.3% of them representing 13 students think that lack of both soft and technical skills inhibited their job chances after graduation. Talking about the awareness level of the respondents about soft and technical skills as an advantage or acutting edge superiority for job find, 11 students representing 18.0% are aware of the importance of this factor while 50 respondents representing 81.9% claimed in the questionnaire that they were not knowledgeable of the existence of these contemporary skills. Interestingly and in an era of technological revolution using the social media, AI and all worth not, most of the students lacked this vital information. On the preference between soft and technical skills being included in their programme, the former had 11 students representing 18.0% while the latter skill had 50 students representing 81.9% students from a total of 61 who responded.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study tried to determine the extent French students were aware of soft and technical skills which could help them to navigate in the labour market after graduation. Quite paradoxically, a greater number of the respondents were not aware of these skills as contemporary practice which helps many graduates no matter the discipline to secure jobs with their hands-on experiences. The study found out that aspects of literature, language and translations which are the hallmark of the French study at Nigerian universities were not enough to adequately prepare the graduates in the labour market. In other words, the horizon of their programme at the university should be expanded to give them what the researchers believed were 'cutting-edge' advantage when they face the realities at the labour market because life as a university student is a different ball game immediately they graduated.

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing however, the researchers recommend the following steps to be taken in order to create advantageous positions for French graduates in the labour market:

- i. At the arrival in the university in Year One, students should be made to choose at least a technical skill as part of the core curriculum of their study. Although some may argue that a related course like *Entrepreneurship* is already being offered compulsorily in Nigerian universities, the course has been plagued by obvious lack of logistics, dearth of manpower and the tendency to continue teaching it theoretically.
- ii. The relevant authorities like the National Universities Commission(NUC) and the Ministry of Education should allow some form of autonomy of universities because this gives room for creativity of university personnel instead to always run to Abuja for approval of programmes that fits the whims and caprices of the élite who more often patronize foreign universities for their children and wards.
- iii. Those who have practical experiences should be engaged to impart mainly technical skills instead of always relying on personnel with theoretical knowledge. Over classroom talk has been the bane of Nigerian educational system with graduates being churned out with paper qualifications without necessary skills.

- iv. In the same vein, the attitude of the students towards knowledge acquisition at the ivory tower must change for the better in such a way that students concentrate on their studies more and lay less emphasis on money making. Thus, there is the need for the students to embrace 'first thing first' believing that there is light at the end of the tunnel for it is after rain that sunshine comes.

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