

Assessment of Attitudes of Engineering Students at UMaT vis-à-vis the Study of Basic French

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Abstract

The study of Basic French is a core course for all first year undergraduate students at the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT), Tarkwa. The future prospects of a bilingual engineering student are of paramount importance to UMaT management hence the conception of the course, for further future development by the students themselves. This study, therefore, attempts to assess the attitudes of students towards the course. Over the years, the fact that the course is not a mainstream engineering programme, it has been eliciting various attitudes from students. The objective of the study is to find out to what extent the attitudes of students towards the course is positive or negative. The first year students were the principal respondents in the study. A mixed-method approach was exploited for the study. 110 first years (10 students each from each of the eleven programmes), and 90 second, third and fourth years, making a total of 200 respondents were randomly sampled. Two lecturers from the Department of Technical Communication (DTC), shared their experiences of students' attitudes when they are first introduced to the course and by the end of year one. The results indicate that majority of the students representing about seventy-nine percent (79%) have a positive attitude towards the study of the course. A high percentage sampled will prefer that they study the course for more than an academic year. Students' attitudes towards the course vary due to various influences including; the practicality of the course, the kind of atmosphere created at lectures and the future objectives of the individual students and their knowledge of what their prospects are if they can speak another international language in addition to the English Language.

Keywords: Language policy, Foreign language, Belief, Attitude, Motivation.

1. Introduction

Language is considered as a veritable tool for socio-economic and manpower development because of the role it plays in connecting people. Learning a language is sometimes associated with several perceptions and idiosyncrasies of the individual learner. These perceptions and idiosyncrasies are most of the time as a result of the learner's motivations and beliefs. There have been several studies regarding learner's attitudes, beliefs and motivations towards the study of language. Learners are believed to bring along all their personality features including their beliefs, attitudes, and language styles to the learning environment any time they step in a language classroom (Hosseini and Pourmandnia, 2013). Horwitz (1987) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), which has been exploited broadly for the past two decades to investigate the link between proficiency and beliefs. Understanding the beliefs of learners is important because it helps teachers to come to terms with learners' approaches and strategies to language learning, and consequently, help them plan

language instruction to meet their needs (Horwitz, 1985, 1987, 1999).

In learning a foreign language, students can be motivated by the people who speak the language or the context in which the language is spoken. The level of anxiety of the learners in foreign language learning situations, in the view of Johnson and Johnson (1998), may account for the changes in motivation of language learners and ultimately changes the students' positive attitudes. According to Brown (2000), second language learners, benefit from positive attitudes, and negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation. That notwithstanding, he believes negative attitudes can be changed, often by exposure to reality. For instance, by encounters with actual persons from other cultures. Positive attitudes on the part of language learners can cause the development of an integrative motivation and this can consequently facilitate second language progress.

Amodio and Devine (2006), on their part, reviewed evidence suggesting that attitudes are products of neural networks including brain regions such as the amygdala, which are associated with basic motivational and appetitive behaviours. It is

therefore, worth noting that once the teachers get to understand the attitudes of students towards a particular foreign language, they may take actions to address the negative attitudes thereby paving the way for a positive attitude to be developed towards the said language.

1.1 Motivation and Attitudes towards learning a foreign language

Gardner and Lambert (1972) define *motivation* in terms of ‘the learner's overall goal or orientation’, and *attitude* as ‘the persistence shown by the learner in striving for a goal’ (Ellis 1985; Patsy Lightbown *et al.*, 2000) on their part, distinguish two types of motivation: i) *Integrative motivation*: a learner studies a language because he is interested in the people and culture of the target language or in order to communicate with people of another culture who speak it. Choosri and Intharaksa (2011) see integrative motivation as aiming at better understanding of cultural values of the target language or assimilation into a society or a wider community. Such people express a sincere and strong desire to learn a different language and its pertaining culture. ii) *Instrumental motivation*: a learner’s goals for learning the second language are functional and useful, for example they need the language to get a better job, to pass tests, to enable him to read foreign newspaper, among others. In the view of Gardner and Lambert (1972), instrumental motivation refers to a student’s desire to learn a new language for utilitarian reasons; learning of a new language will reflect on practical values and well-being.

