

# Motivation and Attitudes towards Learning French among Students in a College of Education

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Date Received: 07-11-2024; Date Revised: 29-11-2024; Date Accepted: 12-12-2024

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## Abstract

This study examines the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations on students' attitudes towards learning French in a College of Education in Northeast Nigeria, through the lens of Self-Determination Theory. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 83 respondents through a Likert-scale questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. Findings reveal that both intrinsic ( $\beta = 0.46, p < .001$ ) and extrinsic motivations ( $\beta = 0.33, p < .001$ ) significantly influence attitudes towards learning French, with intrinsic motivation emerging as the stronger predictor. Together, these motivational factors account for 45% of the variance in students' attitudes. The results highlight the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation through engaging pedagogical strategies while leveraging extrinsic motivators such as career counselling and institutional policy alignment. These findings contribute to the discourse on language education, highlighting practical implications for curriculum design and policy in multilingual contexts like Nigeria. Future research should explore the impact of specific teaching methods and broader socio-cultural influences on language learning motivation.

**Keywords:** Motivation, Attitudes, French Language Learning, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Nigeria.

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## Introduction

The French language, spoken by over 300 million people across more than 30 countries worldwide, holds significant cultural, political, and economic importance (Ethnologue, 2023). In Nigeria, particularly in the Northeast region, French is increasingly recognized as a vital second language that fosters regional cooperation and enhances the employability of graduates. Despite its significance, the uptake of French as a second language in educational institutions, especially in Colleges of Education, remains a subject of concern. The primary reason often cited for this limited enthusiasm is the varying levels of motivation and attitudes that students exhibit toward learning the language. Understanding the motivational factors influencing language learners is crucial for developing strategies that can enhance the effectiveness of French language instruction in Colleges of Education.

Investigating the motivation and attitudes of students in a College of Education towards learning French is critical for several reasons. Motivation plays a central role in language acquisition (Gardner, 1985), and different types of motivation—intrinsic and extrinsic—can significantly affect learners' commitment, performance, and overall success in language learning. Colleges of Education, as institutions responsible for training future teachers, have a unique opportunity to shape educational outcomes by understanding the factors that influence language learning. Given the increasing emphasis on multilingualism and the need for teachers to be proficient in French for both academic and professional purposes (Akinmoladun, 2018), exploring how

motivation influences students' attitudes toward learning French can offer valuable insights into how best to engage and support them in their language learning journey (Chikaji et al., 2024). In particular, this study will focus on the students' intrinsic motivation, such as personal interest and enjoyment, as well as extrinsic motivation, such as perceived career benefits and societal expectations.

But while there is a substantial body of literature on motivation and attitudes towards language learning (Arciaga and Lucas, 2024; Inostroza *et al.*, 2024; Kamal *et al.*, 2024), most studies have focused on general language learning contexts or specific populations, such as secondary school students or university students in urban centres (Liao *et al.*, 2024; Ma *et al.*, 2024). There is a lack of research specifically addressing the motivational dynamics of students in Colleges of Education in Nigeria, particularly in the Northeast region, where cultural and regional factors may influence both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Ogundare and Olagoke, 2024). Also, while studies have examined the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in language learning (Howard and Oakes, 2024; Wannas and Alshaye, 2024), few have explored how these two types of motivation interact and influence attitudes towards learning French in Nigerian educational settings (Araromi, 2009; Umukoro and Ohanyere, 2020). This study aims to fill these gaps by examining the motivational factors at play in a College of Education in Northeast Nigeria and how these factors influence students' attitudes towards learning French. Specifically, the study aims to address the following research questions:

1. Does intrinsic motivation influence attitudes towards learning French among students in Colleges of Education?
2. Does extrinsic motivation influence attitudes towards learning French among students in Colleges of Education?

## Literature Review

### *Theoretical framework*

Motivation theories provide a foundational understanding of how students engage with and persist in learning activities (Chikaji et al., 2024). Two widely discussed theories relevant to language learning are Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Expectancy-Value Theory. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), posits that motivation exists on a continuum ranging from intrinsic motivation (doing an activity for its inherent satisfaction) to extrinsic motivation (doing an activity for external rewards or recognition). According to SDT, the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—fosters intrinsic motivation, which is essential for long-term engagement and learning (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In the context of language learning, students who experience autonomy (control over their learning), competence (feeling skilled in the language), and relatedness (connecting with others through language) are more likely to have positive attitudes and better outcomes in acquiring a second language such as French.

