

Learning French in non-linguistic disciplines: Attitudes and perceptions of students at the Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy, University of Ghana

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ABSTRACT: Learning French as a Foreign Language (FLE) in a non-linguistic discipline requires a strategy for supporting learners to achieve the stated objectives. This study aimed to analyse the attitudes and perceptions of postgraduate students of international relations at the University of Ghana towards learning French. The introduction of French language courses in the Master's programme at this level strives to provide students with a linguistic basis in a language of international communication and to facilitate understanding of exchanges in French with francophone neighbours in performing job functions in diplomatic and international relations. However, most students struggle to master the structures of the French language. The study takes a functionalist approach, which is concerned with real language used by real people. Data were collected through a questionnaire sent to the students on *Google Docs*. The results show the students' differing attitudes. Some displayed positive attitudes towards French, and others felt obliged to do so, given the importance of inter-regional communication; moreover, some perceived French as a means to enhance their careers and should be learnt from primary school onwards. The findings demonstrate that despite the students' unenthusiastic approach to learning activities in class, they exhibited a positive attitude towards learning French as a foreign language.

Keywords: learning, French as a foreign language, attitudes, perceptions, non-linguistic discipline

INTRODUCTION

Learning another language enables an individual to interact and communicate effectively in real-life situations within the culture of the language acquired. It helps the learner access a new perspective by understanding cultural and linguistic diversity. The postgraduate students at the Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy (LECIAD) learn either French, Chinese, Spanish, Arabic or Japanese as part of the foreign language proficiency requirement (at least to the A2 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [CEFR]) for the academic programme at the centre. Students can choose which foreign language they wish to study, subject to the condition that they are neither near-native speakers nor have advanced knowledge of that language. Teaching and learning foreign languages at the centre aim to empower and equip students with the basic linguistic skills to access and understand information and communicate with ease in the current geopolitical and socioeconomic world. More than two-thirds

of students (for instance, 48 of 65 in 2022–2023) choose French every year, given the West African linguistic landscape, whereby Ghana is surrounded by francophone countries such as Burkina Faso, the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, and the Republic of Togo. Their choice of language in the programme may be based on the belief that it would provide advantages and opportunities in future. The course is taught using a blended communicative approach (in-person and online), depending on the arrangement with the facilitator. However, several observations of the learning processes of the students who had chosen French showed that most of them were unwilling to participate, contribute or become involved in class interactions and learning activities, and performed poorly in exams. The question arises why students would have such an attitude towards learning a subject they have chosen voluntarily. However, even students who tried to participate did so hesitantly.

Maafi (2022: 2606) notes that currently, many academic programmes and curricula in most educational institutions no longer meet the demands and needs of the market. It might be tempting to agree with this view when observing that many young graduates who have, for example, completed a programme in foreign languages are unable to express themselves sufficiently in these languages to meet the communication requirements of real-life situations. However, agreement with this assertion requires considering the students' attitudes, perceptions, and motivation towards the subjects of their training. Most foreign language learning creates contexts whereby students spend a limited amount of time each week in classrooms or schools, learning a foreign language under the guidance of a facilitator. These contexts are typically input-limited, with students spending between 30 minutes and three hours per week in classrooms learning the foreign languages (Murphy, 2014: 2). Students in these contexts have different linguistic and academic outcomes, and the extent to which they are successful can depend on numerous variables, including home language support, oral language skills (in the first and second language), and pedagogical approach, to name a few (Murphy, 2018; 2019).

An analysis of students' attitudes to and perceptions of learning a foreign language and the approach to teaching should be considered when teaching and learning French in a non-linguistic discipline (NLD), such as the Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy (LECIAD). The Council of Europe (2000) affirms that individual attitudes and perceptions towards different languages, those who speak them, and the cultures with which they are associated have been identified as one of the most significant obstacles to the development of effective policies for linguistic diversity (Council of Europe, 2000: 6).). Further research into how students' attitudes and perceptions of foreign languages in the classroom are dealt with by stakeholders would be productive. The results of such research could enable students, teachers and researchers to find appropriate approaches or techniques to foreign language teaching and learning that might help dismantle negative attitudes and perceptions, and lead to increased motivation.

Evaluative judgements of students' participation in classroom presentations and interactions are necessary, given that attitudes, perceptions, and motivations are integral to foreign language acquisition and learning, leading to effective participation in the teaching and learning process. Hence, a close examination of students' attitudes and perceptions is required. Therefore, the present study aims to focus on and analyse the attitudes, perceptions, and main motives of postgraduate students at LECIAD who choose to learn French as a foreign language. This study sets out to engage with the following questions:

1. What attitudes do postgraduate students in non-linguistic disciplines display towards learning French as a foreign language?
2. How do students perceive the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language?
3. What implications do students' attitudes and perceptions have for the teaching and learning process of foreign languages to achieve their goals?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attitudes to and perceptions of language learning

Every individual or language learner begins either based on personal choice or the requirements of an educational institution. David (2001: 22) argues that factors, such as social status, gender, level of education, ethnicity, age, occupation, rural or urban origin, speakers, theme, place, media, and the formality of the situation, prompt language choice. Notably, learning a foreign language involves learners' attitudes, perceptions, behaviours and differing expectations. Each attitude or perception stems from some kind of motivation within the learner. In other words, the effectiveness of foreign language learning depends on the pupils' attitudes, perceptions, motivations and aptitudes, as well as the teachers' professional approaches. Lai (2005: 365) explains attitude in French as '*un processus latent, interne à l'individu, qui ne peut être directement mesuré mais qui peut être interprété au travers des réponses observables d'un individu à des stimuli*', translated as, a latent process, internal to the individual, which cannot be measured directly but which can be interpreted through the individual's observable responses to stimuli. This statement signifies that attitude can only be measured through actions and reactions. Garrett (2010: 19) defines linguistic attitudes based on the general definition of attitudes provided by Sarnoff, who stated that 'an attitude is a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects'. He concluded that 'an attitude is an evaluative orientation toward a social object of some kind, whether it is a language or a new government policy, etc.' (Garrett, 2010: 20). Therefore, an attitude is considered a predisposition to responding in a certain way to a person, object, situation, event or idea. Attitudes are closely related to opinions; however, a person may not be able to express their attitudes as clearly in words as they do with opinions. An individual's attitudes can only be revealed by their actions and, perhaps, by the content of what they say.