Motivation for a learner of a foreign language could also be described as *intrinsic* and *extrinsic*. Intrinsically motivated activities are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. Intrinsically motivated behaviours are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding consequences, namely, feelings of competence and self-determination (Deci, 1971). Extrinsically motivated behaviours expect a reward, for example money, a praise or positive feedback. Intrinsic motivation leads to greater success in learning a foreign language, especially in a long run (Brown 1994). Nikitina (2019) agrees and stretched the discussion further by adding that the learners’ *efforts* and *perseverance* in learning the TL also come into play. He concluded that among the four relationships, the integrative orientation (motivation) of the learner is the strongest. This is followed by the instrumental orientation, effort and then perseverance.

In Gardner’s (1985) view, motivation is composed of a desire to achieve the aimed progress, invested

effort and positive attitudes. Positive attitudes in particular help bridge the gap of initial student-teacher interaction in foreign language learning, which may sometimes be stressful to beginners.

Motivation results from attitudes which Gardner (1985) sees as components of motivation in language learning. According to him, “motivation ... refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language”. The motivation to learn a foreign language is determined by basic predispositions and personality characteristics such as the learner’s attitudes towards foreign people in general, and the target group and language in particular, motives for learning, and generalised attitudes. The learner’s integrativeness and attitude towards the learning situation for Gardner, have a great impact on their motivation and consequently also on their achievements. Learners of target foreign languages exhibit a strong desire to learn the languages aiming to communicate within the target language community in order to achieve the practical goals, such as employment, earning money and similar (Kovac *et al.*, 2017). The work of Ellis (1994) brings us to the conclusion that positive attitudes towards the TL and its speakers can be expected to enhance learning while negative attitudes impede it.

Though there seems to be great emphasis on the importance of learners' attitudes toward the target language community, there is a more moderate view that rejects the idea of attitude as an unchangeable, fixed trait but states that attitude can develop within complex elements. The theories of classical conditioning, instrumental conditioning and social learning confirm the belief that attitudes held by people to a very large extent, are mostly learned through experience and socialisation. For Araromi (2013), attitude as compared with personality is subject to change due to experience and persuasion.

1.2 Policy on French Education in Ghana

As part of language and literacy at the lower primary level, the recommendation was made for French to be introduced as an optional subject and that, it should be taught in all public schools based on the availability of teachers. The report also emphasised the need to introduce French into all Colleges of Education to equip newly trained teachers to teach French in basic schools. The White Paper on the Report of the Education Reform Review Committee (Oct 2004) clearly stated the Government of Ghana’s intention to ensure that French became a compulsory subject at the Senior High School (SHS) level and that efforts

be made to ensure that the Junior High School (JHS) curriculum prepares students to meet this benchmark. The White Paper on the Education Reform Review Committee's findings also stated that:

"It's also well established that an early and routine acquaintance with second, third and fourth language confers on children great advantages in their life-long proficiency in those languages... the facts of geography impose on Ghana a necessity to promote among wide segments of the commercial and financial sector's workforce a proficiency in the French language; ..." (GOG, 2004: P. 29)

The White Paper also indicated how French is expected to become compulsory at the second cycle level:

"... the study of French to working standard --- will also become compulsory in second cycle education and the Junior High School curriculum should accordingly work up to that policy" (GOG, 2004: P. 30).

The recruitment of the needed human capital from neighbouring countries through exchange programmes, use of retired professors and other qualified teachers to assist in the teaching of French was expected to increase the numbers significantly in the French language classrooms to give full expression to making French compulsory at the SHS level.

