FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR COLLEGES OF EDUCATION STUDENTS' DIFFICULTY TO COMMUNICATE ORALLY IN FRENCH

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ABSTRACT: *The majority of Ghanaian French language students have wished that they speak some acceptable level of French in and out of their study institutions. This has however not been fruitful. This study set out to investigate the reasons for the difficulty in engaging in oral communication in the French language by French language students in colleges of education in Ghana. This quantitative study adopted the cross-sectional survey design. Out of 122 target participant populations, 93 students from the St John Bosco's and the Gbewaa colleges of education provided responses to the questionnaire items. Data was analysed using Kendall's coefficient of concordance to rank the factors responsible for students' difficulty to communicate orally in French, from the most pressing factor to the least pressing factor. The study realized that fear of being mocked, interference of the English language and inadequate exposure to the French language were the most pressing reasons/factors responsible for college students' inability to communicate orally in French while inadequate time allocation for French lessons and lack of encouragement from French teachers to speak French orally were among the least reasons for college students' inability to speak French orally. It was therefore recommended that there is a need for pro-activeness on the part of French language tutors to frequently engage students in oral communication and also discourage students from mocking colleagues who might make mistakes in their efforts at oral speeches. Also, a deliberate policy by school authorities and the tutors alike to make French speaking attractive through reward schemes should be made available and students should be encouraged to form or create French language clubs which will provide them the platform to practise oral communication on campus to aid fluency in the French language.*

KEYWORDS: French language, oral communication, college students, difficulty in communication.

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is quite daunting, especially oral communication with its anxiety related challenges. The demands of written communication in terms of accuracy appear much more official than oral communication. However, due to articulation challenges, oral communication in any language, whether native or foreign, has witnessed much more intellectual contention. In both content and semantics, public speaking draws attention. Typically, the audience is divided into two: those that listen for semantics/grammar and those for the enjoyment of the substance and intent. When it comes to oral communication of the foreign languages, these arguments become more heated.

One of the most widely spoken languages in the world is French. It is the fifth most spoken language in the world, behind Spanish, Hindi, Mandarin, and English, with over 80 million native speakers and about 309.8 million total speakers (Statista Research Department, 2023). This indicates that many educational programmes throughout English-speaking nations offer French as a popular option. The French language has a diverse patronage. For example, it is one of the foreign languages given significance in Ghana, owing to the country's international relationship with French-speaking countries. As a result, the French language has been incorporated into the educational curricula of Ghana. Not only that, but French is also taught in some colleges and universities and in Ghana as majors, which has inspired French to equally be taught in various elementary, junior, and senior high schools. This is to allow students who are interested in learning French at higher levels to be transitioned to French-taught educational institutions if they so desire.

The challenge, however, is the difficulty that French students have in engaging colleagues and tutors in oral communication in the French language. According to the National Social Anxiety Centre, the fear of public speaking is second to death (Montopoli, 2017; Cassagne, 2021). Cassagne (2021) goes further to reveal that about 75% of the global population grapple with public speaking anxiety (known as glossophobia). This paper situates the current problem in the context of colleges of education in Ghana, where French students are unable or unwilling to take part in French language oral tasks due to anxiety related challenges. As the only study that focuses on oral articulation anxieties by colleges of education French language students, this study explores the reasons for the reluctance of French language students to engage in oral communication and goes further to assess some practices that could be engaged in by students to alleviate the oral speaking anxieties. The research further makes recommendations on how to overcome glossophobia in French oral communication.

Statement of the Problem

The French language might be difficult to navigate, especially in public speaking since some accents are unfamiliar to native English speakers (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; Bodie, 2010; Cassagne, 2021). It is established that students lack public speaking confidence in their native language, let alone about a foreign language like the French the better, thereby generating stress and anxiety (Cassagne, 2021). This may have contributed to only 0.8% of Ghanaians aged 11 and above being able to communicate in French (Population & Housing Census, 2010). Another recent discovery is that approximately 13% of Ghanaians can now speak some French (West Africa Civil Society Institute [WACSI], 2019). WACSI (2019) conducted a 15-respondent study on Ghanaians' capacity to speak French and discovered that although three

could speak some level of acceptable French and had basic understanding of French respectively, nine respondents could not speak French at all.