Expectancy-Value Theory, developed by Eccles *et al.* (1983), asserts that individuals' motivation is determined by their expectations for success and the value they place on the task. When applied to language learning, students' motivation to learn French is shaped by their perceived ability to succeed (expectancy) and the importance they attribute to learning French (value). Students who perceive French as useful for career advancement or cultural exploration are more likely to be motivated and have positive attitudes towards the language (Schunk, Pintrich, and Meece, 2008).

Both theories highlight the critical role of motivation in second language learning, suggesting that intrinsic motivation fosters deeper engagement, while extrinsic motivation can still encourage students to learn if the value placed on the language is significant enough.

### ***Motivation in Language Learning***

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between motivation and second language acquisition, with a particular focus on French as a foreign language. Intrinsic motivation, which arises from personal enjoyment or interest in the language, is often linked to higher levels of proficiency and persistence in language learning (Dörnyei, 2001). For example, a study by Lafford (2007) found that students with high intrinsic motivation showed a greater desire to communicate in French and engaged more actively in classroom activities (Chikaji et al., 2024). These students were motivated by the enjoyment of the language itself, rather than external rewards.

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation has also been shown to play a significant role, particularly in regions where learning a second language is driven by external factors such as career advancement or societal expectations. In a study by Noels, Clément, and Pelletier (2001), students motivated by extrinsic factors such as job prospects in Francophone countries or the perceived economic benefits of French proficiency showed positive attitudes towards learning French, even though their intrinsic interest in the language was low. In the context of Nigeria, French is often viewed as a valuable skill for students aiming for international careers or governmental roles, particularly within the West African region, where French-speaking countries are prevalent (Akinmoladun, 2018).

### ***Attitudes towards Language Learning***

Attitudes towards language learning are crucial in determining students' success in acquiring a second language (Gardner, 1985). Positive attitudes towards learning French have been linked to higher motivation, engagement, and language proficiency (MacIntyre, 1999). According to Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, students' attitudes towards a language are influenced by their integration into the cultural and social aspects of the language community. Students who have favourable attitudes towards French-speaking cultures are more likely to engage with the language and succeed in learning it.

However, negative attitudes, such as viewing French as irrelevant or difficult, can hinder language learning (Gardner, 2001). A study by Chen (2012) showed that negative attitudes toward learning French could significantly lower students' motivation, leading to a lack of effort and poor academic performance in French courses. This highlights the importance of cultivating positive attitudes towards French, which can, in turn, enhance motivation and improve language learning outcomes.

In Nigerian Colleges of Education, students' attitudes toward learning French may be shaped by their perceptions of the language's practical utility, cultural relevance, and personal interest. However, regional differences in attitudes exist, with students in the Northeast of Nigeria often perceiving French as less directly applicable to their local context compared to other regions with stronger international links (Olabode and Adewumi, 2020).

### ***Factors Influencing Motivation and Attitudes***

Several factors influence students' motivation and attitudes towards learning French, including institutional support, prior exposure to the language, and societal or career-related influences.

1. **Institutional Support:** Research has shown that institutional support, including access to qualified teachers, learning resources, and a conducive environment, significantly impacts students' motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In Colleges of Education, where French is often taught as part of the curriculum for prospective educators, the quality of teaching (Salisu *et al.*, 2016) and available resources can either foster or diminish students' motivation.
2. **Prior Exposure to the Language:** Students with previous exposure to French, whether through formal education or personal experiences, tend to have higher intrinsic motivation and more positive attitudes (Vallerand, 1997). In contrast, students who have had limited exposure may view French as a difficult and inaccessible language, leading to lower motivation and negative attitudes (Chung, 2014).

3. Societal and Career-Related Influences: In many African contexts, including Nigeria, language learning is often motivated by career opportunities. French is considered an essential skill for students aspiring to work in international organisations, government agencies, and multinational corporations (Olabode and Adewumi, 2020). Extrinsic motivation linked to these career aspirations often shapes students' attitudes, with those who see the language as a valuable asset showing higher levels of engagement and commitment to learning.