It has been eighteen (18) years since the launch of this report and sixteen (16) years since the subsequent Government's White Paper was issued to give it expression. However, very few public schools offer French at the primary level. There is no available data currently regarding the actual number of junior high schools in Ghana offering French. The practice of making French compulsory or optional, therefore, varied across the regions and localities in the country. Urban areas which had a more stable deployment pattern of teachers of French for instance, had more JHSs offering French as a compulsory subject, while more rural areas were more flexible. Most districts in the country are not able to implement the compulsory French teaching policy at the JHS level due to lack of the requisite human capital to prepare the students to write the BECE. (Final French Study Report 2010: 33)

This further clarifies the inability of the second cycle schools to make French one of the core subjects. Till date, French is only offered as an elective subject at this level. It is only potentially available to students who opt to study General Arts programme. Students on the General Arts Programme only stand the chance of offering

French if they choose certain options which have a combination of French and other subjects. These combinations or options vary from school to school making the French sometimes compete with Music and Ghanaian language among other subjects. Students in Science, Home Economics, Visual Arts, Vocational and Technical programmes among others, do not have the opportunity to study French as an elective subject in almost all second cycle institutions in the country. (Final French Study Report 2010)

1.3 General view of instructors of the Basic French course at UMaT

Teacher's beliefs exist on many levels from global to personal and serve as overarching frameworks for understanding and engaging with the world. They can be thought of as guiding principles for teachers that serve as lenses through which new experiences can be understood (Abdi and Asadi, 2015). Teachers' beliefs guide their decision-making, behaviour, and interactions with students and shape their planning and curricular decisions, in effect determining what should be taught and path instruction should follow. Teachers' beliefs, practices and attitudes are important for understanding and improving educational processes. The first interactions with students of UMaT in the Basic French class always reveals mixed reactions over the years. There are always three different groups of students in the opinion of the course instructors; i) those who have never studied French prior to their admission into the university, ii) those who have ever studied French either at the primary or JHS level but had very unpleasant experiences with the target language, the teachers or how the language was taught to them in general, and iii) those students who have studied French before and always look forward to studying it any time the opportunity presents itself.

As course instructors of the Basic French course at UMaT, the researchers always make it as part of their interactions with students at their first meetings to randomly speak to some of them through interviews to pick their thoughts on the study of Basic French as a required course at the University. It always comes to light, at least for the last two years running that, the students come to the Basic French class with a preconceived mind about the course and its instructors. This preconceived mind of the individual students is hedged on their prior experiences with the target language. That is, how they evaluate the target language, the target language speakers, culture, as well as the learning environment.

Between 18 and 20% of first year undergraduate students each year, at the beginning of their Basic French course, are always apprehensive about how things will turn out for them in the course of the year. They are aware it is a university required course and thus will need to pass it to be able to graduate. Their apprehension is always due to the fact that; they had never studied French prior to their admission into the university and always wondered how they would be coping in class for the two semesters that the course is taught.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

French language in Ghana has a status of a foreign language. It is the second most widely studied foreign language in Ghana. However, French is yet to be made compulsory at the SHS level due to failure of successive political leaders to implement what is indicated in the Government of Ghana White Paper 2004 regarding teaching and learning of the French language at the first and second cycle levels. To this end, science students in almost all SHSs in Ghana, do not get the opportunity to study French. University of Mines and Technology (UMaT), an engineering school, has all its students being science students because of the various engineering programmes it runs. UMaT being aware of the prospects of bilingual engineering students, introduced the study of Basic French as a required course to its first year undergraduate students to afford them the opportunity to at least, get the basics of the French language for further development by the students themselves.

In line with the policy of UMaT to have all its first year undergraduate students study Basic French as a university required course, and being aware of the lack of political will to implement the report on this policy, this study nonetheless sets out to investigate the attitudes of these undergraduate students towards the course.

1.5 Research Questions

- a) What is the background experience of UMaT undergraduate students in the French Language?
- b) What is the attitude of engineering students of UMaT towards the learning of Basic French?
- c) What are the views of engineering students of UMaT about the Basic French course?

2. Method

2.1 Population

The population consists of all undergraduate students in the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT), Tarkwa during the 2019/2020 academic year, who are studying or

studied Basic French as a university required course. The focus is more on the first year students because the course is only available to the first year undergraduate students. However, we would like to complement the input of the first years with the second, third and fourth year students since they have also gone through the course and have a view on it.