One of many reasons French students have difficulty in engaging in oral communication in the French language stems from their elementary and senior high school French tutors, terrorizing them with corporal punishment for failing to pronounce a word correctly or receiving a poor class score. This is added to a certain level of absence in motivation for students to participate in oral tasks, which creates an artificial hatred for the French language. Even today, learning French entails memorizing antiquated poems and passing a time-consuming written exam. Another difficulty is the country's clear lack of interest, as seen by a lack of financing for French education and related oral learning materials that could aid in the teaching of the French language coupled with the absence of a clear policy framework for learning and teaching (see Bangnia, 2020). There is a sizable population who wish they could speak French effectively; unfortunately, the unmotivating behaviour of some French language tutors turns learners off (Bangnia, 2020). This may be seen in the way students are humiliated and laughed at when they make blunders while attempting to communicate in French (Florescu et al., 2013).

In addition, there is little advice and research on how to develop a professional and personal interaction between students and instructors. It is realised that despite the wealth of literature on anxiety and difficulty to orally engage in French, redefining the classroom environment and teachers' roles in reducing student anxiety, there is still a gap in integrating the social, academic, and motivational climates to form the potent support students need to lessen or eradicate oral communication anxiety in college foreign language courses.

On the backdrop of these stated stumbling blocks, the study was conducted to ascertain and rank factors responsible for French students' inability to communicate orally in the French language.

LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

Learning a foreign language is contagious, according to Skinner (1904–1990). As a result, the community in which the person develops strengthens their desire and attempts to study. Thus, as was emphasized in the introductory section, a tutor-student connection might be used to support Skinner's theory of language learning. According to Skinner, social behaviour is what leads people to develop their capacity for language learning. As is the case in this study, when French tutors interact verbally with their students occasionally, particularly during oratories, this reinforces the relevance of semantics to students as they attempt to mimic and duplicate the tutors' pronunciation and sentence construction techniques (Nath, 2010).

Few other similar ideas in educational learning support Skinner's theory of language acquisition. The social climate, academic climate, and academic motivation both inside and outside the physical boundaries of the foreign language classroom are all important factors (Anderman, Andrzejewski & Allaen, 2011; Cassagne, 2021). Academic atmosphere is defined by Anderman et al. (2011) as a community of educational learning where tutors support students in practising verbal interactions with one another wherever they are. Therefore, whether within or outside of a formal educational setting, students are urged to interact with

one another about the material covered in class. It improves articulation. Similar to this, Anderman et al. (2011) define motivation climate as a situation in which students find motivation to involve their peers in collaborative learning. Additionally, social climate was described as the favourable tutor-student interaction that motivates students to desire to learn and understand more about a subject.

Anxiety and Difficulty in Articulating in French Language

Anxiety and difficulty to engage in oral communication are two terms very difficult to separate and are sometimes used interchangeably. However, anxiety according to Felman (2018) and Cassagne (2021) is "an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure." Aside from that, Mayo Clinic (2018) sees anxiety as concerning "interference with daily activities and are difficult to control." Rassaei (2015) characterizes foreign language anxiety as an "intense feeling of tension, apprehension, and even fear when learners think of a foreign language," sharing some traits with general anxiety (p. 100). The goal of this study is to comprehend and attempt to address the conundrum of student concerns about speaking a foreign language at the collegiate level.

Empirical Studies

Numerous studies have examined how students struggle to maintain oral communication in French when faced with challenges related to speaking in public, including those related to oral participation (Bodie, 2010; Rassaeiy, 2015; Toth, 2011) and, in particular, speaking a foreign language (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). In other words, students' hesitation in oral communication, which is pervasive and has detrimental effects, must originate from somewhere and be brought about by something.

Additionally, a number of studies have linked personality traits like anxiety and depression (Diener & Lucas, 2019; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Kayaoglu, 2013; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987; Oz, 2014; Zarrinabadi, 2014). For instance, introverts might find it challenging to speak in front of audiences. Certain personality traits become more apparent when college students are required to speak in front of others as part of an assignment, especially if it will affect their grade (Nez-Pea, Suárez-Pellicioni & Bono, 2013; Stack, 2018). This can have a significant negative impact on learning and performance as well as make it challenging to process and retrieve information.

There is research on the benefits of a supportive environment for learning (Florescu & Pop-Pacurar, 2016; Gkonou, 2013) as well as the role of college professors in reducing or eliminating student anxiety or reluctance to engage in oral communication in the French language with speaking skills in the target language (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Mohammadi, Biria, Koosha & Shahsavari, 2013). But there is not much information available on what French language tutors should do specifically, and there are not many studies about how connections between tutors and students can reduce oral communication anxiety (Andrzejewski & Allen, 2011; Sparks, 2019).

Studies have found that the interference of learners' mother-tongue also known as L1 has an adverse effect on their ability to pronounce English words (Dansieh, 2018; Latha & Ramesh, 2012). Again, research indicates that poor foundation of learners in English language has a negative influence on their ability to pronounce words and speak English language fluently (Richards, 2015; Dansieh, 2018).

