

REVIEW ARTICLE

Motivation for Learning French as a Foreign Language Among Ghanaian University Students: A Situational Analysis of All Nations University

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ABSTRACT

This study examined motivation to learn French as a foreign language among Ghanaian university students at All Nations University. Drawing on Gardner's socio-educational model, Self-Determination Theory and behaviorist perspectives, the study investigated students' interest, perceived usefulness, confidence, social influences and willingness to continue learning French. A descriptive quantitative survey design was adopted, using a structured questionnaire administered to 50 undergraduate students from the School of Business. Data were analysed using frequencies and percentages. The findings revealed generally low intrinsic motivation, despite moderate recognition of French's professional value. While 50% of respondents believed that French could improve their employment prospects, only 36% reported being motivated to learn it, and 60% indicated that they would not study French if it were not compulsory. Social encouragement was also limited, with 64% reporting no support from family or friends, and 50% lacking confidence in their ability to learn French. The findings suggest a gap between students' recognition of French's instrumental value and their willingness to engage autonomously with the language. The study concludes that compulsory provision alone is unlikely to sustain motivation and recommends more learner centred, professionally relevant and communicative approaches to French education in Ghanaian universities.

Keywords: Motivation; Interest; French language; Students; ANU

INTRODUCTION

Foreign language competence increasingly supports international mobility, professional development and intercultural communication. In West Africa, French has particular strategic importance because Francophone countries surround Ghana and participate in regional organisations requiring interaction across linguistic boundaries^[1,2].

Despite this importance, French learning in Ghana continues to face pedagogical and motivational challenges. Studies report persistent difficulties in oral communica-

tion, limited fluency and insufficient opportunities for meaningful language use^[3,4]. Motivation is therefore important because it influences learners' engagement, persistence and willingness to invest effort in language learning^[5,6].

Gardner's^[7] socio-educational model distinguishes between instrumental motivation, driven by practical benefits such as employment, and integrative motivation, associated with interest in the language and its community. Self-Determination Theory further emphasises autonomy, competence and relatedness as conditions for sustained motivation^[8]. These perspectives are particularly relevant where students may recognise the profes-

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sional value of French yet lack a strong personal commitment to learning it.

All Nations University provides a useful context for examining this tension. Its business students encounter French within a professional environment where the language could support careers in business, diplomacy, tourism and regional commerce. However, whether perceived usefulness translates into sustained motivation remains insufficiently understood.

Although Ghanaian research has examined linguistic difficulties, teaching challenges and learner behaviour^[2,9], comparatively limited attention has been given to the motivational orientations of university students studying French outside specialised language programmes. This study therefore examines students' interest, perceived usefulness of French, confidence, social influences and willingness to continue learning beyond compulsory academic requirements at All Nations University.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Motivation In Foreign Language Learning

Motivation strongly influences learners' willingness to initiate, sustain and regulate engagement in foreign language learning^[5]. It is shaped by cognitive, emotional, social and contextual factors, meaning that students may recognise the usefulness of French while remaining weakly committed to learning it^[6]. In Ghana, limited exposure to French beyond formal instruction may further affect confidence, oral practice and engagement^[3,4].

Gardner's socio-educational model

Gardner's^[7] socio-educational model distinguishes between **integrative** and **instrumental** orientations. Integrative motivation involves interest in the target language, culture and community, whereas instrumental motivation arises from practical goals such as employment, academic advancement and professional communication. This distinction is relevant in Ghana, where students may view French primarily as a professional resource within an Anglophone environment. Chachu^[2] shows that English strongly shapes Ghanaian learners' French practices, potentially limiting deeper engagement with the target language.

The distinction also helps explain why students may recognise French's professional value while showing limited enthusiasm for learning it. The present study therefore examines whether motivation among All Nations University students is primarily professional, personal or externally imposed.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) shifts attention from the amount of motivation to its quality^[8,10]. It identifies three psychological needs underlying sustained engagement: **autonomy**, or feeling that learning is personally chosen; **competence**, or confidence in one's ability; and **relatedness**, or a sense of social connection.

