International Journal of
Strategic Research in Education, Technology and Humanities
p-ISSN: 2465-731X | e-ISSN: 2467-818X
IJSRETH
September, 2026
Vol. 14, No. 1

Assessment of French Reading Interest Among Senior Secondary School Students in Federal Government Colleges in North Central Nigeria

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Article DOI:
10.48028/iiprds/ijsreth.v14.i1.02

Abstract

This study examined French reading interest among Senior Secondary School students in Federal Government Colleges in North-Central Nigeria. Specifically, it investigated students' reading frequency, timing, volume of reading, the influence of teachers' attitudes on reading interest, and strategies for enhancing students' interest in French reading. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The population comprised all Senior Secondary School students in Federal Government Colleges in North-Central Nigeria. Data were collected using the self-structured Reading Interest Questionnaire (RIQ) and the Questionnaire on Students' Interest in French Reading Environment (QSIFRE) observation checklist. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that most students read French texts for less than two hours daily and primarily read when assigned homework, given assignments, or preparing for tests and examinations. The study recommends early parental encouragement of reading and provision of appropriate reading materials, while teachers should promote regular and purposeful reading practices.

Keywords:
French reading, Reading interest, Senior Secondary School students, Reading habits, North-Central Nigeria.

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Background of the Study

The cornerstone of education, the road to becoming an expert in any field, and the means of making any meaningful academic progress are all made possible by reading. It is also an indispensable learning tool. It provides quick access to resources for academic and career advancement as well as for personal improvement. Babalola (2020) asserts that information is vital since it closes the knowledge gap. The act of identifying symbols and placing them in the appropriate context is reading. It is essential to recognize and comprehend (Palani, 2012). Reading is one of the primary methods for gaining knowledge. Epçaçan (2018) asserts that reading is an art form with the power to change people's lives as well as society. It also serves as the basis for self-education and lifetime learning. Reading serves as the cornerstone for all other academic abilities. It is an essential tool for one's own potential realization, mental development, and improvement of mental health. Reading becomes ingrained in everyone and serves as a lifelong natural teacher. According to scholarly studies, students who read regularly develop into voracious readers, students who read for pleasure five days a week or more are also more likely to be eager to engage in environmental talks and have superior social-emotional skills. Regular reading has benefits that endure a lifetime (Scholastica Parent Staff, 2024).

It is crucial for kids to read every day because it gives them a foundation of information, improves their vocabulary, introduces them to new ideas and cultures, and helps them connect with characters that go through a range of emotions (Burke, 2024). Additionally, he claims that reading foster inner peace, curiosity, and focus. The key to all kinds of information is reading; it enables one to create or mend things, take pleasure in stories, discover the viewpoints of others, and develop their own concepts and beliefs. The greatest benefit of literacy may be that it allows us to learn almost as much from the experiences of others as we do from our own, allowing us to experience and absorb everything firsthand through reading. It's a sign of literacy, really. A person who struggles with reading has not acquired the skills required to contribute to society as an educated member. In the high-tech world of today, it is an essential talent. Anindhita (2021) asserts that reading helps kids comprehend the current world, widens their horizons, and broadens their perspectives. Additionally, it fosters quick learning and sparks their inventiveness. He continues by highlighting the benefits of reading for developing one's imagination, curiosity, and ability to understand challenging ideas. When a student shows an interest in reading, they set themselves apart from their peers by gaining a deeper comprehension of the material covered in class. How much a child enjoys reading at any given time will affect how likely it is that he will continue his education after high school.

According to Yusuf (2015), reading is essential for kids to succeed both inside and outside of the classroom. According to Ogbonna (2014), reading is the capacity to identify, decipher, and apply words that are written, printed, or otherwise retained in the body of human knowledge. It is the capacity to comprehend language used in texts. Students in secondary school should be motivated with the desire to excel and develop themselves both inside and outside of the classroom, according to the National Policy on Education

(2014). This is addressed in Section 4, Paragraph 18. The goal is to provide the learner with the necessary tools to function well in this era of rapid technological advancement. This may help to explain why senior secondary school students are expected to have a great interest in reading. A person's reading interests determine how he or she arranges his or her reading culture into a functional literacy. Because the ability to read, understand, and critically comprehend the information is one of the most crucial components of education, students must be passionate readers (Yusuf, 2015). However, before reading is ingrained in students as a habit, they must first develop a daily reading interest and habit. According to Rintaningrum (2019), a lifelong passion in reading should be developed at an early age. For pupils to understand academic information and pass tests, structured activities and a deliberate study plan are important reading habits. The importance of reading cannot be overstated because learning activities and circumstances cannot take place without it. However, the terrible results of secondary school students in open exams seem to be a major problem with Nigeria's educational system.