According to Wang (2017: 2), 'a perception is a set of internal sensory cognitive processes of the brain at the level of unconscious cognitive functioning that detects, relates, interprets and searches for internal cognitive information in the mind'. This viewpoint implies that perception is a cognitive process that can be complex since what one perceives in their mind might not be the objective reality. From that perspective, one can define attitude as a person's way of thinking, an orientation, or an inherent idea that cannot easily be defined from the outside but can be interpreted by observation. Perception can also be defined as a person's complex mindset, which might not represent objective reality. These explanations form the operational definitions of attitude and perception for the study.

Language attitude reveals how language is used within social contexts, including how it relates to social identity, group membership, and cultural norms. Understanding language attitude could also foster better social cohesion and integration, especially in linguistically diverse

societies. In addition, it might impact employment opportunities, as particular languages or accents might be favoured in the labour market. In the context of this study, investigating students' attitudes to and perceptions of learning French would not only help researchers and instructors understand the level of preparedness of foreign language learners for social integration and fairer employment practices, but also develop strategies and innovative ways of dealing with the challenges of learning French.

A review of the existing literature provided a better understanding of the two concepts examined in this study (Yashima, 2009; Garrett, 2010; Galloway et al., 2017; Hromova, 2019; Bratož et al., 2022; Zhang & Pladevall-Ballester, 2022; Agbo et al., 2020). Language learners' attitudes can be discussed from different perspectives: They can be related to the learning situation, the subject matter (the technicalities of the language and the teaching methodology), or to the language community in question. Yashima (2009) describes attitudes towards the target community as an 'international posture', insofar as how students see themselves 'connected to the international community, [with] concern for international affairs and...a readiness to interact with people [from the target culture(s)]' (Yashima, 2009: 146). One cannot discuss attitudes without linking them to motivation, as the concepts are closely related. Masgoret and Gardner (2003) outlined five attitude/motivation variables, including integrative orientation, which refers to the reasons why learners are willing to identify with the target language community, and instrumental orientation, which refers to the desire to learn a language for practical use. These variables could only reveal part of the rationality embedded in language learners' decisions, highlighting the importance of investigating their attitudes to and perceptions of foreign language learning to provide more input.

Galloway et al. (2017) investigated learners' attitudes towards English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in Japan and China. The study found that the current prestigious status of English and its pragmatic usefulness drove their enthusiastic attitudes to learning English through EMI. On the other hand, a similar study in mainland China showed that students did not regard EMI as a meaningful way to learn English, because their needs were limited to English for specific purposes courses (Jiang et al., 2019). Zhang and Pladevall-Ballester (2022) conducted comparable research on students' perspectives of different EMI disciplinary courses in mainland China, finding that students were generally positive towards EMI courses, although their attitudes became rather negative at the end of the semester.

The results of a study by Riyanto et al. (2017) on learners' attitudes to language learning with reference to reading comprehension show that a minority of students had a positive attitude and had achieved high scores in the reading comprehension test, while the majority of them had negative attitudes, as manifested in their low scores in the reading test. The authors suggest eliciting language learners' attitudes to their learning situation through their evaluation of the course, the teacher, and either or both the materials and classroom environment, all of which can influence their attitudes towards language learning.

Hromova (2019) examined the perceptions and motivations for learning foreign languages of 132 first-year students at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, and suggests that modern students seek to expand their knowledge, improve their communication skills, and become integrated into

the international community. In that study, Hromova (2019) found concerning patterns in students' perceptions of language learning, such as unclear reasons, lack of confidence, and others. Another study by Peace-Hughes et al. (2021) focused on learners' attitudes and perceptions regarding bilingualism in Scotland. This study assessed students' perceptions of their bilingualism and emphasised the key role of parents, family and community-based support systems for effective bilingual practices.

Eshghinejad (2016) investigated the attitudes of male and female English as a foreign language (EFL) students towards learning English as regards behavioural, cognitive, and emotional aspects by administering a questionnaire to 30 students. The results showed that although the respondents were positive about English language learning in these three aspects, there was a significant difference between the male and female students' attitudes. Behavioural attitudes were higher among male students, while cognitive and emotional attitudes were higher among female students. Sex differences in language learning remain an area of research. For example, Amin (2017) states that female learners of English as a foreign language are positive about learning and are more active insofar as engaging in practical communication strategies. Similarly, Akdamar (2020) concludes that female students held more positive attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language than male students. Mutar (2019) finds that Iraqi students' perceptions of learning English are positive, with no differentiation between sexes and universities.

Yaseen and Gholami (2022) examined EFL students' perceptions of English education policy and the discrete purposes for learning in Kurdish contexts across various fields of study. The study collected data by administering a questionnaire to 300 science (not linguistics) students at two private universities in Kurdistan. The findings showed that students displayed positive attitudes towards learning English as an international language and considered English competency a significant academic achievement. The authors noted that 'several factors could contribute to Kurdish students' positivity towards English language education, such as native-speaker teachers, peer groups, and the students' parents (Yaseen & Gholami, 2022: 42). However, the results revealed that some students felt dissatisfied with the status quo of English education at their institutions.