2.2 Research Instruments and Samples

To assess the attitudes of UMaT undergraduate students towards the study of the Basic French course, we used both interview and questionnaire as instruments. The study relied on the random sampling technique, where each of the elements in a population has equal chance of being selected. (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000; Cresswell, 2013). Two hundred questionnaires were administered electronically to the students, which were made of the same items. The authors took inspiration from and adopted some of the items in the questionnaire from Araromi (2013). Each item was rated on a 2-point Likert-type scale ranging from (2 = Agree, 1 = Disagree). There were three open-ended questions in addition to the fifteen closed ended ones to constitute the second part of the questionnaire. This second part contained questions which focus on the duration of the course and how the course is delivered. Twenty (20) students out of the 200 respondents were interviewed.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were exploited to collect data for this study. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of demographics: age, sex, department, programme of study, level and prior knowledge in French. The second part asked the students about: (a) their attitudes towards the French language, listing fifteen items in a form of statements; b) their opinions focusing on the duration of the course and how the course is delivered listing three items, making the total items in the questionnaire, eighteen (18). Based on the students' responses to the open-ended questions, there was a follow-up interview to twenty (20) of the students randomly selected to validate the responses. The interviews were carried out on phone. All qualitative data were interpreted using content analysis. In mixed methods studies, researchers intentionally integrate or combine quantitative and qualitative data rather than keeping them separate. Qualitative and quantitative data sets can be linked, preserving the numbers and words in each data set. Or, these data can be transformed to create one data set, with qualitative data converted into quantitative data, or quantitative data converted into qualitative data

(Caracelli and Greene, 1993). This integration can be achieved by reporting results together in a discussion section of a study, followed by qualitative quotes or themes that support or refute the quantitative results.

3. Results and Discussions

The study presents the result of findings on the student's attitude towards the Basic French course, a required course at the Department of Technical Communication of University of Mines and Technology (UMaT), Tarkwa. The researchers of this study conducted a survey with 200 undergraduate students in their first, second, third and fourth year(s) of study during the 2019/2020 academic year. The summary of data analysis has been put under two sub-headings: (a) Demographic data analysis; (b) Research questions. Two hundred (200) responses were received after questionnaires were administered to participants randomly and electronically for analysis of frequency and percentage for demographic characteristic.

3.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 revealed Social demographic characteristics of respondents in terms of gender and level.

Table 1 Frequency Distribution of Socio-Demographic Characteristic

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	129	64.5
	Female	71	35.5
	Total	200	100%
Level	100	110	55
	200	50	25
	300	20	10
	400	20	10
	Total	200	100%

The table revealed the frequency distribution according to sex of respondents, the result shows that higher percentages of male as 129 (64.5%) while female were 71 (35.0%). It implies that male have higher percentage. This is the case because of the gender imbalanced regimes that existed in the university. However, since the introduction of a policy called 'gender mainstreaming' by the university, there is a progressive increase in the enrolment of females into the university. The 2019/2020 enrolment figures for instance, show about 70% of males and 30% of females which is the highest in the history of the university.

Table 1 further revealed frequency distribution according to the year of respondents, the result shows higher percentage of first years as 110 (55.0%) while second, third and fourth years show 50 (25%), 20 (10%) and 20 (10%) respectively. The first years are the ones who are currently on the Basic French course, and are almost at the end of it. It implies that the stakes are higher so therefore, it was deliberate to sample more of the respondents being the first years.

3.2 Test of Research Questions of Respondents

3.2.1 Research Question 1

What is the background experience of UMaT students in the French Language?

Table 2 shows that 33 of the respondents being (16.5%) had no background experience in French Language before entering UMaT while 6 of them representing (3%) were francophone. The remaining 161 of them representing (80.5%) had some knowledge in the French language at various levels; with 39 (19.5%) being at the primary level, 118 (59%) being at the junior high level and 4 (2%) being at the senior high school level. This implies that most of the respondents had language experience in French prior to their admission into the university.

