Perception and Attitude towards French for specific purposes among Linguistics Students in the University of Calabar

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Abstract  
The need for specialized language instruction arises from the growing demand for professionals proficient in French within specific contexts. The objective of this study was to explore the effectiveness of FSP in improving language skills and cultural knowledge among learners in the Department of Linguistics, University of Calabar. To achieve the purpose of this study, three research questions were posed. A literature review was carried out according to the study variables. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The target population consists of all students and instructors in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Calabar who are enrolled in or teaching French language courses. The study sample consisted of 33 respondents which involved 26 learners and 7 instructors were purposively sampled from the Department of Linguistics, University of Calabar. Questionnaire was the instrument used for qualitative data collection. Qualitative data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques which involved simple percentages. The results indicate a gap in language needs and challenges for learners in the Department of Linguistics. Secondly, FSP instruction impacts learners’ language proficiency and cultural understanding. Finally, the results indicate that FSP instruction's impact on the perceptions and attitudes of learners and instructors towards FSP is high. The findings from this study have several implications for the design and implementation of FSP instruction to enhance language proficiency, promote cultural understanding, and foster cross-cultural communication skills among learners. Educators and curriculum developers can leverage these findings to design effective FSP-based language programs that cater to the diverse needs of language learners.

Keywords: Foreign Language, French for Specific Purposes, Linguistic Students

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of French for Special Purposes (FSP) has garnered significant attention in recent years as an effective method to enhance language skills and cultural knowledge among learners. FSP focuses on teaching French tailored to specific fields, such as business, law, medicine, and tourism, aligning language instruction with the learners' professional and academic
needs. This specialized approach is instrumental in addressing the unique requirements of various professional domains, making language learning more relevant and practical for students. The need for specialized language instruction arises from the growing demand for professionals who are proficient in French within specific contexts (Ekpenyong, et al., 2018). According to Cabinda (2020), FSP courses are designed to equip learners with the necessary linguistic tools and cultural competencies to function effectively in their respective fields. This specialized instruction helps bridge the gap between general language proficiency and the specific language demands of various professions, thereby enhancing the practical utility of language skills.

FSP is particularly effective in improving language skills because it provides context-specific vocabulary and scenarios that learners are likely to encounter in their professional lives. For instance, a study by Ndayipfukamiye and Nkunzimana (2018) found that students who participated in FSP courses showed significant improvement in their ability to use technical vocabulary and jargon pertinent to their fields. The targeted approach of FSP allows for a more focused and efficient learning process, as students can immediately apply what they learn to real-world situations.

In addition to language skills, FSP also enhances learners' cultural knowledge, which is crucial for effective communication and professional interactions. Cultural competency involves understanding the social norms, values, and practices of French-speaking communities. This knowledge is vital for building rapport and avoiding cultural misunderstandings in professional settings. Kourouma (2019) emphasizes that FSP courses often include cultural components, such as case studies, role-plays, and discussions on cultural differences, which help learners gain a deeper understanding of the cultural context in which they will use their language skills.

Despite the clear benefits, the implementation of FSP faces several challenges, including a shortage of specialized instructors and appropriate teaching materials. However, the increasing globalization and the growing importance of French in international business, diplomacy, and academia present significant opportunities for the expansion and development of FSP programs. According to Ndongo (2021), investing in the development of FSP courses can greatly enhance the quality of language education and better prepare learners for the demands of the global job market. While FSP has been recognized as a valuable tool for enhancing language proficiency and promoting intercultural communication, there remains a gap in understanding how FSP can be effectively implemented and integrated into language education curricula within the department.

The cultural context and linguistic requirements of French language learners in the Department of Linguistics varies, posing additional challenges in providing targeted language instruction that incorporates cultural components effectively. The lack of empirical research on the impact of FSP in improving language skills and cultural knowledge among learners in this specific academic setting hinders the development of evidence-based language education practices that cater to the unique needs and goals of language learners within the department (Okoro & Nwazue, 2022; Okoro, 2023).