Twumasi (2021) analysed Ghanaian students' attitudes to and motivational factors for studying Ghanaian indigenous languages at the University of Cape Coast. The study distributed 100 questionnaires, which were administered to 50 Ghanaian language students and 50 non-Ghanaian language students at the University of Cape Coast. The results showed that students not only felt positive about studying Ghanaian indigenous languages but also had instrumental reasons, such as self-identification, ethnicity, and belongingness, for doing so.

Lomotey and Boasiako (2020) investigated the influence of language beliefs and attitudes on students' motivation to learn Spanish and Russian as foreign languages at the university level. The study was conducted with 64 Ghanaian students studying Spanish and 45 students studying Russian. The results showed that the participants held positive beliefs and attitudes about their language courses, despite the apparent challenges of studying these European languages. The authors argue that the findings contradict the popular belief that students at Ghanaian universities regard such courses as irrelevant in the African context. The findings also suggest that while the

majority of the participants had extrinsic motivations for studying the respective languages, ‘A significant number of the participants have negative perceptions and attitudes towards certain subjects, namely literature and civilisation. This negativity affected their study of the languages.’ (Lomotey & Boasiako, 2020: 81).

Agbo et al. (2020) investigated students’ perceptions of and attitudes towards teaching and learning French at the Ho Technical University. Data were collected from 94 participants in the Department of Secretarial & Management Studies at the university. The study employed a descriptive survey research design to elicit information from respondents by using a 5-point Likert scale administered through an online platform. A 5-point Likert scale is a survey instrument for measuring attitudes or opinions; it typically includes a statement and a range of responses that allow participants to express their level of agreement or disagreement. This scale requires respondents to select one of five options that best represent their opinion when presented with a statement, e.g., ‘I enjoy studying French’. The study revealed that most of the respondents (90%) found it difficult or very difficult to learn French while the majority (57.5%) found it difficult to express themselves orally; more than half of the respondents, 24 (25.5%) and 37 (39.4%), respectively either agreed or strongly agreed that they strongly desired to learn French and believed that knowledge of the language was key to career opportunities. This outcome demonstrates that the students display a positive attitude towards learning French and seek to improve their use of the language. However, they noted insufficiency of learning resources and competing demands from their other courses.

Lastly, Soku et al. (2011) conducted a questionnaire survey of 130 students’ attitudes towards studying English and French at Wisconsin University in Ghana, specifically first- and second-year undergraduates. The results showed that sex significantly influenced students’ attitudes towards studying English; female students were more positive about the two languages than their male counterparts. The results further showed that the students’ academic levels (either first- or second-year) did not significantly affect their attitudes towards studying English and French. However, the study showed that the language barrier significantly affected their attitude towards studying French. Furthermore, francophone students displayed more positivity about studying French than their anglophone counterparts, which could be because of their foundation in the French language. The researchers posit that the results of this study strongly suggest interventions to encourage male students’ appreciation of and attitude towards studying both languages. The study concludes that Anglophone students in French classes should receive special attention to develop a more positive attitude towards the language.

Many studies have examined students’ attitudes to and perceptions of language learning in local, second and foreign languages (Twumasi, 2021; Lomotey & Boasiako, 2020; Yaseen & Gholami, 2022; Eshghinejad, 2016), as well as attitudes towards English as a medium of instruction and reading comprehension (Galloway et al., 2017; Riyanto et al., 2017). Although these studies focused on students’ attitudes vis-à-vis languages, their contexts differed from the present study and did not address learning French as a foreign language. The studies that focused on attitudes towards studying teaching and learning French (Soku et al., 2011; Agbo et al., 2020) were limited in context and scope, as the former focused on a private university and examined

gender, level and language background as influencing factors of attitudes at a private university, while the latter examined the attitudes and perceptions of students at a technical university, none of which considered whether learners' attitudes and perceptions impacted teaching and learning foreign languages.

The present study sought to address this deficiency and extend the discussion on learners' attitudes to and perceptions of learning French and their implications for foreign language teaching by focusing on postgraduate students at LECIAD, a non-language discipline at the University of Ghana, a public university in Ghana.

Functional and self-perception theories of attitudes

The study is based on the functional and self-perception theories of attitude. The functional theory posits that people's attitudes are determined by the functions they serve and governed by their motives (Katz, 1971). To wit, people have different attitudes that serve specific functions for them. Attitudes help people achieve their basic goals (McLeod, 2009). Among the functions attitude may serve are the instrumental value-expressive functions. The instrumental function refers to situations in which people develop favourable attitudes towards things that reward them or help them achieve their goals; the value-expressive function refers to beliefs that strengthen the self-esteem of both teacher and learner in teaching and learning situations. From this perspective, people develop their attitudes to enhance their self-image, which controls their motivation.

On the other hand, self-perception theory suggests that individuals observe their behaviour and adjust their attitudes to align with their behaviour and that a person's behaviour shapes their attitudes and perceptions. Hence, self-perception theory (Bem, 1972: 8) submits that an individual forms their attitudes through observing their behaviour.

Students' attitudes to and perceptions of learning French as a foreign language can be self-perceived and found in the functionalist theory. The instrumental function can emerge when students in Ghana and, by extension, the West African sub-region develop their attitudes and perceptions, depending on their understanding of the benefits of learning foreign languages in general, and French in particular. Students' attitudes and perceptions might also result from shared values regarding foreign languages in conversations in their environment. Theories pertaining to attitude are relevant in explaining the reasons for students' positive or negative attitudes and perceptions towards learning French, and their implications for foreign language teaching and learning.