Table 2 Frequency Distribution of Respondent with knowledge in the French Language

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
None	33	16.5
Francophone	6	3
Primary	39	19.5
JHS	118	59
SHS	4	2
COE	0	0
Total	200	100

3.2.2 Research Question 2

What is the attitude of engineering students of UMaT towards the learning of Basic French?

Table 3 indicates the statements that were used in the study to test the research question.

Table 3 The Statements used to Test the Research Question

SN	Statement
1	I felt shocked when I learnt that French is compulsory in this University
2	Studying French will enhance my future career
3	I am always happy to be in French Language class
4	I like to study French language at all times
5	I always love to be in the company of French language speakers
6	I love to speak French language fluently
7	I make use of knowledge acquired in French daily
8	I scarcely read my French language notes except when exam approaches
9	I love people that speak French language fluently
10	I will continue to learn French Language after my University Education
11	I study additional materials to improve my knowledge of French
12	I hate it when my mates speak French language to me
13	I need French Language to add to English Language that I already speak
14	I listen to French Station or Cassettes at my leisure
15	I need more practical activities to develop speaking skills

Table 4 reveals the percentage, mean and the standard deviation of the levels of undergraduate student's attitude towards French language as a university required course.

Table 4 The Level of Student Attitudes Towards French Languages

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Mean	SD
1	107 (53.5%)	93 (46.5%)	1.54	0.82
2	183 (91.5%)	17 (8.5%)	1.92	1.30
3	160 (80.0%)	40 (20.0%)	1.80	1.14
4	128 (64.0%)	72 (36.0%)	1.64	0.94
5	122 (61.0%)	78 (39.0%)	1.61	0.91
6	165 (82.5%)	35 (17.5%)	1.83	1.17
7	113 (56.5%)	87 (43.5%)	1.57	0.86
8	127 (63.5%)	73 (36.5%)	1.64	0.93
9	191 (95.5%)	9 (4.5%)	1.96	1.35
10	144 (72.0%)	56 (28.0%)	1.72	1.06
11	97 (48.5%)	103 (51.5%)	1.49	0.78
12	18 (9.0%)	182 (91.0%)	1.09	0.66
13	187 (93.5%)	13 (6.5%)	1.94	1.32
14	33 (16.5%)	167 (83.5%)	1.17	0.63
15	191 (95.5%)	9 (4.5%)	1.96	1.35
Average mean scores			1.63	

From the statements (Table 4), 53.5% of the total respondents agreed that they felt shocked when

they learnt that French is compulsory in this University, while 46.5% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.54). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they felt shocked when they learnt that French is compulsory in this University. This explains the initial anxiety that students have about the Basic French course.

Also, the table shows that 91.5% of the total respondents agreed that studying French language will enhance their future career, while 8.5% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.92). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that French language will enhance their future career language wise.

Furthermore, the table shows that 80.0% of the respondents agreed that they are always happy to be in French Language class, while 20.0% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.80). It suggests that majority of the respondents agreed that they are always happy to be in French Language class.

Also, the table shows that 64.0% of respondents agreed that they like to study French language at all times, while 36.0% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.64). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they like to study French language at all times.

In-addition, 61.0% of the total respondents agreed that they always love to be in the company of French language speakers, while 39.0% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.61). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they love to be in the company of French language speakers.

Furthermore, the table reveals that 82.5% of the total respondents agreed that they love to speak French language fluently, while 17.5% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.83). This suggests that majority of the respondents agreed that they love to speak French language fluently.

The table further shows that 56.5% of the total respondents agreed that they make use of knowledge acquired in French daily, while 43.5% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.57). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they make use of knowledge acquired in French daily.

In-addition, 36.5% of the total respondents disagreed that they scarcely read their French language notes except when exam approaches, while 63.0% agreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.64). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they scarcely read their French language notes except when exam approaches.

There will be the need for more engagements to be done to ensure that the students are kept busy most of the time.