This framework is particularly relevant where French is compulsory. External requirements may encourage participation without fostering commitment or independent learning. Ghanaian research similarly indicates that difficulties with oral performance can undermine learners' confidence and willingness to engage^[9,4]. SDT therefore allows motivation to be examined not simply as present or absent, but by its sources and quality.

Behaviourist perspectives

Behaviourism offers a complementary account of externally regulated learning. Skinner^[11] argues that behaviour is shaped by reinforcement and environmental consequences. In compulsory language programmes, students may learn French because it contributes to academic progression or because institutional requirements encourage compliance.

However, external reinforcement may initiate participation without producing sustained commitment. This limitation makes behaviourism insufficient on its own to explain continued engagement. Ghanaian French education has also faced methodological, resource and institutional challenges that shape students' learning experiences^[12]. Behaviourism is therefore useful for explaining external regulation but needs to be complemented by cognitive and social perspectives.

Empirical evidence and research gap

Research on French learning in Ghana has largely examined teaching challenges, oral difficulties and learner behaviour rather than motivation itself. Limited exposure and weak opportunities for communication affect engagement^[3], while English dominance influences French production^[2]. Yet less is known about students outside specialised French programmes, particularly those in professional fields who may approach French primarily through employability and career advancement.

This study addresses this gap by examining motivation towards French among students at All Nations University. It focuses on how **professional aspirations, compulsory study, confidence and social influences** shape engagement with French in a Ghanaian business education context.

METHODOLOGY

Research design and approach

This study adopted a **descriptive quantitative survey design** to examine factors influencing motivation towards learning French as a foreign language among university students at All Nations University (ANU), Ghana. A survey design was considered appropriate because the study sought to identify students' perceptions, attitudes, interests and motivational orientations rather than manipulate variables or establish causal relationships. According to Creswell and Creswell^[13], quantitative survey approaches are suitable when researchers aim to describe patterns, examine relationships among variables and obtain information from a defined population through structured instruments.

The study was guided by the understanding that foreign language motivation is a multidimensional construct influenced by personal, social and educational factors. Therefore, the questionnaire focused on dimensions emerging from the theoretical framework, including interest in French, perceived usefulness, willingness to continue learning, confidence, social encouragement and institutional influences. These dimensions were informed by Gardner's^[7] socio-educational model, Deci and Ryan's^[8] Self-Determination Theory and behavioural perspectives on motivation.

Research context and participants

The study was conducted at All Nations University, Kororidua, Ghana. The university context was selected because French is offered to students within professional programmes where foreign language competence may provide potential academic and career advantages. The study focused particularly on students within the School of Business who were studying French as part of their academic programme.

The participants comprised 50 undergraduate students selected from different academic departments. The sample included students from Accounting, Banking and Finance, Human Resource Management, Business Administration and Entrepreneurship programmes. The demographic information collected included gender, age, programme of study and prior knowledge of French. This information provided contextual understanding of the participants' linguistic background and learning experiences.

A convenience sampling technique was employed because participants were selected from students who were accessible and enrolled in French courses during the period of data collection. While this approach facilitated access to the target population, it also limited the generalisability of the findings beyond the institutional

context. The results should therefore be interpreted as reflecting the motivational situation of students within ANU rather than all Ghanaian university students.

Data collection instrument

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed to examine students' motivation towards learning French. The questionnaire consisted of two major sections. The first section collected demographic information, including participants' gender, age, academic programme and previous exposure to French. The second section examined motivational factors related to French learning.

The questionnaire items focused on several dimensions:

Interest and enjoyment in learning French;

Perceived career and professional benefits;

Willingness to continue learning French;

Confidence in learning ability;

Influence of family and friends;

Perceptions of compulsory French learning.

Responses were collected using closed-ended questions, allowing the researcher to calculate frequencies and percentages. The structured format enabled systematic comparison of students' motivational patterns.

