

BMAS TO CCMAS : IMPLICATIONS FOR FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This article looks at the French language as a General Studies (GS) Course in Nigerian Universities through the National Universities Commission's (NUC) Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) curriculum. This was aimed at promoting a bilingual culture. This bilingual ideology was driven by two major factors: the fact that Nigeria is surrounded by French speaking countries, and that learning a second foreign language better equips students to face the challenges of a highly competitive world. The sudden removal of French Language as a GS course in the new NUC's Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) became worrisome. Many questions arose because of this, hence, this study. In order to answer these questions, we resorted to the use of mixed method research. Forty-six (46) questions were generated and responded to across private, state and federal universities, cutting across all cadres of lecturers, from Assistant lecturers to professors. The institutions were spread across Central Nigeria, to the South-West, South-East

and South-South. The results show the implications of the removal of French Language learning as a GS course in the CCMAS. There are far reaching implications as it also affects mass unemployment of staff.

Keywords: Bilingual, BMAS, CCMAS, French, General Studies, NUC

Introduction

In December 1996, the late Head of State, General Sani Abacha announced the launching of the national language training in French that would make the country bilingual. This was because the Nigerian government saw the need for Nigerians to learn and speak a language that was spoken by most of her neighbouring countries. This became a springboard to enacting a national policy on education (1998, Section 1, No 10) (Ezeodili & Ezeafulukwe: 2016). This led to the introduction of French as a compulsory General Studies (GS) Course in Nigerian Universities by the NUC's Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS). The CCMAS contains 17 disciplines, which is an expansion from the 12/13 disciplines contained in BMAS.

By the enactment of NUC Act No. E3 L.F.N. 2004, the NUC developed the first set of Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) in 1989 for all the academic programmes existing in the Nigerian University System (NUS) at that time under the 13 major disciplines of Administration, Agriculture, Arts, Education, Engineering and Technology, Environmental Sciences, Law, Medicine and Dentistry, Management Sciences, Pharmaceutical Science, Science, Social Sciences and Veterinary Medicine. The Minimum Academic Standard served as the reference documents for the first accreditation of programmes conducted in NUS in 1990. The Minimum Academic Standard (MAS) gave way to BMAS. By implication, all undergraduates in Nigerian Universities were required to pass the French Language Course before graduation. The National Universities Commission (NUC) is the national university regulatory body in Nigeria.

Students are required to take the French Language as a GS Course in order to acquire a basic working knowledge of the French Language. Although there are lots of challenges associated with the learning of a second foreign language, research has shown that its benefits far outweigh its challenges (Omonkhua, 2017). The sudden shift by the NUC from BMAS to CCMAS and the removal of French Language as a GS Course has created a fracture in the national policy of education's intention to promote French Language learning. Removing a language that has given most Nigerian graduates the confidence to compete with their counterparts in other countries will be counterproductive, not only to the students, but to the nation at large (Cuq & Gruca: 2003). If teachers are to prepare students for the challenges of the global world, it is imperative that they expose students to skills that will enhance their competence and professional advantage in their various fields of endeavours (Frantz: 1996) especially as all neighbouring countries are French speaking.

The procedure for introducing a new programme in the university begins from the Department while involving students for onward transmission to the Faculty Board that has the prerogative to send it to the Academic Planning and Curriculum Development before finally sending it to the university Senate for final approval.

However, the article is concentrating its attention to French language learning in Nigerian universities.

Problem Statement/Justification

After twenty-five years of operating a system that incorporates French Language learning in Nigerian Universities, the CCMAS, which is the NUC's new curriculum for Universities, has removed French Language as a General Studies Course. What informs this removal? Why was French removed? What is the implication of this? How does this affect the bilingual ideology of the national policy on education? What happens to the human capital and infrastructure that has been put in place over the years to implement French Language learning as a GS course? Are there alternative scenarios to the present CCMAS position that could present better outcomes for French Language learning? These are the burning questions that require urgent answers as NUC has succeeded in enforcing the CCMAS on most of the Nigerian universities. This study therefore explored the implication on French Language learning using qualitative and quantitative data from stakeholders.