This terrible performance may be related to children's lack of a positive reading interest. In the meantime, early findings from the French language study program at Federal Government Colleges' Senior Secondary Schools revealed that students' proficiency in using a variety of French sources is low. Students rarely use written materials in French for reading purposes; instead, they mostly use them to complete college assignments. This is because students typically find the information they need for their assignments online rather than in original French texts. Similarly, the findings of multiple additional studies (Sotiloye and Bodunde, 2018) similarly demonstrated a low level of reading interest. While reading interest is low, developing nations like Nigeria, with a 59.6% literacy rate, and Ethiopia, with a 49.1% literacy rate, have a strong reading culture, according to the CIA World Factbook, 2015. Benin's 38.4% is extremely low. The aforementioned reason of the poor reading interest led the researcher to decide to focus their research on children's reading interest, particularly in French written materials. "Assessment of French Reading Interest among Senior Secondary School Students in Federal Government Colleges in North Central Nigeria" is the title chosen by the researcher.

Consequently, the purpose of the study is to evaluate:

i. How often and how long students at Federal Government Colleges in Nigeria's North Central Zone read French text;
ii. The quantity of reading that students in senior secondary school engage in;
iii. How students' interest in reading is impacted by teachers' attitudes toward them; and
iv. How to improve French reading interest

Research Questions

The investigation is guided by the following research questions:

i. How frequently do senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria's Federal Government Colleges read written French materials?
ii. How long does it take senior secondary school students at Federal Government

Colleges in North Central Nigeria to read written materials in French?

iii. What effect does teachers' attitude have on students' desire to read written materials in French?
iv. What approach might be taken to increase senior secondary students at Federal Government Colleges in North Central, Nigeria's interest in reading French-written texts?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be of great benefit to students by encouraging the development of positive reading habits and improving their proficiency in French. Teachers will as well gain insight into effective strategies for motivating learners to read beyond the classroom. School administrators will better understand the importance of providing adequate library resources and instructional materials. Curriculum planners and policy makers will have evidence of improving French language programs in secondary schools. Government will see the need for regular training of French teachers and instructors to learn better teaching skills. Researchers will also benefit from the study as it will contribute to existing literature on language education and reading culture in Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses only on selected senior secondary school students of Federal Government colleges in North Central Nigeria offering French language. It examines students' interest in reading French text, factors influencing their reading habits, availability of instructional materials, teachers' roles, and the contribution of school libraries.

Method

Without requiring any form of manipulation, the researcher collected and analyzed data from a representative sample of the total population by employing a descriptive survey methodology. The population of the study consisted of all senior secondary school students enrolled in federal government colleges (7, 433) located in the North Central Nigeria. The sample consist of 100 students from four Federal Government Colleges located in the North Central Nigeria. Because the French subject was unique, a purposive technique was used to select the sample.

Instrumentation

The "Reading Interest Questionnaire (RIQ)," a well-crafted and self-developed questionnaire, was used to collect the necessary data from the respondents. Reading Interest Questionnaire (RIQ) was subjected to both face and content validation procedures. The reliability of the interview schedule was found using the same population and by asking different participants similar questions in order to check whether or not the participants gave reliable answers. The questionnaire had 21 items with response alternatives that asked respondents about their reading habits, including how often and when they read, how much they read, how teachers' attitude affect their

interest in reading, and how to increase their interest in reading. The questionnaire has a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Before disseminating the questionnaire to the respondents, it was first vetted by specialists in Language Education, Tests and Measurement, and Assessment to determine its face and content validity. The descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyse the questionnaire responses.

Results

Question One

To what extent do senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria's Federal Government Colleges read written French materials?