Data collection procedure

Before data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary. The researcher explained that responses would be treated confidentially and used only for academic purposes. Participants completed the questionnaire individually, and sufficient time was provided to ensure that questions were understood before submission.

The researcher ensured that the administration procedure was consistent for all participants to reduce procedural variation. Completed questionnaires were reviewed, organised and prepared for analysis.

Data analysis

The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistical procedures. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to identify patterns in students' responses regarding motivation, interest, confidence and perceived usefulness of French. The analysis focused on interpreting response distributions rather than establishing statistical relationships between variables.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 50)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	20	40
	Female	30	60
Age	Below 20	10	20
	20–25	25	50
	25–30	10	20
	Above 30	5	10
Academic programme	Accounting	15	30
	Banking and Finance	10	20
	Human Resource Management	10	20
	Entrepreneurship	10	20
	Business Administration	5	10
Previous knowledge of French	Yes	28	56
	No	22	44

Note: Percentages were calculated using the total number of respondents.

The findings were organised according to the main motivational themes derived from the questionnaire: students' general interest in French, instrumental motivations, compulsory learning, social influence and learner confidence. This approach allowed the study to connect empirical findings with the theoretical perspectives guiding the research.

Ethical considerations

Ethical principles were considered throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire. No identifying personal information was collected, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. The collected data were used exclusively for research purposes.

Although the descriptive design and sample size limit broader generalisation, the methodology provides useful insights into the motivational factors shaping French language learning among students in a Ghanaian university context. The study therefore contributes contextual evidence on how institutional requirements, perceived usefulness and learner attitudes interact in shaping engagement with French as a foreign language.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study according to the main motivational dimensions examined: respondents' demographic characteristics, interest and intrinsic motivation towards French, perceived professional value of French, influence of compulsory learning, and social and psychological factors affecting motivation. The analysis is based on questionnaire responses from 50 students of All Nations University.

Respondent characteristics

The demographic profile of respondents provides important contextual information for interpreting students' motivational orientations towards French learning. The variables considered were gender, age, academic programme and previous knowledge of French. (Table 1)

The respondent profile shows that the sample consisted mainly of young undergraduate students, with half of the participants aged between 20 and 25 years. Female students represented 60% of respondents, while male students accounted for 40%. The sample included students from different business-related programmes, providing a diverse representation of learners within the university context. More than half of the participants (56%) reported previous knowledge of French, indicating that most respondents had some prior exposure to the language before university study.

Interest and intrinsic motivation towards French learning

The first dimension examined students' personal interest, enjoyment and willingness to engage with French beyond institutional requirements. These indicators reflect the extent to which students possess intrinsic motivation towards learning the language. (Table 2)

The findings reveal generally limited intrinsic motivation towards French learning. Although 48% of students reported enjoying learning French, only 36% considered themselves motivated to learn the language. Furthermore, 60% indicated that they would not study French if it were not compulsory within their programme. These findings suggest that participation in French courses is influenced more by institutional requirements than by personal commitment.

Table 2: Students' interest and intrinsic motivation towards French learning

Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)	Somehow (%)
Interested in learning French	36	60	4
Enjoy learning French	48	40	12
Motivated to learn French	36	48	16
Would study French if it were not compulsory	30	60	10

Note: Values are presented as percentages, and each row totals 100%.

Table 3: Students' perceptions of the practical value of French

Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)	Somehow (%)
Learning French would improve job prospects	50	30	20
Learning French for travel or living abroad	20	60	20

Note: Values are presented as percentages, and each row totals 100%.

Table 4: Influence of compulsory learning on students' motivation

Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)	Somehow (%)
Learn French simply because it is part of the course	36	40	24
Would study French if it were not compulsory	30	60	10
French should be compulsory in all schools	30	64	6

Note: Values are presented as percentages, and each row totals 100%.

The results indicate a possible gap between exposure to French instruction and genuine learner engagement. While some students demonstrate positive attitudes towards the language, a considerable proportion do not perceive French learning as a personally meaningful activity.