Objective(s) of Study

The main goal of this study is to assess the implication of the removal of French Language as a General Studies Course by the NUC's CCMAS from stakeholders' point of view.

The specific objectives are:

- To assess the effect of NUC's CCMAS on the bilingual ideology of the national policy on education
- To assess the perception of stakeholders on the effect of NUC's CCMAS on the established human capital and infrastructure for French Language learning as a general course
- To explore alternative ideas that can preserve the learning of French Language in Nigeria

Literature review

A lot of research has been carried out in the field of second language acquisition/learning. These studies have shown the immense benefits that could be derived from learning a foreign language (Aire: 2017). Nigeria, apart from the Atlantic Ocean on its southern border, is surrounded by countries that are partially or totally Francophone. This has made the teaching of the French language a necessity for Nigerians (Tidjani-Serpos: 2013). According to Emordi (2000: 118), Nigeria was the first country to introduce the teaching of French in Anglophone Africa; this has given her an edge over other English speaking African countries. The studies of Osawaru and Osawaru (2022), and Frantz (1996) etc., have been of enormous value in terms of promoting the study of French in Nigeria. Mokwenye in his article "French in Nigeria for International Relations: Our role as University French Teacher" spoke on the importance of the French Language in fostering international relations with our neighbours. Ajah (2025) specifically did an appraisal of Benchmark and Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) B.A. French Programme having over 40% literature-oriented courses. He equally complained of the same predominance in the CCMAS. These studies and many others demonstrate the fact that French Language learning is indispensable to the educational, socio-economic, and political development of Nigeria and Nigerians. This research intends to demonstrate, from stakeholders' point of view, the effect of the sudden removal of French Language as a GS course from Nigerian Universities by the NUC's CCMAS.

Methodology

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve its objectives. Questionnaires were designed by the research team in conjunction with experts to assess stakeholders' views on the NUC's CCMAS and how it affects French Language learning. These questionnaires contain sections that explore:

- the implication of the NUC's CCMAS on the bilingual drive of the national policy on education
- the implication of the NUC's CCMAS on the established human capital and infrastructure for French Language learning as a GS course
- alternative ideas that can preserve the learning of French Language as a GS course

In order to obtain more in-depth information from stakeholders, Key Informant Interview (KII) guides was developed to elicit more information according to the objectives of the study.

Stakeholders, including French Language teachers from at least one public and one private university, French Language experts/desk officers from the NUC, Faculty and administrative staff of the French Language Village, Badagry served as key interview informants. The questionnaires were distributed to university teachers and students from at least two institutions where French Language was taught as a GS Course.

Collection of Data

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from stakeholders as indicated above. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically but this study has not included the analysis of the interviews due to some technical reasons. Quantitative data were collated and presented as percentages.

Statistical analysis

Qualitative data were analysed thematically while quantitative data were analysed by SPSS, version 26 and results presented as percentages. Figures 1 to 12 show the questions and responses of respondents and their percentage analyses.



Do you have a French language department in your Institution?

46 responses

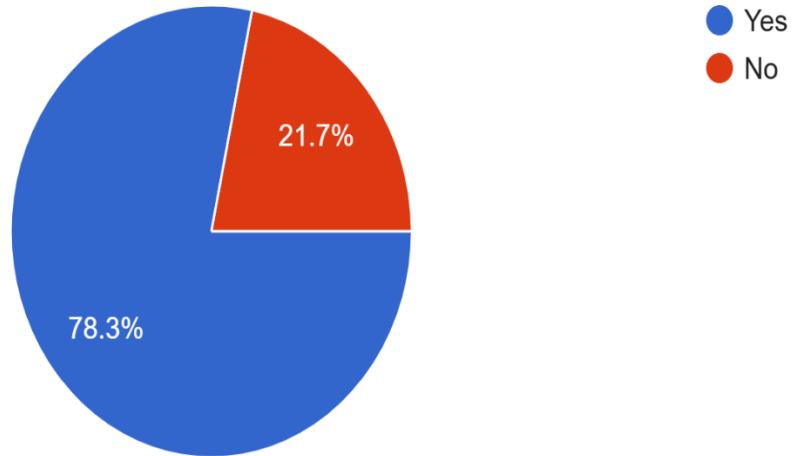


FIGURE 1

Is the French Language General Studies Course taught in your Institution?