Furthermore, the table shows that 95.5% of the total respondents agreed that they love people that speak French language fluently, while 4.5% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.96). It implies that majority of the respondents agreed that they love people that speak French language fluently.

Also, 72.0% of the total respondents agreed that they will continue to learn French Language after their University Education, while 28.0% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.72). It therefore, suggests that majority of the respondents agreed that they will continue to learn French Language after their University Education.

In-addition, 51.5% of the total respondents disagreed that they study additional materials to improve their knowledge of French, while 48.5% agreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.49). It implies that majority of the respondents disagreed that they study additional materials to improve their knowledge of French language.

Furthermore, 91.0% of the total respondents disagreed that they hate it when their mates speak French language to them, while 9.0% agreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.09). It implies that majority of the respondents disagreed that they hate it when their mates speak French language to them.

Also, 93.5% of the total respondents agreed that they need French Language to add to English Language that they already speak, while 6.5.0% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.94). It suggests that majority of the respondents agreed that they need French Language to add to English Language that they already speak.

In-addition, 83.5% of the total respondents disagreed that they listen to French Station or Cassettes at their leisure, while 16.5% agreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.17). It implies that majority of the respondents disagreed that they listen to French Station or Cassettes at their leisure.

Furthermore, 95.5% of the total respondents agreed that they need more practical activities to develop speaking skills, while 4.5% disagreed, also supported with (Mean = 1.96). It suggests that majority of the respondents agreed that they need more practical activities to develop speaking skills.

3.2.3 Research Question 3

What are the views of engineering students of UMaT about the Basic French course?

The study through this question, focuses on two areas that are of importance to making the Basic French course better and more exciting to the students, especially those of them who seem to have a negative attitude towards it and to help them develop a more positive one to make its learning a lot more fun. These areas included; a) how the course is delivered and b) the course duration. The motivation of the students to learn a foreign language coupled with the learning environment as organised by the teacher are crucial. Fifteen (15) representing 75% out of the twenty (20) students interviewed, expressed appreciable satisfaction about the course delivery and the learning environment. They however, wished that more attention could be paid to practical activities and projects to enable them develop the speaking skills of the language. As already discussed with the quantitative data, the overwhelming majority of the respondents that is, 191 (95.5%) who agree with this statement; *'I need more practical activities to develop speaking skills'*, implies that the students really love to speak the language and will welcome all strategies geared towards helping them develop and sustain positive attitudes towards the French language. Therefore, introducing games, songs, role plays, audio-visuals among others to get them to speak French in class and outside the classroom will make a lot of difference in the study of the course.

The 15 out of the 20 participants interviewed, who displayed positive attitudes towards the course, some of them had this to say; *"I think the lecturers are very good in their mode of presentation of the lecture material. It makes learning the French language fun"*, *"The delivery is good but if possible one on one tutorial will help"* *"It is cool because they make us practice the language by speaking it which helps make it a language and not a subject"*, *"I think they should concern more on the speaking than the writing"*, *"It should take a more practical approach. More should be done in helping us speak it and putting so much emphasis on grammar and writing"* etc The remaining five (5) students out of the twenty (20) interviewed, representing 25% however, expressed strong disapproval of the method and the environment the language is taught. They deplored large class sizes making it

practically impossible to get them to master the French language; Some of them had this to say about the delivery of the course; *“Very bad, I don't see why lecturers will be using a language I don't understand to teach me the same language”*, *“The course in my first year of study has been delivered diligently by passionate lecturers. My challenge is with the large classes for French now. As much as possible, small classes at a time should be kept for the French lesson so that, each student can be observed. Some students become passive learners in the larger classes”* etc. It is important to note that even though the five of the 20 students interviewed did not approve of how the course is delivered, the fact that they came out with suggestions to improve the delivery of the course in itself is positive. The researchers think there is some positivity in their attitude towards the language except that their expectations are not being met. This cohort of students, will need encouragement and practical strategies with the view of helping them develop positive attitudes towards the study of the Basic French course.