Table 1: Extent to which Junior Secondary School Students in Federal Government Colleges Read French Written Materials

S/n	Statement	X	SD	Remark
1	I always read	1.92	1.11	Disagreed
2	I read often	2.40	0.85	Disagreed
3	I read for 2 hours or less everyday	2.11	0.68	Disagreed
4	I read for 3 hours or more everyday	1.98	0.60	Disagreed
5	I do not read	1.71	0.41	Disagreed

Note: N = 100. Mean score less than 2.5 = Disagreed, greater than/equal to 2.5 = Agreed

The frequency and length of French literature reading among senior secondary school students enrolled in Federal Government Colleges (FGCs) are displayed in Table 1. All of the items had mean scores below the 2.5 mean benchmark, according to the analysis's findings (M = 1.71 – 2.40, SD = 0.41 – 1.11). As a result, most FGC students study French literature infrequently or never at all. The students stated that they were unable to read for two to three hours a day, indicating that they did not study French literature at all or very little of it.

Question Two

What is the level of students' interest in reading French written materials?

Table 2: Level of Students' Interest in Reading French Written Materials

S/N	Statement	X	SD	Remark
1	I generally lack interest in reading	2.58	0.93	Agreed
2	I read only when I am given assignments or examination	2.84	0.68	Agreed
3	I never read other books such as newspapers, novels and or magazines	2.77	1.67	Agreed
4	I love reading other texts beside my classroom work	2.83	0.68	Agreed
5	I love to play rather than read during my recreation/free time	2.40	0.85	Disagreed

Note: N = 100. Mean score less than 2.5 = Disagreed, greater than/equal to 2.5 = Agreed

Result in Table 2 presents level of students' interest in reading French literature. The results showed that, with the exception of item five (5), which had a mean score less than 2.5 (M = 2.39, SD = 0.85), respondents agreed with all of the items, all of which had mean scores above the mean bench mark of 2.5 (M = 2.58 – 2.84, SD = 0.68 – 0.91). This suggests that the majority of FGC students concurred that they are not normally interested in reading. They only start reading when they have homework or tests to complete. The majority of students enjoy reading materials other than those assigned in class, although they do not read novels, newspapers, or magazines. Students, on the other hand, differed when it came to saying that they would rather play than read in their spare time.

Question Three

How do teachers' attitudes toward the students affect their reading interest?

Table 3: Teachers' Attitudes toward Students' Reading Interest

S/N	Statement	X	SD	Remark
1	In our class, my teacher provides possibilities for students to read literature written in French	2.30	1.12	Disagreed
2	I don't like my teacher's approach to teaching French reading.	2.82	0.94	Agreed
3	I'm encouraged by my teacher to read books, short tales, and other French-language materials	3.37	0.46	Agreed
4	My teacher acts as a role model for me while reading French texts	2.30	1.12	Disagreed
5	The method my teacher uses to teach reading in French language is interesting	2.52	0.78	Agreed

Note: N = 100. Mean score less than 2.5 = Disagreed, greater than/equal to 2.5 = Agreed

Table 3 presents the results of the study on the impact of teachers' attitudes on students' reading. It is evident that items 2, 3, and 5 had mean scores higher than the mean bar of 2.5 (M = 2.52 – 3.37, SD = 0.46 – 0.94), while items 1 and 2 (M = 2.30, SD = 1.12) showed a disagreement regarding the teachers' ability to provide opportunities for students to read books in class and their lack of role modeling. According to the results, even if a large number of students disapprove of the way their instructor reads, they do affirm that their teacher encourages them to read books, short stories, and other materials but does not always set a good example for them. They found their teacher's approach to teaching reading to be intriguing as a result. These generally demonstrated that teachers' attitudes have a favorable or negative impact on pupils' reading interest.

Question Four

How can senior secondary school students at Federal Government Colleges in Nigeria's North Central Zone become more interested in reading?

Table 4: Ways of improving Senior Secondary Students' Interest in Reading at Federal Government Colleges in Nigeria's North Central Zone

S/N	Statement	X	SD	Remark
1	Every school needs to have a working library run by a qualified teacher librarian.	3.51	0.60	Agreed
2	Parents ought to instruct their children to start reading at a young age	3.58	0.40	Agreed
3	Reading time in the school library should be included in the school timetable	3.60	0.46	Agreed
4	Students should be encouraged to read aloud in front of others during classes	3.56	0.40	Agreed
5	Teachers should engage students in vigorous reading and writing activities	3.58	0.38	Agreed
6	French reading materials for their children should be provided by Parents	3.51	0.46	Agreed
7	Students who are proficient in French reading and writing should be motivated	3.68	0.35	Agreed

Note: N = 100. Mean score less than 2.5 = Disagreed, greater than/equal to 2.5 = Agreed

Table 3's results on ways of improving reading interest showed that every item had mean scores higher above the 2.5 cut-off point (M = 3.51 – 3.60, SD = 0.38 – 0.60). The majority of respondents agreed that the following would improve reading: having a working library staffed by a qualified teacher librarian in every school; parents teaching their students to read at a young age; scheduling time for reading in the library into the curriculum; encouraging students to read aloud in front of others during class; teachers involving students in challenging reading and writing exercises; and parents providing reading materials for their students.