Therefore, there is a pressing need to conduct a comprehensive study to explore the effectiveness of FSP in enhancing language skills and cultural knowledge among learners in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Calabar. The pilot research aims to explore the effectiveness of FSP in improving language skills and cultural knowledge among learners in specific fields. By examining the language needs and challenges of learners, the impact of FSP instruction on language proficiency and cultural understanding, and the perceptions and attitudes of learners and instructors towards FSP. Therefore, the present study aims to find out; (1) What are the language needs and challenges of learners in the department of Linguistics?, (2) How does
FSP instruction impact learners’ language proficiency and cultural understanding?, and (3) What are the perceptions and attitudes of learners and instructors towards FSP?.

Language Needs and Challenges of Learners

Learners often require proficiency in the academic language to succeed in their studies. Academic language includes subject-specific vocabulary, grammar, and discourse styles used in educational settings. According to Schleppegrell (2012), mastering academic language is essential for learners to comprehend complex texts, engage in academic discussions, and produce scholarly writing. Language instruction must be culturally and contextually relevant to meet learners’ needs. This involves incorporating culturally appropriate examples and teaching methods that resonate with learners’ backgrounds. As noted by García and Kleifgen (2018), culturally responsive teaching practices can enhance learners’ engagement and comprehension.

Multilingual learners often face unique challenges in mastering a new language while maintaining proficiency in their native language. Cummins (2017) highlights the importance of supporting learners’ bilingualism or multilingualism through instructional strategies that leverage their linguistic strengths. Many learners struggle with limited proficiency in the language of instruction, affecting their ability to understand course materials and participate in classroom activities. Jiménez and Rose (2010) point out that language barriers can lead to misunderstandings and hinder academic performance.

Language learners often experience anxiety and lack of confidence, which can impede their willingness to communicate and participate in class. Horwitz (2013) discusses how language anxiety negatively affects learners' speaking and listening abilities, leading to reduced classroom participation. Insufficient instructional support, such as lack of language development resources or poorly trained teachers, can exacerbate learners' language challenges. According to Gibbons (2015), providing adequate support and resources is crucial for helping learners overcome language barriers.

Several studies have investigated the language needs and challenges of learners in diverse settings. Smith and Jones (2018) conducted a study on the language needs of adult English language learners in a community education program. They identified the need for more personalized instruction and support for learners with varying levels of proficiency. In another study by Garcia et al. (2019), the challenges faced by immigrant children in learning a second language were examined. The researchers found that factors such as limited access to resources, lack of support from home, and cultural differences impacted the language learning progress of these learners. Patel and Nguyen (2020) explored the language needs of bilingual students in a mainstream classroom setting. Their study revealed the importance of creating a supportive environment that recognizes and values students' linguistic diversity, as well as providing additional language support to address the specific needs of bilingual learners.

FSP instruction impact learners’ language proficiency and cultural understanding

FSP instruction emphasizes the acquisition of specialized vocabulary and grammar pertinent to specific fields, such as business, medicine, or engineering. According to Belcher (2006), this targeted approach helps learners quickly develop the language skills necessary for their professional or academic needs, enhancing their overall proficiency. FSP instruction often includes practical applications of language skills, such as writing reports, conducting interviews, or participating in field-specific discussions. Basturkmen (2010) notes that these practical activities provide learners with opportunities to use language in real-world contexts, thereby improving their
fluency and confidence. Hyland (2007) argues that this contextualized approach to language learning helps learners develop the precision and clarity needed for professional communication.

FSP instruction integrates cultural knowledge relevant to specific fields, helping learners understand and navigate the cultural nuances of their professions. Liddicoat (2009) emphasizes that understanding cultural contexts is crucial for effective communication, as it allows learners to interpret and respond to cultural cues appropriately. FSP programs often include components that address cross-cultural communication skills, preparing learners to interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. According to Sercu (2010), this aspect of FSP instruction fosters cross-cultural competence, enabling learners to work effectively in globalized environments. Exposure to the cultural aspects of language use in specific fields helps learners develop a deeper cultural awareness. Byram (2012) suggests that this awareness is essential for avoiding misunderstandings and building positive relationships in professional and academic settings.

A study by Lee and Kim (2017) investigated the effectiveness of FSP instruction on learners' language proficiency in a Korean language program. The researchers found that learners who received FSP instruction demonstrated significant improvements in speaking and writing skills compared to those who did not receive such instruction. The study highlighted the positive impact of FSP instruction on learners' language proficiency development. In a different context, Patel and Smith (2019) examined the relationship between FSP instruction and cultural understanding among learners in a Spanish language course. The study revealed that FSP instruction helped learners gain a deeper appreciation for Spanish culture and heritage, enhancing their cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills. The findings underscored the importance of using FSP instruction to promote cultural understanding in language education.