Regarding the course duration, majority of the respondents suggested that the one academic year is not enough to equip them with the basics to be able to develop the spoken aspect of the language as expected and to be practiced for further consolidation. Quantitatively, the two hundred (200) respondents expressed their views as follows; twenty-two (22) of them representing (11%) believe that taking the course for four (4) years, that is throughout their stay on campus, should be ideal for them. Twenty-three (23) representing (11.5%) think that, three (3) years should be enough, whereas seventy-four (74) of them representing (37%) are of the opinion that, taking the course for two academic years will help them to really consolidate the basics of the French language for future development. Sixty-eight (68) of the respondents representing (34%), believe that one academic year should be enough to help them get the basics of the language if there is no distraction in academic year in anyway. They made the point that, since this university is specialised in engineering and French being a ‘borrowed course’ (the way some of them put it), it should not engage too much attention to the detriment of the main engineering courses.

A good number of this cohort of respondents (those for the one and two academic year duration), will prefer that the course is taken in the final year (in the case of one year) and the third and the final year (in the case of the two-academic year duration) so that the language will still be active

with them as they enter the job market. The current arrangement according to them, leaves them with almost zero knowledge in the language since they have or will have long forgotten all that they have learnt in the first year by the time they are in their final year. Thirteen (13) of them representing (6.5%) think studying Basic French at UMaT is a waste of time and therefore, it does not deserve to even be studied for a month. We find the view of this cohort of respondents a bit curious regarding the view they had earlier expressed in item 9 of the first 15 questions that is; ‘I love people that speak French language fluently.’ 191 (95.5%) agree with this statement with only 9 (4.5%) disagreeing with it. The turn of event regarding the qualitative data, suggests to us that some of them may like it when other people are speaking French fluently but they themselves would not like to be conversant with the language.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

There is unanimity among language scholars that the success of learners of language is strongly influenced by what they think and how they evaluate the target language, the target language speakers, culture, as well as the learning environment.

The results from the present study reveal largely that the attitudes of the undergraduate students towards the Basic French course is positive. This is attributable to quite a number of factors including the students’ beliefs (their predisposition to action), their knowledge of what benefits they stand to gain from learning French, their motivation in general and the environment in which the language is delivered. The study suggests that more activities for instance, the use of audio-visuals, authentic documents among others, need to be exploited in class to enable the students to quickly develop the spoken aspect of the language. These measures the study reveals, will make the students active participants thereby equipping them with the speaking skills needed. In the same vein, to really consolidate the level as far as getting the basic concepts of the French Language is concerned, there is the need to increase the number of years that the course is delivered currently.

Some of the students are of the view that, taking the course just before the final year and at the final year will be better because, from that point, they are moving out of school into the job environment where they may need the language depending on where they will be plying their profession. So having taken the course in the final year or the last two years of their study, the French Language will

still be active as they move out of school into the job market. The study also reveals that, almost all the students tend to lose all what they have learnt in the Basic French course by the time they get to the final year and about moving out of school due to the long break in studying it.

4.2 Recommendations

In view of the conclusions arrived at from the study, the following are recommended;

i) That the University should make provision for Oral French on the examination time table for it to be monitored like all laboratory works. Once the students become aware that the oral examination is captured on the main time table and being monitored by the examination unit, they will take their practical sessions more seriously to further enhance their positive attitudes towards the course to help develop the speaking skills.

ii) That the Basic French course should be run for a two-academic-year duration. This will enable the students to really consolidate their foundation in the French Language for future development.

iii) That the course should be taken from the third year to the fourth year to ensure that the concepts learnt and used by the students will be readily available to them when they move out of school to the job market. They need the French most in this environment, more especially those of them who will get the opportunity to be working with international organisations.

iv) That an opportunity should be given to a lecturer from the Technical Communication Department, during orientations of first year undergraduate students of the University, to make a brief presentation on the prospects of engineering students learning the French Language, which the UMaT management considered in introducing the course as a programme of study. This could help largely to start to eliminate the negative perceptions a segment of the students has about the course.

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