### ***Development of Hypotheses***

Intrinsic motivation, rooted in SDT, emphasises doing an activity for its inherent satisfaction, such as personal enjoyment or intellectual curiosity (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In language learning, intrinsic motivation is critical because it fosters deep engagement and persistence. When students find learning French enjoyable or stimulating, their attitudes towards the language improve. For example, if a student enjoys exploring French culture or finds pleasure in mastering its phonetics, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness—core elements of intrinsic motivation—play pivotal roles in this process (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students who feel autonomous in choosing their methods of learning French, competent in their ability to speak the language, or connected to Francophone cultures exhibit stronger intrinsic motivation and, consequently, more positive attitudes. This, it is hypothesised as follows:

*Hypothesis 1: Intrinsic motivation significantly influences students' attitudes towards learning French.*

Extrinsic motivation, as conceptualised by SDT and expanded upon in Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles et al., 1983), involves engaging in a task to achieve external rewards or recognition. In the context of learning French, students may be motivated extrinsically by factors such as career opportunities, passing exams, or fulfilling institutional requirements. While extrinsic motivation might not foster the same depth of engagement as intrinsic motivation, it can still shape attitudes positively, particularly if students value French for pragmatic reasons (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). For instance, students who associate French proficiency with potential careers in international organisations or as French teachers may exhibit favourable attitudes towards learning the language. Accordingly, this study hypothesises as follows:

*Hypothesis 2: Extrinsic motivation significantly influences students' attitudes towards learning French.*

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are essential and often interact in shaping attitudes. Intrinsic motivation leads to more sustainable engagement, while extrinsic motivation provides the initial impetus, especially when the perceived utility of the language is high. Together, these motivational dimensions align with the argument that they significantly influence students' attitudes towards learning French at a College of Education in Northeast Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This study employs a survey-based, cross-sectional research design to investigate the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on students' attitudes towards learning French in a College of Education in Northeast Nigeria. A survey-based approach is suitable for capturing a snapshot of students' motivation and attitudes within a specific time frame. The cross-sectional design allows for the collection of data at one point in time, facilitating the exploration of relationships between the independent variables (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation) and the dependent variable (attitudes towards learning French) among a sample of students.

### ***Population and Sample***

The target population for this study consists of students enrolled in the College of Education situated in Northeast Nigeria. These students are pursuing education-related degrees and are required to take French as part of their curriculum. The choice of this population is based on the importance of understanding their

motivation and attitudes toward French, a second language that plays a significant role in Nigeria's educational system and international relations (Fabiya *et al.*, 2016).

The sampling strategy employed is purposive sampling, which is particularly appropriate when specific characteristics are required from participants. In this case, purposive sampling ensures that only students who are enrolled in French language courses in the College of Education are included. This targeted approach allows for a more in-depth understanding of the specific factors influencing their attitudes toward French learning.

A sample size of 95 students was selected for the study. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), this sample size is appropriate for the study's statistical analysis, ensuring adequate power for detecting significant relationships between the variables. It is also substantial within the context of available target students, thereby providing a representative snapshot of the student body enrolled in French courses.

### ***Data Collection Instrument and Pilot Reliability Results***

**Intrinsic Motivation:** This variable was measured using statements that assess the internal drive to learn French for its own sake, such as enjoying the language, personal interest, and satisfaction derived from learning French. Students rated their agreement with statements on a 5-point scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree).

**Extrinsic Motivation:** This variable was evaluated based on external factors influencing students' motivation, such as career prospects, societal pressure, and the perceived economic value of learning French. A 5-point Likert scale was used to rate the importance of these external motivators.

**Attitudes towards Learning French:** This construct assessed students' general attitudes towards learning French, including their perceptions of its relevance, difficulty, and personal value. A 5-point Likert scale was employed, with items measuring both positive and negative attitudes towards the language.

The pilot reliability results for the three measurement instruments indicated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.89 for intrinsic motivation, 0.85 for extrinsic motivation, and 0.91 for attitudes towards learning French, all of which exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Cronbach, 1951).