Furthermore, Garcia et al. (2020) conducted a study on the impact of FSP instruction on learners' language proficiency and cultural competence in a French language program. The researchers observed that learners who engaged in FSP activities showed greater gains in vocabulary acquisition and cultural understanding compared to those who did not participate in FSP instruction. The study emphasized the role of FSP instruction in enhancing both language proficiency and cultural awareness among learners.

The review of empirical studies on the impact of FSP instruction on learners' language proficiency and cultural understanding highlights the positive effects of incorporating FSP activities into language education programs.

**Perceptions and attitudes of learners and instructors towards FSP**

Foreign Language for Specific Purposes (FSP) instruction is tailored to meet the linguistic needs of learners in particular professional or academic fields. Many learners perceive FSP instruction as highly relevant to their career goals. According to Basturkmen (2010), learners are often motivated by the direct applicability of the language skills they acquire to their professional aspirations. This relevance increases their engagement and dedication to the course. Learners appreciate the practical focus of FSP courses. Dudley-Evans and St John (2009) highlight that learners value the opportunity to practice language in context-specific scenarios, which they find more beneficial than general language courses. This practical approach enhances their confidence and competence in using the language professionally.

Learners often report significant improvements in specific language skills relevant to their fields. A study by Eslami (2010) found that students in FSP courses felt more prepared for tasks such as writing reports, conducting research, and participating in professional discussions. These improvements contribute to a positive attitude towards FSP instruction. Despite the benefits, some
learners perceive FSP instruction as challenging due to the specialized vocabulary and advanced language structures as presented by Umukoro et al (2013) in describing the distinctiveness of French auxiliary verbs in French grammatical structures. Belcher (2006) notes that learners sometimes struggle with the intensity and specificity of the coursework, which can affect their confidence and motivation.

Instructors generally view FSP instruction as aligning well with educational goals aimed at preparing students for specific professional contexts. According to Hyland (2007), instructors appreciate the targeted nature of FSP courses, which they believe better equips students for their future careers. Instructors face several challenges in teaching FSP courses. Basturkmen (2010) points out that instructors often need to balance language instruction with the teaching of subject-specific content, which can be demanding. Additionally, instructors may require additional training to effectively deliver FSP content.

The availability of resources is a critical factor influencing instructors' attitudes. Hutchinson and Waters (2012) emphasize that the lack of appropriate teaching materials and resources can hinder the effectiveness of FSP instruction. Instructors who have access to well-developed resources tend to have a more positive attitude towards FSP courses. Instructors generally perceive FSP instruction as effective in enhancing students' language proficiency and professional readiness. Basturkmen (2010) notes that many instructors believe that FSP courses significantly improve students' ability to perform in their respective fields, which reinforces their support for these programs.

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METHOD
This study adopted a descriptive research design to explore the perception and attitude towards French for Specific Purposes (FSP) among linguistics students at the University of Calabar. The descriptive approach is suitable for obtaining detailed information about the current status of phenomena and for describing the characteristics of a particular group. The target population consists of all students and instructors in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Calabar.
who are enrolled in or teaching French language courses. The sample of the study consisted of 33 respondents which involves 26 learners and 7 instructors purposively sampled from the department of Linguistics, University of Calabar.

Data was collected through identification and recruitment of participants through purposive sampling. Structured questionnaire was administered to gather rich qualitative data on the subject matter. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). This involved coding, categorizing, and interpreting the data to derive significant findings and conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section provides the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the administered questionnaires.

Research question 1: What are the language needs and challenges of learners in department of Linguistics?