Instrumental motivation and perceived usefulness of French

The second dimension examined whether students perceived French as valuable for professional and personal development. Instrumental motivation concerns learning a language because it provides practical benefits, such as employment opportunities, mobility and career advancement. (Table 3)

The findings show that instrumental motivation was stronger than intrinsic motivation. Half of the respondents believed that learning French could improve their employment prospects, suggesting that students recognise the economic value of French. However, only 20% reported learning French because of aspirations to travel or live abroad, while 60% rejected this motivation.

These results suggest that students primarily associate French with professional usefulness rather than personal interest or international mobility. The findings indicate that awareness of the benefits of French exists among students, but this awareness does not necessarily translate into sustained engagement with the language.

Compulsory learning and learner autonomy

The study further examined whether students' motivation was influenced by the compulsory nature of French within their academic programme. (Table 4)

The findings suggest that compulsory exposure plays an important role in students' participation. While 36% acknowledged studying French because it was part of their course, only 30% indicated that they would continue studying French voluntarily if it were not compulsory. In addition, 64% disagreed that French should be compulsory in all schools.

This pattern suggests that institutional requirements may encourage initial participation but may not necessarily develop long-term learner commitment. Students appear to recognise French as an academic requirement rather than a personally chosen learning objective.

Social influence and learner confidence

The final dimension examined social encouragement and students' confidence in their ability to learn French. (Table 5)

The results indicate that students received limited social encouragement towards French learning. Only 30% reported receiving support from family or friends, while 64% indicated that they did not receive such encouragement. Similarly, confidence levels were relatively low,

Table 5: Social support and learner confidence

Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)	Somehow (%)
Encouraged by friends or family to learn French	30	64	6
Confident in ability to learn French	24	50	16

Note: The percentages for “Confident in ability to learn French” total 90%, not 100%. The original data should be checked for a missing or incorrect value.

Table 6: Summary of motivational patterns among respondents

Dimension	Main finding
Interest	Most students reported limited interest in learning French
Intrinsic motivation	Generally weak
Instrumental motivation	Moderate; many recognised its career value
Compulsory learning	External requirements influenced participation
Social support	Limited encouragement from family and peers
Confidence	Many students lacked confidence in learning French
Voluntary continuation	Most students would not continue if French were optional

with only 24% of students expressing confidence in their ability to learn French, compared with 50% who lacked confidence.

These findings suggest that motivational challenges are not limited to classroom factors. Students’ perceptions of their own competence and the absence of supportive social environments may influence their willingness to engage with French learning.

Summary of major findings

Overall, the results reveal a tension between recognising the practical value of French and demonstrating strong personal motivation towards learning the language. While many students acknowledged the professional benefits of French, relatively few demonstrated strong interest, confidence or willingness to continue learning independently. The findings suggest that French learning at All Nations University is shaped more by external requirements and perceived usefulness than by strong intrinsic engagement. (Table 6)

DISCUSSION

This study examined the motivational orientations influencing French as a foreign language learning among Ghanaian university students at All Nations University. The findings reveal a complex motivational profile characterised by a clear difference between students’ recognition of the usefulness of French and their actual willingness to engage with the language. While many students acknowledged the professional value of French, a substantial proportion demonstrated limited interest, low confidence and weak commitment to continued learning. This section discusses these findings in relation to existing theories of language learning motivation and

previous research on French learning in Ghana.

The gap between perceived usefulness and actual motivation

One of the most important findings of this study is the difference between students’ instrumental appreciation of French and their limited intrinsic engagement. Half of the respondents believed that learning French could improve their employment prospects, suggesting that students recognise the economic and professional relevance of the language. However, only 36% reported being motivated to learn French, while 60% indicated that they would not study French if it were not compulsory.

This finding supports Gardner’s^[7] distinction between instrumental and integrative motivation. In contexts where learners study a foreign language primarily because of expected practical benefits, instrumental motivation may encourage participation but may not necessarily create sustained commitment. The results suggest that students at All Nations University largely perceive French as a useful professional resource rather than as a language connected to personal interest, cultural engagement or social interaction.