METHODOLOGY

Aims and place of investigation

Mutar (2019) notes that attitude is integral to determining and guiding learner behaviour, thereby leading to second language acquisition. Indeed, many scholars have observed that attitudes towards language learning play a pivotal role in language learning, as they influence learners' success or failure (Zainol et al., 2012; Finch, 2008). Accordingly, students with a positive attitude towards learning a particular language are likely to enjoy their lessons and acquire better language knowledge and skills. However, students with negative attitudes towards language learning might

be less interested and thus, pay less attention to the teaching and learning activities in class. To this end, contributions from various contexts must be considered for a better understanding when comparing the attitudes of learning groups in different parts of the world. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the following:

1. Postgraduate students' attitudes towards learning French as a foreign language.
2. Students' perceptions of the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language.
3. The implications of students' attitudes to and perceptions of the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

The study was conducted at the University of Ghana, in the Master's programme in international relations (LECIAD). It is a centre solely for postgraduate programmes in international relations, international law and diplomatic practices, foreign policy, international politics and development, and others. Although it is a non-linguistic discipline, it is mandatory for students to take and pass a proficiency course in one of the foreign languages offered by the programme. The LECIAD offers language courses in Arabic, Chinese, French, Spanish, German, and Japanese, depending on the availability of tutors. Importantly, without a pass mark of 50% or above in the foreign language proficiency course, a student cannot graduate, even if they complete all the other courses.

Participants and design

For the present study, the researcher selected all the students enrolled in the French as a foreign language course at LECIAD, using a purposive sampling technique. The total sample for the study was 48 students. There were 17 male and 31 female students, all in their first year of the Master's programme. Their ages ranged from 17 to 28 years and above, with a mean age of 22.9 years. The participants formed a homogeneous group in terms of Ghanaian nationality and educational qualifications, as all the students had already obtained their honours or first degrees from different tertiary institutions. The researcher contacted the participants personally before data collection to obtain their consent and assured them of anonymity and confidentiality. As the aim of the study was to investigate students' attitudes and perceptions towards learning French and the implications thereof for foreign language teaching and learning, it was necessary to use data collection techniques that allowed participants to express themselves freely to obtain a clear understanding of their perceptions.

However, considering that the participants might have been inclined to please the researcher, a foreign language teacher at the centre, the questions were designed without any reference to him and distributed by another researcher (Dörnyei, 2003). For this reason, quantitative and qualitative data were collected by means of a questionnaire survey with dichotomous and Likert scale structured questions distributed via *Google Forms* to determine the students' attitudes to and perceptions of learning French as a foreign language in their programme. The quantitative data were collected using closed-ended questionnaire items with multiple-choice or Likert-scale formats, and the qualitative data through open-ended questions. The quantitative data were collected to analyse the general views that the participants held about learning French, and the qualitative data were collected to examine the reasons for their viewpoints.

Data collection instrument

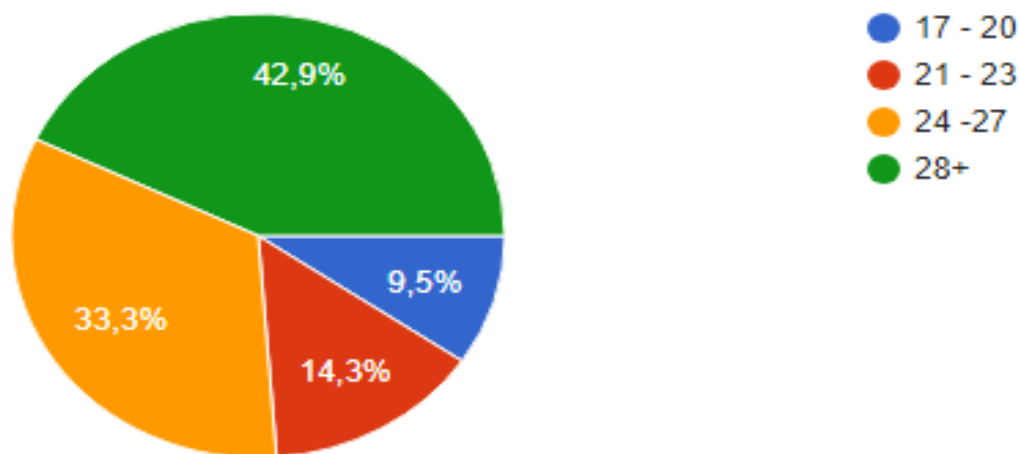
Questionnaire: The questionnaire administered to the students consisted of three sections: The first section pertained to personal characteristics, such as gender, age and language background; the second section consisted of closed-ended items on a Likert scale with two alternatives (1 = yes, 2 = no); and the third section contained five open-ended questions. The survey was shared on the participants' *WhatsApp* group platform for all to access. The questionnaire design facilitated easy access, was not time-consuming, and contained open-ended questions to support a better understanding of the participants' attitudes to and perceptions of foreign language learning.

Observation: The participants' behaviours, reactions and social interactions during the teaching and learning process in class were observed.

Data analysis and interpretation: The study analysed the closed-ended items on the Likert scale quantitatively and qualitatively in the form of charts and graphs, followed by an analysis of the open-ended responses.