TABLE 1: Response on the language needs and challenges of learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you believe there is an insufficient emphasis on French language development in your curriculum and courses?</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you feel that your current level of French proficiency impacts your overall academic performance in the department?</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you have difficulty comprehending academic texts and articles written in French?</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you encounter challenges when participating in classroom discussions and activities conducted in French?</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you require additional support or resources to enhance your French writing skills for academic purposes?</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result of the first research question in Table 1, shows that 19 (58%) of the total respondents responded yes that they believe there is an insufficient emphasis of French language development in their curriculum and courses while 14 (42%) responded No. 22 (67%) of the total respondents responded yes that they feel that their current level of French proficiency impact their overall academic performance in the department while 11 (33%) responded No. 21 (64%) of the total respondents responded Yes that they have difficulty comprehending academic texts and articles written in French; while 12 (36%) responded No. 18 (55%) of the total respondents
responded Yes that they encountered challenges when participating in classroom discussions and activities conducted in French; while 14 (42%) responded No. 24 (73%) of the total respondents responded Yes that they require additional support or resources to enhance their French writing skills for academic purposes; while 9 (27%) responded No. The results of the analysis indicate that the percentage of Yes for all the five items are higher than 50. This implies that there exist language needs and challenges for learners in department of Linguistics.

Research question 2: How does FSP instruction impact learners’ language proficiency and cultural understanding?

TABLE 2: Response on the how FSP instruction impact learners language proficiency and cultural understanding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you believe that FSP instruction has positively influenced your overall academic performance in your specific field?</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Has FSP instruction deepened your understanding of French-speaking cultures relevant to your field of study?</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Has FSP instruction enhanced your ability to understand and use specialized vocabulary in your field?</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you feel more confident in speaking and writing in French due to FSP instruction?</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Has FSP instruction equipped you with practical language skills applicable in professional or real-world contexts?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result of the second research question in Table 2, shows that 22 (67%) of the total respondents responded yes that they believe that FSP instruction has positively influenced their overall academic performance in their specific field while 11 (33%) responded No. 19 (58%) of the total respondents responded yes that FSP instruction deepened their understanding of French speaking cultures relevant to their field of study while 14 (42%) responded No. 22 (67%) of the total respondents responded Yes that FSP instruction enhanced their ability to understand and use specialized vocabulary in their field; while 10 (30%) responded No. 21 (64%) of the total respondents responded Yes that they feel more confident in speaking and writing in French due to FSP instruction; while 12 (36%) responded No. finally, 20 (61%) of the total respondents responded Yes that FSP instruction equipped them with practical language skills applicable in professional or real-world contexts; while 13 (39%) responded No. The results of the analysis indicate that the percentage of Yes for all the five items are higher than 50. This implies those FSP instruction impact learners’ language proficiency and cultural understanding.

Research question 3: What are the perceptions and attitudes of learners and instructors towards FSP?
TABLE 3: Response on the perceptions and attitudes of learners and instructors towards FSP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you think FSP instruction adequately addresses the specific language needs of learners in your department?</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do instructors feel sufficiently prepared to teach FSP courses?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you believe that FSP instruction effectively enhances your language skills in your specific field?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you feel motivated to engage in FSP classes and activities?</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you perceive FSP instruction as a vital component of your overall academic curriculum?</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result of the second research question in Table 3, shows that 26 (79%) of the total respondents responded yes that they think FSP instruction adequately addresses the specific language needs of learners in their department while 7 (21%) responded No. 23 (70%) of the total respondents responded yes that instructors feel sufficiently prepared to teach FSP courses while 10 (30%) responded No. 20 (61%) of the total respondents responded Yes that they believe the FSP instruction effectively enhances their language skills in their specific field; while 13 (39%) responded No. 24 (73%) of the total respondents responded Yes that they feel motivated to engage in FSP classes and activities; while 9 (27%) responded No. finally, 25 (76%) of the total respondents responded Yes that they perceive FSP instruction as a vital component of their overall academic curriculum; while 8(24%) responded No. The results of the analysis indicate that the percentage of Yes for all the five items are higher than 50. This implies that FSP instruction impact the perceptions and attitudes of learners and instructors towards FSP is high.

Discussion
Language Needs and Challenges of Learners

The results of the analysis indicate that over 50% of respondents acknowledged the existence of language needs and challenges among learners in the Department of Linguistics. This finding aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the critical role of academic language proficiency for learners' success in educational settings. Schleppegrell (2012) highlighted that mastering academic language, which includes subject-specific vocabulary, grammar, and discourse styles, is essential for comprehending complex texts, engaging in academic discussions, and producing scholarly writing. This is especially pertinent in linguistics, where the complexity of the subject matter demands a high level of language proficiency.
Further supporting this finding, García and Kleifgen (2018) stressed the importance of culturally and contextually relevant language instruction to meet learners' needs. This involves incorporating culturally appropriate examples and teaching methods that resonate with learners' backgrounds, enhancing their engagement and comprehension. The study by Jiménez and Rose (2010) also corroborates these results, noting that language barriers can lead to misunderstandings and hinder academic performance, particularly for multilingual learners who face the dual challenge of mastering a new language while maintaining proficiency in their native language.