METHODS

Study Design

The survey design was adopted for this quantitative study. Survey research design is a quantitative research design which allows the investigator to administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of participants to describe the attitudes, behaviours, opinions or characteristics of the population. The specific survey design used was the cross-sectional survey design which enabled the researcher to collect the data within a short period of time.

Population and Sample Size

The population for the study comprised 32 students from the St. John Bosco's College of Education and 90 students from the Gbewaa College of Education. Since the target population was quite limited, the researcher used Yamane's (1967) sample determination formula. From the Yamine's formula, sample size of 93 was drawn from the population. The sample size of 93 college students were selected using simple random sampling technique.

Sample Size Determination

Sample size for known study population can be calculated with the help of Yamane's formula, which is used below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where:

n = Unknown sample size for the study to be determined

N represents the Study Population

e = estimated sample Size Determination Error, usually set at 5% (see Yamane, 1967)

Therefore, the sample size is calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{122}{1 + 122\,(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{122}{1 + 122\,(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{122}{1 + 0.305}$$

$$n = \frac{122}{1.305}$$

$n = 93$ (which is about 70% of the target study population).

For populations smaller than 1000, Nardi (2003) and Neuman (2007) recommend that a 30% plus sample size is sufficient for statistical analysis.

Data Collection Instruments

Likert scale questionnaires were used to solicit data from the 93 respondents. The questionnaire comprised 7 items found in literature as the factors or reasons responsible for French students' reluctance to speak French language orally. Participants responded to the items by ranking the items from the most pressing to the list pressing factor based on their own judgement. The validity of the instrument was established through experts and peer review while reliability was ensured by calculating the Cronbach's Alpha value at .05 confidence interval using the data obtained from the pilot test. A Cronbach Alpha value of .915 was obtained, indicating that the instrument is reliable.

Data Analysis Technique

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to code and do final analysis of data gathered from the field. Data were analysed using the Kendall's coefficient of concordance to rank the responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reasons	Mean Ranks	Rank
Lack of French reading materials	4.15	4th
I don't speak French always because we used to English language	3.81	2nd
Lack of/inadequate encouragement from French teachers to speak the language	4.28	7th
French assessment is always done in written form	4.20	5th
I have not been too exposed to the French language	4.08	3rd
Inadequate time allocation for French lessons	4.25	6th
I don't speak French frequently because of mockery	3.24	1st

Source: *Field Data, 2023*.

Kendall's tau-b correlation coefficient was used to assess the relationship between the mean ranks of the reasons responsible for college students' inability to express themselves orally in the French language. The results showed a statistically significant positive correlation between the mean ranks of the reasons ($\tau\_b = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that the reasons are generally consistent in their ranking, with reasons that are ranked higher on average also more likely to be ranked higher in individual cases. From the analyses, it was realized that fear of being mocked, interference of the English language and inadequate exposure to the French language were the most pressing reasons/factors responsible for college students' inability to communicate orally in French. It was again found that inadequate time allocation for French lessons and lack of encouragement from French teachers to speak French orally were among the least reasons for college students' inability to speak French orally. The finding that English language interference affected students' ability to communicate orally in French affirms the findings of Latha and Ramesh (2012) and Dansieh (2018), who both observed that the use of mother-tongue (L1) was an influencing factor in teaching and speaking pronunciation in

English. The difference between those studies and the current study is the fact that as the interference of L1 affected pronunciation in English in the previous studies, English language interference rather affected college students' ability to speak French orally. Also, the finding that inadequate exposure to French language is an obstacle preventing students from speaking French orally confirms the findings of Dansieh (2018) and Richards (2015) when they found that poor foundation in the subject/language affected students' pronunciation in English language.

Test Statistics

N	93
Kendall's W[a]	.030
Chi-square	16.547
df	6
Asymp.Sig	.011

Source: *Field data, 2023.*

Kendall's W test was used to assess the degree of agreement among the participants on the ranking of the items. The results showed a statistically significant but small degree of agreement (W = 0.030, χ^2 = 16.547, df = 6, p = 0.011). The statistically significant Kendall's W test statistic suggests that the college students are generally in agreement about the ranking of the items. However, the small Kendall's W coefficient (magnitude of the effect) suggests that they are not in perfect agreement on the ranking of the items, but that the observed agreement is unlikely to be due to chance.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study led to the conclusion that interference of the English language and inadequate exposure to the French language were the most pressing reasons/factors responsible for college students inability to communicate orally in French whiles inadequate time allocation for French lessons and lack of encouragement from French teachers to speak French orally were among the least reasons for college students' inability to speak French orally.

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