FINDINGS

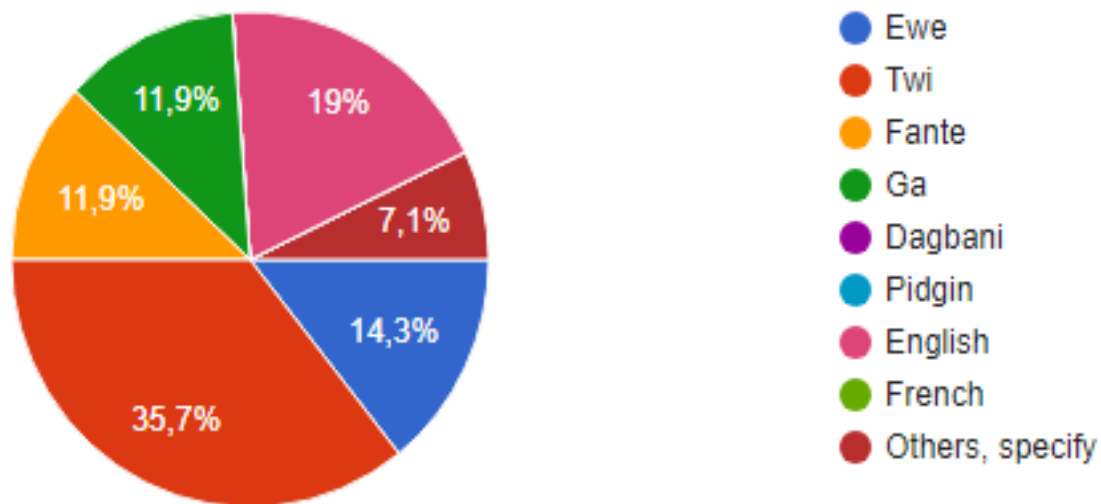
The study analysed the results of the questionnaire administered to respondents in the form of graphs and a bar chart. These include the participants' ages, linguistic profiles, basic knowledge, reasons for learning French, learners' opinions and reasons for learning French as a foreign language, the relevance of French in the study programme, and the learning approach to foreign language learning.



Pie Chart 1: Participants' ages

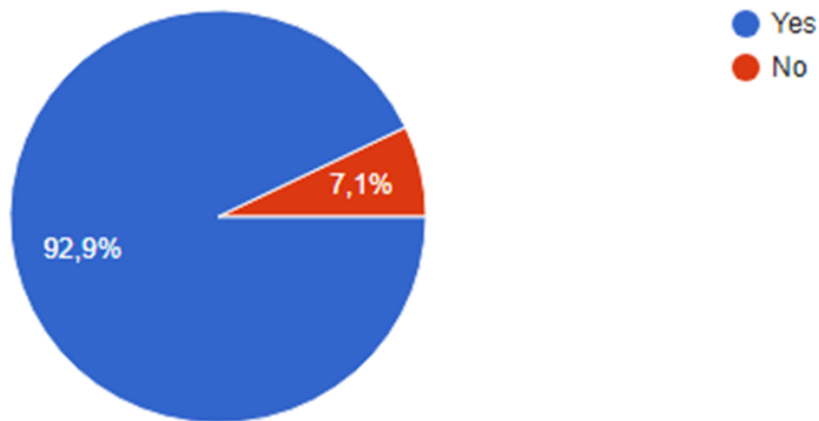
The pie chart above highlights the participants' age groups. The diagram illustrates that the participants' ages ranged between 17 and 28 years, and the majority (76.1%) were above 23.

Accordingly, one can conclude that the participants were mature/adults and had developed their own attitudes, perceptions, and opinions about any learning instructions in their academic careers.



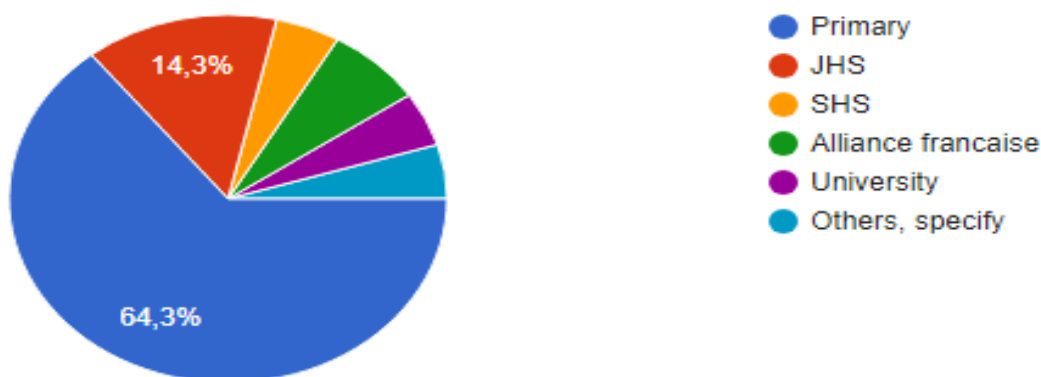
Pie Chart 2: Participants' linguistic profiles in order of acquisition

The graph above displays the students' linguistic profiles, given that their multilingual backgrounds could also have influenced their attitudes to and perceptions of learning foreign languages. This potential exists because knowing different languages can profoundly affect people's attitudes towards languages in various ways, such as increased appreciation of linguistic diversity, cognitive flexibility, and career opportunities. The graph indicates that students are linguistically heterogeneous because they speak different languages, most of which are indigenous or local Ghanaian languages. Given the illustrated order of acquisition and articulation, 35.7% of participants spoke Twi in their daily lives, 14.3% spoke Ewe, 11.9% spoke Fante, 11.9% spoke Ga, and 7.1% spoke other languages. Interestingly, while 19% prioritise the English language, the results show no indication of any of them speaking French, as seen in the lemon-green-coloured segment. This finding can be attributed to the sociolinguistic environment in which French is not commonly spoken.