46 responses

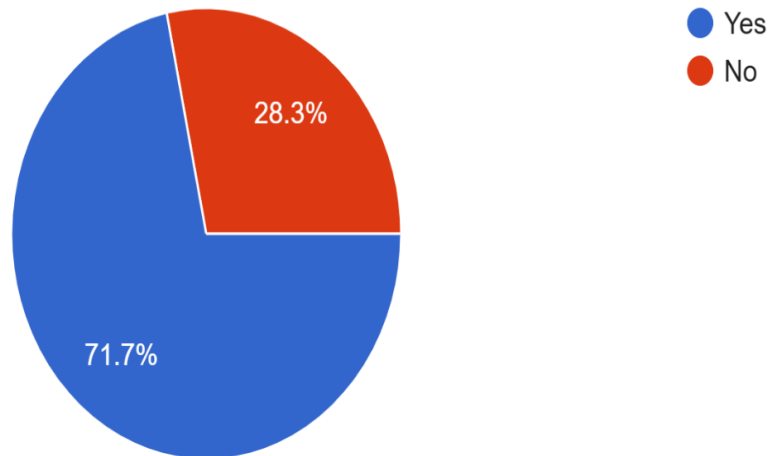


FIGURE 2



Is the French Language General Studies Course domiciled in the General Studies Unit?

46 responses

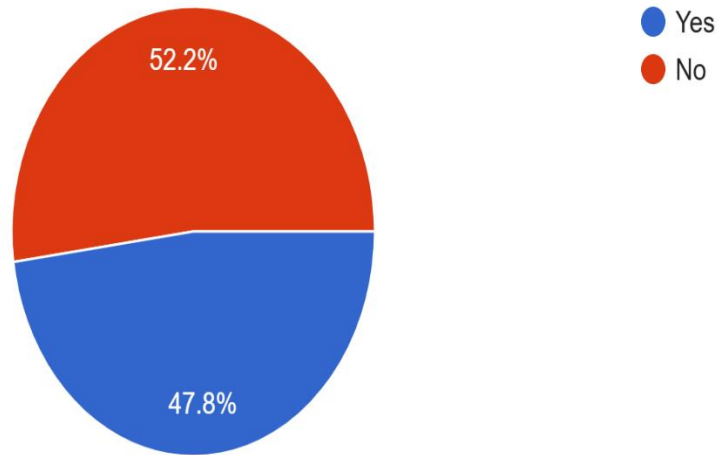


FIGURE 3

Is the French Language General Studies Course domiciled in the language department?

46 responses

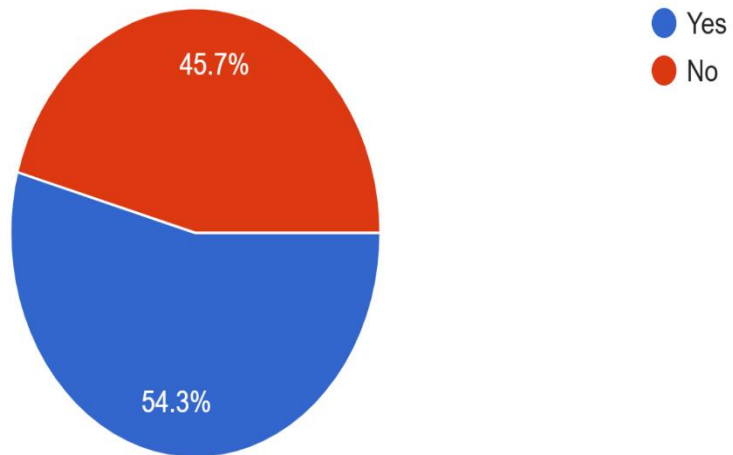


FIGURE 4



Do you think the human infrastructure in your Institution is adequate to teach the French Language General Studies Course?