This pattern reflects the broader Ghanaian context. Although French has strategic importance because of Ghana’s geographical position and regional relationships with Francophone countries, it remains a foreign language with limited everyday use. Previous studies have shown that many Ghanaian learners have restricted opportunities to practise French outside formal classroom settings, which affects their confidence and engagement with the language ^[3,4]. Therefore, the challenge may not be a lack of awareness of French’s importance but the

difficulty of transforming this awareness into sustained learning behaviour.

The limits of compulsory language learning

A second important finding concerns the influence of compulsory learning. Although French formed part of students' academic programme, compulsory exposure did not appear to generate strong voluntary commitment. Only 30% of respondents indicated that they would study French if it were not compulsory, while 60% disagreed.

This finding can be interpreted through Self-Determination Theory^[8], which distinguishes between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Students who learn because of external requirements may demonstrate compliance without necessarily developing personal attachment to the learning process. While institutional requirements can encourage initial participation, long-term engagement is more likely when learners experience autonomy, competence and personal relevance.

The findings therefore raise questions about approaches that rely primarily on compulsory language learning policies. In the Ghanaian educational context, making French available or compulsory may increase exposure, but exposure alone may not guarantee meaningful engagement. Kuupole, De-Souza and Bakah^[12] argue that French teaching in Ghana requires not only institutional commitment but also innovative pedagogical approaches that create meaningful learning experiences. The implication is that policies promoting French should be accompanied by strategies that help learners understand its personal, academic and professional value.

Confidence, competence and willingness to engage

The findings show that only 24% of respondents reported confidence in their ability to learn French, while half indicated a lack of confidence. This finding is significant because perceived competence influences learners' willingness to participate, practise and persist when facing difficulties.

Within Self-Determination Theory, competence represents one of the psychological conditions necessary for sustained motivation^[8]. When learners believe that they cannot succeed, they may reduce their effort or avoid activities that expose their weaknesses. This issue is particularly relevant for foreign language learning because oral communication requires learners to take risks, make mistakes and gradually develop confidence.

Previous research in Ghana has identified similar challenges. Fiadzawoo et al. (2017) found that pronunciation represents an important concern among learners of

French because difficulties with oral production can affect confidence and communication. Similarly, Kuupole and Guilleminot (2013) showed that Ghanaian learners experience hesitation and difficulty maintaining spontaneous oral discourse, indicating that limited confidence and limited practice opportunities may reinforce each other.

These findings suggest that increasing motivation requires more than informing students about the usefulness of French. Universities must also create learning environments where students experience success, receive constructive feedback and develop confidence in their ability to communicate.

The role of social environment in language motivation

The study further revealed that social support for French learning was limited. Only 30% of students reported receiving encouragement from family or friends, while 64% indicated that they did not receive such support. This finding highlights the social dimension of language motivation.

Gardner's^[7] socio-educational model emphasises that attitudes towards a language are influenced not only by classroom experiences but also by learners' broader social environment. In contexts where the target language has limited visibility in everyday life, learners may perceive it as distant or unnecessary. This situation differs from environments where learners regularly encounter the language through family, media or community interaction.

The Ghanaian linguistic environment provides an important explanation. English dominates official communication, education and media, while French is mainly encountered within educational settings. Chachu^[2] demonstrates that English strongly influences French production among Ghanaian learners because it occupies a dominant position in their linguistic experience. Consequently, students may understand French's international value while lacking the social reinforcement necessary to maintain strong motivation.

Implications for French language education in Ghana

The findings have important implications for French teaching and policy in Ghanaian higher education. First, institutions should move beyond presenting French primarily as a compulsory academic requirement and instead position it as a practical communication skill aligned to students' future professional fields. For business students, this may involve integrating professional French related to commerce, tourism, international relations and regional cooperation.

Second, teaching approaches should focus on building students' autonomy and confidence. Motivation is unlikely to improve solely through increased course requirements. Students need opportunities to use French meaningfully through communicative activities, authentic materials and interaction with French speakers. Research on multimedia in Ghana suggests that innovative resources can support language learning when they are integrated into appropriate pedagogical approaches rather than used as simple supplementary materials^[12].