Findings and Discussion

The findings reveal that majority of students read little or only when they feel like it. Moreover, the vast majority of students spend less than two hours a day reading. According to the survey, students are generally not very engaged in reading, based on how much they read. Most of them only sit down to read when given homework or during exam times; they don't read french books, newspapers, periodicals, or other literature outside of the classroom. They would prefer to play than read in their spare time. This corroborated the Yusuf's (2015) findings that majority of students only read for examination and have lost interest in reading. The finding also revealed that teachers do not give their students the opportunity to read French language books or short stories, nor do they serve as examples for them to follow. This agrees with Yusuf's (2015) findings, which indicate that most teachers have a negative attitude toward teaching reading in the classroom. He continues by saying that most teachers are not open to experimenting with different approaches to liven up their reading lessons.

This is strong proof that teachers' opinions have an impact on students' interest in reading. The respondents came to the conclusion that every school should have a functioning library staffed by a qualified teacher librarian in order to increase students' reading

interests. Children's library programs are founded on the knowledge that early literacy exercises have a positive impact on language development, reading development, and academic accomplishment, as Singh (2023) accurately states. The research's conclusions suggest that parents should start teaching their children how to read at a young age and they should provide reading materials. Encouraging and facilitating a child's love for reading is one of the most important gifts a parent or caregiver can offer them, according to Emir and Abdulhak (2022). Students should be given reading and writing projects on a regular basis by their teachers. Students should be encouraged to read in public and publicly so that others can hear them. In conclusion, the study found that giving students incentives could serve as a stimulant for the development of positive attitudes and the desired writing and reading habits.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study showed that senior secondary school students at Federal Government Colleges often have poor French reading interest, which is attributed to personal, parental, and instructional reasons. To be successful, efforts to boost reading enthusiasm need to be bolstered by other factors. From an early age, parents should cultivate in their children a love for reading and provide them with reading materials like educational novels and storybooks, as well as encourage them to read aloud to their parents. For a French teacher to fulfill his or her duties, he must also be aware of the students' reading interests in order to gauge how much they love reading in relation to their favorite spot and time, as well as the kinds of French reading materials and environments that they prefer. The teacher must also set the mood for the class with engaging activities. The learning process must be planned before the chosen teaching resources are used. Teachers employ media that is visible, inexpensive, and acceptable to their students. The academic effectiveness of students when reading written materials in French is undoubtedly determined by their choices. Good reading evaluation and an efficient reading classroom are built on a high degree of reading interest. The data analysis indicates that each student is unique and has a variety of reading interests. The media can support this endeavor to increase reading interest. Until parents and teachers provide written materials in the French language, such as novels, storybooks, and other academic learning resources, along with a supportive learning environment and a suitable learning schedule, it will be impossible to increase the goal of growing reading interest in French language.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

i. In order to inculcate a culture of reading, parents should encourage their children to read from an early age, by providing reading materials such as, story books, picture books and educational novels, educational technology and ask them to read these materials either on a regular basis or during their free time when the parents are around.
ii. Federal Government Colleges should provide adequate French books, novels, magazines, newspapers, dictionaries, and digital reading resources.
iii. Teachers should also urge their students to write enthusiastically and read

instructive materials in their classmates' presence.

iv. Teachers should engage their students in reading and writing by using engaging teaching methods when teaching reading in French.
v. Students should be encouraged to read aloud in class for the benefit of their fellow classmates.
vi. French teachers should organize reading clubs, debates, storytelling sessions, drama presentations, and literary competitions.
vii. Students who excel in reading and writing should also be motivated with awards, especially through well-organized reading competitions.
viii. Government should provide regular in-service training for French teachers on innovate reading instruction strategies.
ix. Students should be encouraged to participate in French language clubs and reading programs.
x. A fully functional library overseen by a certified teacher librarian should be present in every school. Language and other discipline-specific books should be available in the library, and Liberians should be able to support and mentor students in their daily reading habits. This will assist the students in forming a natural reading habit in both English and their particular fields of study.
xi. Educational authorities should integrate extensive reading into the French curriculum and asses reading habits alongside language proficiency.

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