46 responses

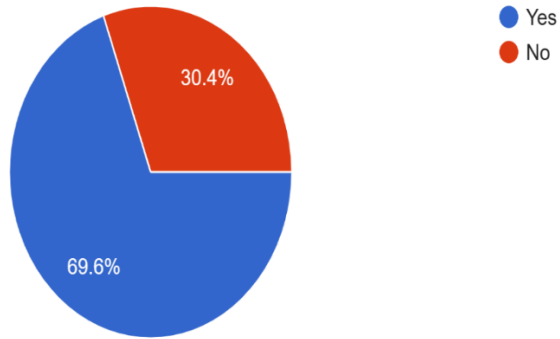


FIGURE 5

Do you think the capital infrastructure (facilities, equipment and library resources) in your Institution is adequate to teach the French Language General Studies Course?

46 responses

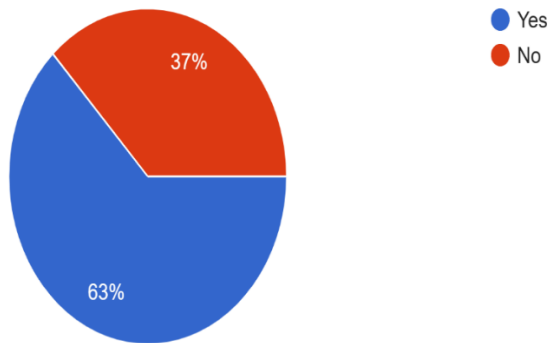


FIGURE 6

As a result of the geographical location of Nigeria do you think learning the French Language is relevant to Nigerians?

46 responses

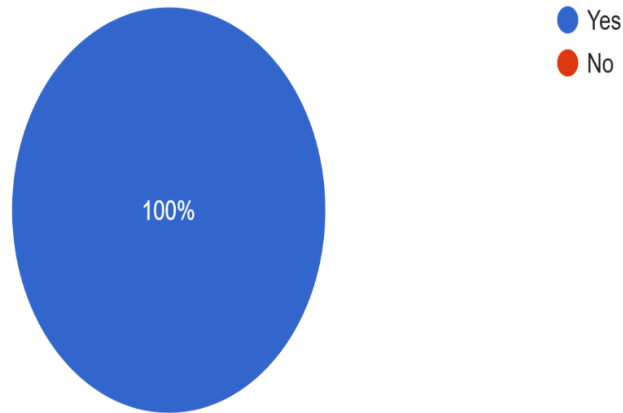


FIGURE 7

Do you agree that the learning of French Language is fundamental to the success of any inter-regional accord in Africa?

46 responses

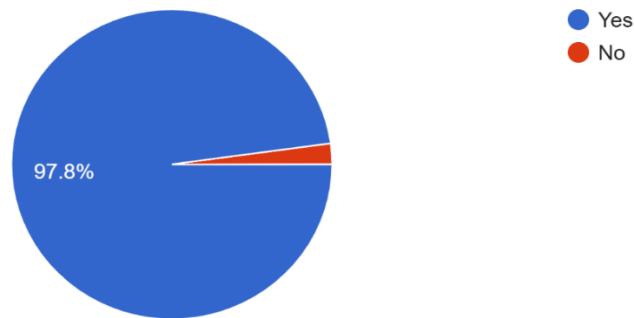


FIGURE 8



Is the NUC's removal of the French Language as a General Studies Course a welcomed development?