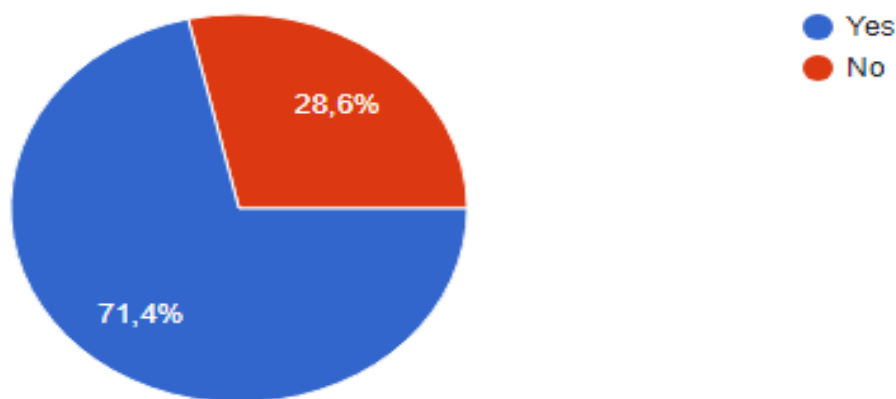
Pie Chart 3: Basic French acquisition

In determining if the participants had ever learnt basic French before taking the course at its current level, the pie chart reveals that 92.9% of the participants stated they had encountered the French language to differing degrees. Despite these claims, the participants did not understand simple everyday French expressions and thus remained beginners, since they could not reach level A2, under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001). However, 7.1% did not know any French. This finding alone might precipitate varied reactions to and perceptions of learning French, and could inform the facilitator of the strategies and approaches to use in dealing with people learning it.



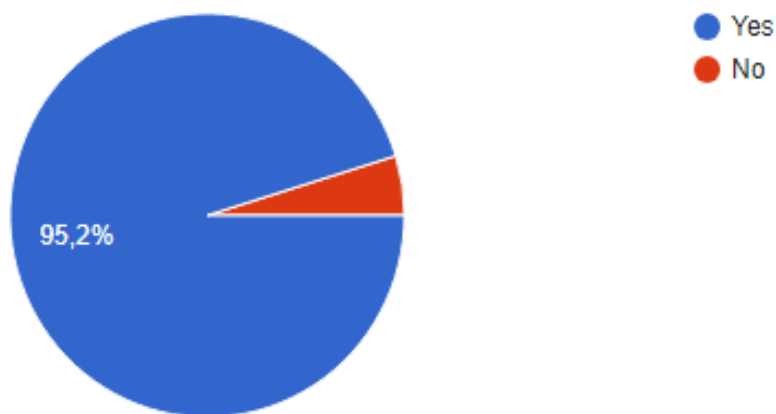
Pie Chart 4: Levels at which participants learnt French

Pie Chart 4 indicates the various levels at which participants have learnt French. The data show that the majority of respondents (64.3%) learnt basic French only in primary school, 14.3% also had French in Junior High School (JHS), and others learnt French either in Senior High School (SHS), at the Alliance Française, or at university. Students with differing levels of French proficiency entering the course, which is pitched at least A2 in the programme, can experience a range of effects on their attitudes and performance. Beginners may feel overwhelmed, leading to low confidence, while more advanced students may feel insufficiently challenged, which may affect their motivation. To reiterate, beginners can become negative if they consistently feel left behind, and advanced students may disengage if they perceive the course material as too easy.



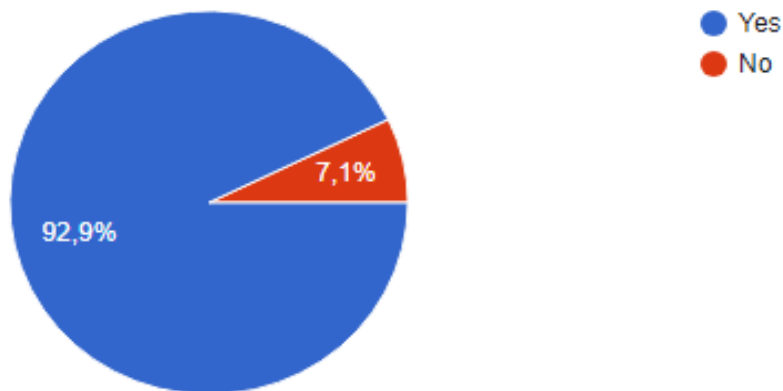
Pie Chart 5: Learning functional French at the postgraduate level

The investigator sought to determine if the participants had any preconceived ideas about learning functional French (a level of linguistic and cultural competence necessary for using the French language in professional francophone environments) in the programme. The statistics reveal that 71.4% of participants knew they were going to learn French, but 28.6% had not anticipated it. The latter group might be students who had either not read the programme content thoroughly or found the word ‘international affairs’ attractive. This difference can engender varied student perceptions of learning French as a foreign language.