### ***Study Variables***

The study focuses on three key variables. Intrinsic Motivation is defined as the internal drive that motivates students to engage in language learning for the inherent satisfaction, enjoyment, and personal interest it brings. It will be measured by items that capture students' personal enjoyment, interest, and the perceived intrinsic value of learning French. Extrinsic Motivation refers to the external factors or rewards that influence students to learn French, such as the language's relevance to career opportunities or societal expectations. It will be measured by items that assess the perceived economic benefits and social recognition associated with learning French. Attitudes towards Learning French is defined as students' overall feelings and evaluations towards learning French, which can be either positive or negative. It encompasses their views on the language's usefulness, the perceived difficulty of learning it, and the personal benefits derived from mastering French. The attitudes will be measured by Likert-scale items that assess both favourable and unfavourable opinions about French.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data were analysed using the JASP software. Descriptive statistics was used to summarise the demographic information of the participants and provide an overview of the central tendencies and variability of the motivation and attitude variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient will be used to examine the strength and direction of the relationships between intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and attitudes towards learning French. This will help to determine if there is a significant association between the independent variables and the dependent variable. finally, multiple regression analysis will be conducted to assess the predictive power

of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on students' attitudes towards learning French. This will allow the researcher to determine the extent to which intrinsic and extrinsic motivation contribute to the variation in students' attitudes towards the language.

## Results

### *Response Rate*

The survey targeted 95 students from a College of Education in Northeast Nigeria, of which 83 students returned valid and complete questionnaires. This resulted in a response rate of 87.4%, which is deemed satisfactory for survey research (Baruch and Holtom, 2008). The high response rate reflects the respondents' interest in the study and the effectiveness of the data collection process.

### *Demographic Profile*

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarised in Table 1. Of the 83 respondents, 45 (54.2%) were female, and 38 (45.8%) were male. The majority of participants were aged 18–24 years (71.1%), followed by those aged 25–30 years (22.9%), and only 6.0% were over 30 years old. Regarding academic levels, 53.0% were in their second year, while 47.0% were in their third year. These demographics align with the typical student population in Colleges of Education in Nigeria, supporting the study's representativeness.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	38	45.8%
	Female	45	54.2%
Age Group	18–24 years	59	71.1%
	25–30 years	19	22.9%
	Above 30 years	5	6%
Academic Level	Second Year	44	53%
	Third Year	39	47%

### *Descriptives*

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the key study variables. The mean score for intrinsic motivation was 3.84 (SD = 0.72), indicating that most students were moderately to highly motivated by internal factors. The mean score for extrinsic motivation was slightly lower at 3.67 (SD = 0.81), suggesting that external incentives also play an important but slightly less dominant role in motivating students. The mean score for attitudes towards learning French was 4.02 (SD = 0.68), showing a generally positive attitude among students towards learning French.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Intrinsic Motivation	3.84	0.72	2.1	5
Extrinsic Motivation	3.67	0.81	1.9	5
Attitude towards Learning French	4.02	0.68	2.3	5

### *Correlation Analysis*

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationships between intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and attitudes towards learning French. The results, presented in Table 3, indicate a significant positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and attitudes towards learning French,  $r(81) = .54$ ,  $p < .001$ , suggesting that higher levels of intrinsic motivation are associated with more positive attitudes.

Similarly, extrinsic motivation was significantly positively correlated with attitudes,  $r(81) = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that external factors also contribute to favourable attitudes towards French learning.

**Table 3.** Correlations Between Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Intrinsic Motivation	1		
2. Extrinsic Motivation	0.38**	1	
3. Attitude towards Learning French	0.54**	0.42**	1

Note:  $p < .001$

### Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive power of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on students' attitudes towards learning French. The results of the regression analysis, summarised in Table 4, was statistically significant,  $F(2, 80) = 34.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.45, indicating that the model explained 45% of the variance in students' attitudes towards learning French. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were significant predictors of attitudes.

**Table 4.** Model Summary

Model	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	F	df1	df2	p-value
1	0.45	0.45	34.21	2	80	< .001

As shown in Table 5, intrinsic motivation ( $U\beta = 0.52$ ,  $\beta = 0.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was a significant positive predictor of students' attitudes towards learning French, indicating that higher levels of intrinsic motivation are associated with more positive attitudes. Extrinsic motivation ( $U\beta = 0.35$ ,  $\beta = 0.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ) also significantly predicted students' attitudes, though to a lesser extent compared to intrinsic motivation. The constant term ( $U\beta = 2.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ) represents the baseline attitude score when both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are zero. These findings confirm that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations play a substantial role in shaping students' attitudes towards learning French, with intrinsic motivation having the stronger impact.