46 responses

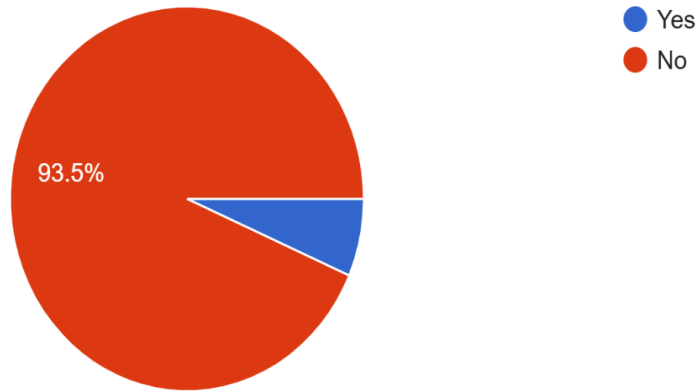


FIGURE 9

Nigeria as a member of the PARIS CLUB; should the learning of the French language be encouraged among her citizens?

46 responses

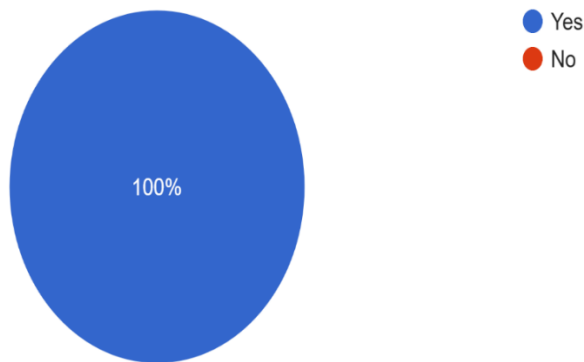


FIGURE 10



At what year of study are students required to take French language General Studies Course?

46 responses

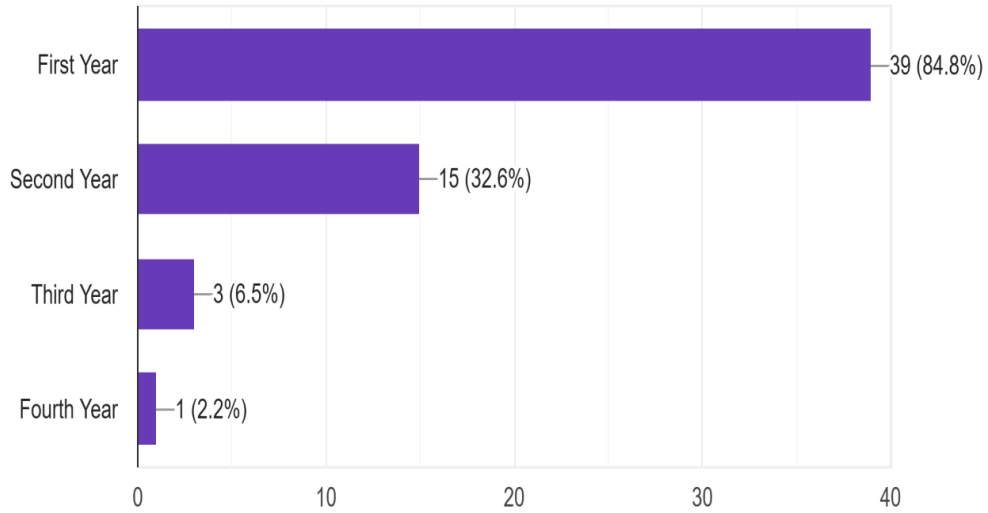


FIGURE 11

How many departments take the French Language General Studies Course?