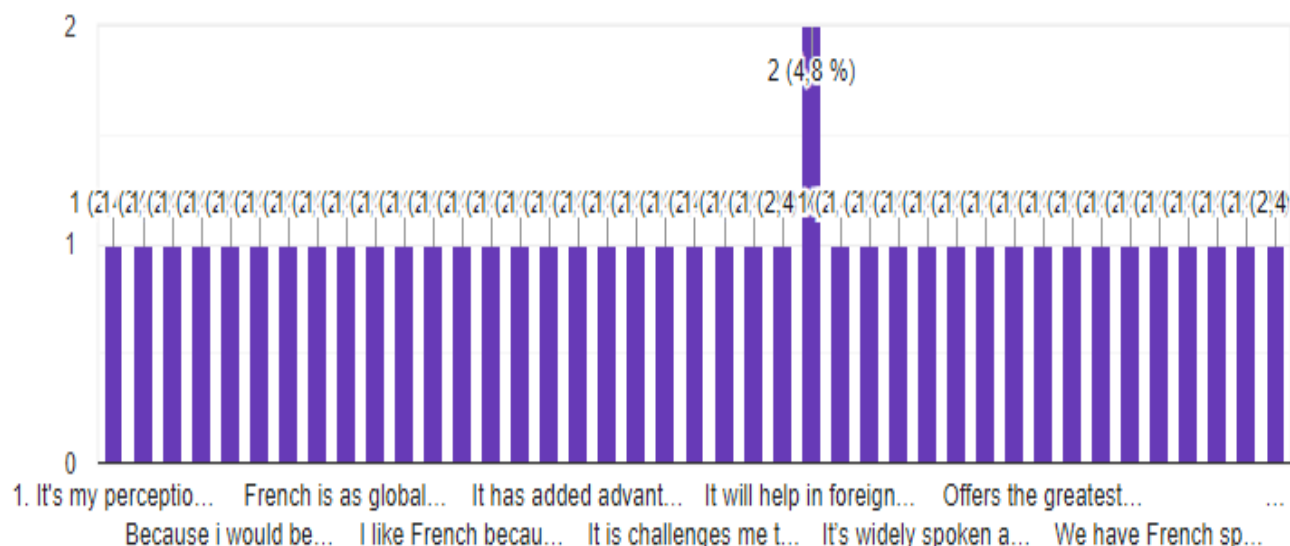
Pie Chart 6: Relevance of learning French in the programme

Almost all participants (95.2%) agreed that learning French was very relevant to the programme, whereas only a few did not see the importance of French to their careers.



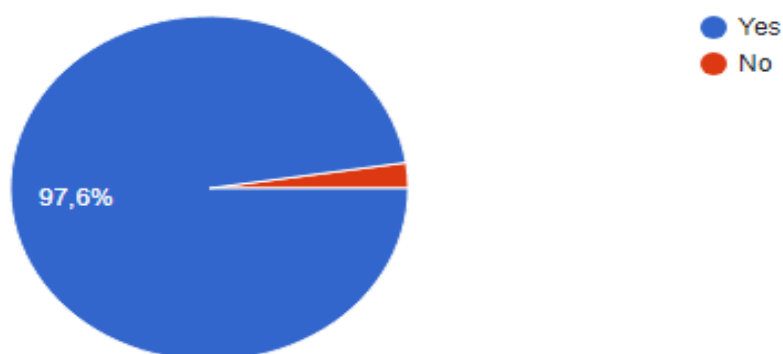
Pie Chart 7: Opinions on learning French

Pie Chart 7 indicates that the majority of respondents (92.9%) liked French as a subject, while 7.1% disliked it. This finding underscores the need for a thorough investigation into students' attitudes and perceptions to identify the various reasons for their liking or disliking of French. Despite Pie Chart 6 indicating that 95.2% of respondents found learning French relevant, yet not all of them liked French as a subject, as observed in Pie Chart 7.



Bar Chart 1: Reasons for liking/disliking French

The participants cited various reasons for liking French, ranging from the added advantages of the language to more opportunities in the labour market. However, participants who responded with 'no' expressed dissatisfaction with learning French because they had been learning the language since primary school, yet had not progressed in proficiency and were still unable to speak it. Others disliked French for no apparent reason.



Pie Chart 8: Opinions on learning French in the programme

Despite the majority of participants (97.6%) agreeing that French as a foreign language should be taught in their programme, some participants disagreed with learning a foreign language as part of their courses. The finding that 92.9% of respondents like the subject and 97.6% believe it should be part of the programme raises concerns that some students do not like French yet agree to study it because foreign language learning is mandatory for their programme and because French is geographically closer to them than other foreign languages. Hence, liking French may not necessarily translate into a positive attitude towards the subject in reality, which would certainly reflect in these students' attitudes to and perceptions of learning French.

Why is French relevant and should be taught in the programme?

The attitudinal studies in the literature review discussed various attitudes and perceptions (both positive and negative) in relation to motivation, attitude to the language and culture, self-efficacy and confidence, and perceptions of the learning environment that become influential, depending on the context and the type of learners, among others. In responding to the question above, the participants advanced various reasons, expressing their attitudes to and perceptions of their answers. These responses related primarily to the international reach and relevance of the language:

- *French is a requirement, a mandatory course in their programme in order to graduate*
- *French is good for international engagement and knowledge, to understand French policies and their behaviour in diplomacy.*
- *French is needed to secure an international position because it adds to your language-speaking abilities.*
- *Diplomats need to understand another international language aside [from] English.*
- *It gives one an upper hand over others who cannot speak any other foreign language.*
- *For travel purposes, since Ghana's border lands are francophones (sic).*
- *The International Affairs and Diplomacy programme is a global one; the programme requires interactions with people from other nationalities; the course is relevant to understand the francophone culture.*
- *Learning French makes it easier to communicate with neighbouring countries, as Ghana is surrounded by francophone countries.*
- *Learning French offers opportunity (sic) for good negotiations in French-speaking countries.*

Among others

The data above underscores the strategic significance of French as both an academic requirement and a professional asset in the field of international relations and diplomacy. Beyond being a mandatory course for graduation, French is perceived as an essential tool for global engagement, offering deeper insight into francophone policies, diplomacy, and culture. Its mastery enhances employability by providing a competitive edge in securing international positions and strengthens the ability of diplomats to operate effectively in multilingual contexts. Regionally, French is indispensable for Ghana, given its geographical positioning among francophone countries, facilitating communication, travel, and negotiations across borders. Ultimately, the relevance of French extends beyond the classroom, serving as a bridge for cultural understanding and international collaboration.