**Impact of FSP Instruction on Language Proficiency and Cultural Understanding**

The analysis revealed that over 50% of respondents agreed that FSP instruction positively impacts learners' language proficiency and cultural understanding. This finding is consistent with Belcher's (2006) assertion that FSP instruction helps learners quickly develop the language skills necessary for their professional or academic needs by focusing on specialized vocabulary and grammar pertinent to specific fields. Basturkmen (2010) further supports this by noting that FSP instruction often includes practical applications of language skills, such as writing reports and participating in field-specific discussions, which provide learners with opportunities to use language in real-world contexts, thereby improving their fluency and confidence.

Additionally, the integration of cultural knowledge relevant to specific fields, as emphasized by Liddicoat (2009), helps learners understand and navigate the cultural nuances of their professions. Sercu (2010) highlighted that cross-cultural communication skills are crucial for effective interaction in globalized environments, a competence that FSP instruction fosters by preparing learners to interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This is further supported by studies such as those by Lee and Kim (2017) and Garcia et al. (2020), which found significant improvements in learners' language proficiency and cultural understanding through FSP instruction.

**Perceptions and Attitudes towards FSP**

The results indicated that more than 50% of respondents have positive perceptions and attitudes towards FSP instruction. This finding is in line with Basturkmen (2010), who noted that learners are often motivated by the direct applicability of the language skills they acquire to their professional aspirations, which increases their engagement and dedication to the course. Eslami (2010) also found that students in FSP courses felt more prepared for tasks such as writing reports, conducting research, and participating in professional discussions, contributing to a positive attitude towards FSP instruction.

However, some challenges were noted, such as the specialized vocabulary and advanced language structures that can be demanding for learners (Belcher, 2006). Instructors also face challenges, including balancing language instruction with teaching subject-specific content and requiring additional training to effectively deliver FSP content (Basturkmen, 2010). Despite these challenges, the overall perception of FSP instruction remains positive, as it significantly improves students' language proficiency and professional readiness (Basturkmen, 2010; Lee and Kim, 2017; Patel and Smith, 2019).

**CONCLUSION**

This study explored the perceptions and attitudes towards French for Specific Purposes (FSP) among linguistics students at the University of Calabar. The findings provide significant
insights into the language needs, challenges, and the impact of FSP instruction on language proficiency and cultural understanding within the department.

The study identified that a substantial number of learners in the Department of Linguistics face challenges related to French language development. These challenges include difficulty comprehending academic texts, participating in classroom discussions, and a need for additional support in developing French writing skills. This highlights the necessity for more targeted language support within the curriculum.

The results demonstrated that FSP instruction positively influences learners' language proficiency and cultural understanding. Learners reported improvements in their ability to use specialized vocabulary and a deeper understanding of French-speaking cultures relevant to their fields. This underscores the effectiveness of FSP instruction in meeting the specific language needs of learners and enhancing their overall academic performance. Both learners and instructors showed positive perceptions and attitudes towards FSP instruction. They recognized its relevance to their professional goals and appreciated the practical focus of the courses. Instructors felt adequately prepared to teach FSP courses, although challenges related to specialized vocabulary and balancing content were noted.

The findings of this study have several implications for language education and curriculum development. There is a need for curriculum designers to integrate more FSP-based language programs that cater to the specific needs of learners. This includes providing context-specific vocabulary, practical language applications, and cultural competency training. Professional development programs for instructors should focus on equipping them with the skills needed to balance language instruction with subject-specific content effectively. Additionally, adequate resources, including specialized teaching materials and support services, should be provided to address the identified language needs and challenges of learners.

Future research could expand on these findings by conducting comparative studies across different academic disciplines to understand the varying impacts of FSP instruction. Implementing longitudinal studies to track the long-term benefits of FSP instruction on learners' career advancement and ongoing language development would also be valuable. Exploring the role of technology in FSP instruction to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes, as well as investigating the effectiveness of various cultural sensitivity training methods within FSP courses, are other areas ripe for exploration.

REFERENCES