46 responses

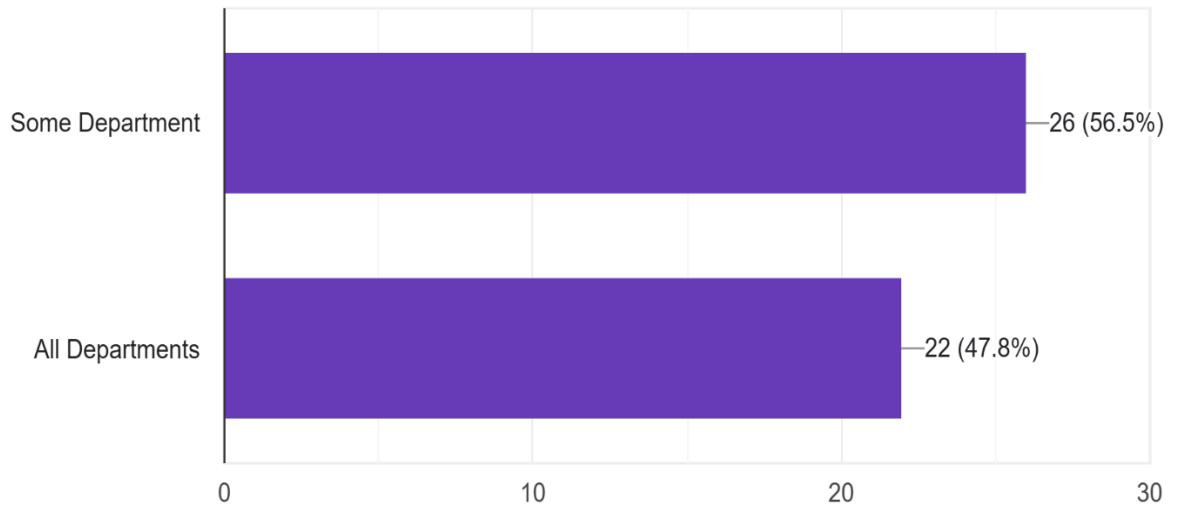


FIGURE 12

Results (Expected outputs/Results)

The outcomes of this study show the perception of the stakeholders on the effect of NUC's CCMAS on French Language learning, and how it affects the human and infrastructural capacities already put in place. Without necessarily trying to repeat the results of the analysis, it is evident from the percentages that the decision to remove the French language learning from the curriculum did not augur well for both students and teachers. French as a GS course was actually meant to be taken at the first year or second year as the case may be and it was a growing trend in most universities as preparations were also under way for all the departments to include it. It was already a major development as it was either domiciled in Foreign Languages/Modern European Languages or in the General Studies Department. Its sudden removal, though, may look harmless at the beginning, has far reaching implications on the citizenry as they navigate the global terrain, which has become a global village. Departments and universities that had made adequate preparations for its commencement abruptly had to stop. It was a major hiccup in the university system.

However, we could not fold our arms as the professional body (University French Teachers' Association of Nigeria – UFTAN), led by its President, Professor Mufutau Tijani and the Executive Council, paid a courtesy call on the NUC Executive Secretary but were told that NUC could not reverse it. The removal of French language from the list of General Studies courses is a major challenge. The one hundred percent given to the relevance of French as a result of its Francophone neighbours is worth examining and shows its relevance and importance in the scheme of geographical and economic significance.

We proffer alternative positions that can preserve the ideal of having a bilingual Nigeria especially as it is surrounded by Francophone countries. Nothing stops Nigeria from offering to its citizens a global view as it is equally done in the Francophone Africa, where English language is compulsory in their institutions of higher learning. A typical example is the current President of Burkina Faso, Captain Ibrahim Traore, who expresses himself fluently in both French and English.

Conclusion

The current impasse in Nigeria and the confusion on the acceptability of the CCMAS, and its practical implementation, as highlighted by many professional bodies that think that the autonomy of the university system is being impeded upon, has however left the Nigerian University System in a somewhat state of confusion. Suffice it to say at this juncture that many universities have been forced to implement the CCMAS against their will, the resultant effect is mass unemployment leading to massive brain drain. Is it a calculated attempt to destabilise the educational system in the country? The massive unemployment is not only a national issue but a global one (see Ajah, 2025), who complained of a surge of unemployment. Nigerian stakeholders, who are able to express themselves in the world acclaimed two most widely spoken international languages in question, is an advantage to the citizens if well catered for linguistically.

Recommendations

1. Reintroduce French as a General Studies course in Nigerian universities at the first year to enable Nigerian graduates to be at par with their Francophone counterparts using French for Specific Purposes (FOS).
2. Organise more workshops and refresher courses/programmes for French teachers
3. Encourage French teachers with incentives in order to reduce unemployment.

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