Finally, efforts to promote French should extend beyond classrooms. Greater visibility of French through cultural activities, professional networks, exchange opportunities and digital resources could strengthen students' perception of the language as a living communication tool rather than merely an academic subject.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to 50 students from one university, which restricts generalisation to the broader population of Ghanaian university students. Second, the study relied on self-reported questionnaire responses, which reflect students' perceptions but may not fully represent their actual learning behaviours. Third, the descriptive design does not establish causal relationships between motivational factors and French learning outcomes.

Future research should examine motivation among students from multiple Ghanaian universities using larger samples and mixed methods approaches. Longitudinal studies could also investigate how students' motivation changes over time and how teaching interventions influence autonomous engagement. Further research should explore how factors such as digital learning resources, professional French programmes and opportunities for authentic communication contribute to sustained motivation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that motivation towards French learning among Ghanaian university students is shaped by a complex interaction between perceived usefulness, institutional requirements, learner confidence and social environment. The central challenge is therefore not simply increasing awareness of French's importance, but creating conditions that transform external recognition into meaningful and sustained learner engagement.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have important implications for French language education in Ghanaian higher edu-

cation. The results indicate that improving students' motivation requires more than increasing access to French courses or making the language compulsory. Although many students recognised the professional value of French, particularly its potential contribution to employment opportunities, this instrumental awareness was not always accompanied by strong personal interest or sustained engagement. Therefore, universities should consider approaches that transform French from a compulsory academic requirement into a meaningful professional and communicative resource.

At the institutional level, French programmes should be aligned more closely with students' academic disciplines and career aspirations. For students in business-related programmes, professional French courses linked to international trade, tourism, diplomacy and regional co-operation may increase perceived relevance and strengthen motivation. In addition, institutions should create more opportunities for authentic language use through French clubs, cultural activities, digital resources and interaction with Francophone communities.

At the pedagogical level, lecturers should adopt learner-centred approaches that promote autonomy, confidence and active participation. Since many students reported limited confidence in their ability to learn French, teaching practices should include supportive activities that reduce anxiety and encourage communication. Providing students with achievable learning experiences may strengthen their sense of competence and willingness to continue learning.

This study contributes to the limited empirical literature on motivation towards French learning among Ghanaian university students by demonstrating the tension between recognising the usefulness of French and developing autonomous motivation. However, the findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the study, including the small sample size, single institutional context and reliance on self-reported questionnaire data. Future studies should involve multiple universities, larger samples and mixed methods approaches to explore how motivational factors interact with teaching practices and learning outcomes.

In conclusion, motivation towards learning French among Ghanaian university students is shaped by the interaction of perceived usefulness, institutional expectations, learner confidence and social influences. Sustainable French learning requires a shift from externally imposed participation towards meaningful engagement, where students perceive French not only as a requirement but as a valuable competence for their academic, professional and social futures.

DECLARATION

About the Author

Mensah Apelete Hadzi is a Ghanaian French-language educator, researcher, and emerging scholar with a strong interest in technology-enhanced language education. He holds an MPhil in French from the University of Ghana, where his research examined the contribution of Information and Communication Technologies to the teaching and learning of French as a Foreign Language. His academic interests include French language pedagogy, digital learning, oral communication, learner autonomy, and innovative approaches to language education. He has continued to develop his research profile at doctoral level, focusing on structured exploitation of digital audio resources to improve learners' oral expression in French. His work reflects a commitment to improving French-language education through research and technology.

Author Contributions

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Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authority before data collection commenced. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and participated voluntarily. They provided informed consent before participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting, and participants could withdraw without penalty.

Data Availability Statement

Data used in the study can be obtained on official request.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares there are no competing interests.

AI-Generated Content Declaration

The author(s) used artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted tools solely for language editing, grammar correction, and improvement of clarity and readability. The authors reviewed and verified all AI-assisted output and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content presented in this article.

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