**Table 5.** Regression Analysis

Predictor	$U\beta$	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Intrinsic Motivation	0.52	0.10	0.46	5.29	< .001
Extrinsic Motivation	0.35	0.09	0.33	3.84	< .001
Constant	2.12	0.27		7.88	< .001

Note:  $\beta$  = Standardized Coefficients.  $U\beta$  = Unstandardized Coefficients

### Discussions

The study provided compelling evidence that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations significantly influence students' attitudes towards learning French, with intrinsic motivation emerging as the stronger predictor ( $\beta = 0.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Extrinsic motivation, while also significant ( $\beta = 0.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ), demonstrated a comparatively smaller effect. These findings resonate with Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985), which posits that intrinsic motivation—driven by interest, enjoyment, and personal satisfaction—is a powerful determinant of positive learning outcomes. The adjusted  $R^2$  of .45 indicates that nearly half of the variance in students' attitudes can be explained by the combined effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, underscoring the critical role of motivation in shaping students' dispositions toward French language learning.

The stronger influence of intrinsic motivation highlights its importance in fostering sustained engagement and favourable attitudes. This finding aligns with previous research by Noels *et al.* (2003), which identified

intrinsic motivation as a key determinant of language learning success, and with Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, which emphasises the central role of attitudes in predicting learning outcomes. Similarly, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) found that intrinsically motivated students tend to exhibit greater resilience and enthusiasm in learning a second language. In contrast, while extrinsic motivation (e.g., career opportunities, societal expectations) plays a secondary but significant role, it may not inspire the same depth of commitment as intrinsic factors.

This study adds a unique perspective by situating the findings within the socio-political and economic realities of a College of Education in Northeast Nigeria. Factors such as limited exposure to French and the focus on career advancement in a challenging job market influence students' motivations and attitudes toward language learning. The findings provide a contextual understanding of motivation and attitudes in this specific setting, offering valuable insights into how intrinsic and extrinsic factors interact to shape language learning experiences. As the country aims to strengthen its bilingual capabilities, fostering a positive attitude among future educators is crucial. Motivated and engaged teachers are likely to inspire their future students, thereby contributing to the broader adoption and mastery of French in Nigeria. Beyond academic outcomes, learning French equips students with a valuable skill set that enhances cultural awareness, cognitive abilities, and career prospects.

## Conclusions

The findings of the study have important implications for enhancing language learning outcomes in Colleges of Education, particularly in fostering motivation to learn French. Given the strong impact of intrinsic motivation, educators should prioritise strategies that cultivate students' internal drive. For instance, integrating culturally relevant and engaging content into lessons can make the learning process more meaningful and enjoyable. Interactive, student-centred approaches, such as role-playing activities, debates, and multimedia resources, can further enhance intrinsic motivation by creating dynamic and engaging learning experiences (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Additionally, authentic communication opportunities—such as language immersion activities or collaborations with native speakers—may deepen students' connection to the language and sustain their intrinsic interest.

While intrinsic motivation is central, extrinsic motivation remains significant and should also be addressed. Career counselling initiatives that emphasise the professional advantages of bilingualism or French proficiency—such as opportunities in diplomacy, education, and international business—can enhance students' perception of the external value of mastering French. Aligning the curriculum with regional and national language policies, including Nigeria's recognition of French as a second official language, can further reinforce its importance. Policymakers and institutional leaders can also play a role by providing adequate support, such as scholarships, recognition programmes, and structured career pathways linked to French proficiency. Together, these strategies can create a balanced approach to motivation that supports both personal and practical incentives for learning the language.

Despite its practical contributions, the study has several limitations. The use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between motivation and attitudes. Additionally, the sample size of 83 students, while adequate for statistical analysis, may not fully represent the broader population of Colleges of Education in Nigeria, particularly given the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds across the country. The reliance on self-reported data also introduces the potential for response bias, as students may have overstated their motivations or attitudes.

Future studies could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs to track changes in motivation and attitudes over time. Exploring the role of specific teaching strategies, such as gamification or technology-enhanced learning, could provide actionable insights for educators. Additionally, comparative studies involving multiple institutions across Nigeria would enhance the generalisability of findings. Finally,



examining the impact of learning environments, including institutional support and access to French-speaking communities, could uncover additional factors influencing motivation and attitudes.

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