Approach to foreign language teaching and learning

The foreign language (French) is mostly taught in a blended mode, both in-person and virtually, using a communicative approach. Students attend weekly lessons and receive both oral and written assignments and projects.

The participants provided several suggestions for the study to determine how French as a foreign language should be taught in the programme, given their attitude and behaviour towards

the subject. Some stated that a foreign language (French, in this case) should not be taught online but rather in person, and should primarily be taught in person and interactively for easy assimilation and familiarisation. Others believed French teaching and learning at this level should focus only on understanding the basics, which would enable them to do further self-learning after completing the programme. The participants also suggested that French should be learnt in a way to facilitate professional relationships, meaning that its use should relate to one's profession. Some participants proposed that in the process of teaching and learning French, the facilitator should communicate in French and encourage the students to speak French to each other, while others suggested using a blend of English and French.

The participants proposed using texts, audio-visual aids, an interactive approach, presentations in French, and strict enforcement of communication or interaction in French during French lessons. Interestingly, the concept of immersion, exchange programmes, or a linguistic trip of at least one month in a francophone country to motivate students and to complement what is taught in class was suggested.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal a discrepancy between the students' overwhelming approval of learning French in the International Affairs and Diplomacy programme and their actual attitudes to and behaviour in class participation, interactions in the learning process, and their performances.

Classroom observation showed that students either avoid or are reluctant to participate in interactions unless persuaded by the facilitator. The students do this under the pretext that their vocabulary is not sufficient for them to express themselves as they do in English, and that they will not be able to pronounce the French lexical items correctly. This finding is understandable, given that the majority of participants (76.1%) were aged 24 or older, since children learn second or foreign languages more easily than older or adult learners. Nevertheless, the results show some positivity towards learning French and foreign languages in general. Because adult learners are cognitively more mature, they do not use the natural way of language acquisition; instead, they take advantage of formal and clear instructions with explicit rules, as confirmed by Hyland and Hyland (2019). The age factor cannot be underestimated in pedagogy; it can cause anxiety and fear that impacts students' willingness to participate in the learning process in foreign language classes.

Pie Chart 2 illustrates that French is not really part of the respondents' language repertoire. No respondent speaks French in their daily life, even though around 91.9% claimed to have learnt French in basic school. The non-prioritisation of French among the languages spoken by the students could be linked to the environmental factor, as French is not a vehicular language in Ghanaian society outside the classroom or school setting. Since the learning environment has been found important to learners, this may negatively impact students' attitudes and perceptions about learning foreign languages in an environment far removed from the target language.

Insofar as the core issue of learning French in their programme, 28.6% of the participants had not anticipated or were unprepared for it. Perhaps these students did not sufficiently scrutinise the various components of the programme they had applied for. Indeed, the attitudes and perceptions of a learner who is not psychologically prepared for a particular learning instruction might not necessarily be affected, but their participation and performance in that learning process could. Nevertheless, the majority of students felt that learning French was essential and should therefore be part of their programme. The study found evidence of positive attitudes and perceptions based on the responses, as seen in Pie Charts 8 and 9 and Bar Chart 1. Students perceived that learning a foreign language (in this case, French) was useful for functioning effectively in the international community, which aligns with the instrumental function theory of attitudes. They expressed the importance of French in their programme as, 'I think French will help me in my career'; 'I like French because it will increase my knowledge of francophone issues'; 'it will help in foreign missions'; 'French is a global language', etc. These statements could reflect personal and national relevance, indicating the students' positive attitudes to and perceptions of foreign language learning. Pie Chart 1 illustrates that 48% of respondents believe that 'it will help in foreign missions'. This result corroborates findings by Taylor (2013), which highlight the importance of students making choices that are relevant to their personal lives, not just to society. The study found a high level of appreciation for the general usefulness of foreign languages, with almost all participants agreeing in principle that French is crucial and must be included in the academic programme. However, although the students are aware of the value of foreign language learning in non-linguistic disciplines, such as international affairs and diplomacy, banking, national security, immigration, hospitality and hotel management, such awareness does not necessarily translate into their active participation in classroom interaction during the learning process, unless driven by internal or personal motivation. The acceptance of some students that French or a foreign language is a compulsory course could be regarded as fulfilling the knowledge function in the functional theory of attitudes, inasmuch as they would not opt for a foreign language, were it not compulsory.

Despite the participants' stated good reasons for learning French, there remains a need to raise awareness among students about the practicality of foreign language learning. Tinsley (2013) confirms this viewpoint, stating that consistent, recurring messaging about the value of foreign language learning from various sources is needed to change actual behaviour. However, further research would provide a better understanding of most students' disinterest in the classroom learning process. This behaviour manifests in students' class participation, assignments, and performance in the semester examinations.

If attitudes and perceptions predicted students' actual performance in a foreign language, one would expect that positive attitudes and perceptions would lead to their enthusiastic performance. However, the study found that the perceived personal and global relevance expressed in the participants' responses, which are positively associated with studying French as a foreign language, did not correlate with their actual participation and performance in the classroom learning process. Students' attitudes and perceptions can be deceptive if unrelated to actual learning engagement and practice, which would reveal their real attitudes.

To this end, the findings have important theoretical, methodological, and practical implications for teaching and learning foreign languages.

Pedagogical Implications

The study results have both practical and methodological implications for teaching and learning foreign languages. Based on the findings, the impact of foreign language learners' attitudes and perceptions on classroom participation and interaction cannot be overlooked. The way students perceive foreign language learning may not automatically lead to positive involvement in the classroom learning situation. The teaching process must develop appropriate strategies to stimulate students' interest and strengthen their belief in the value of foreign language learning. Such actions would help translate their positive attitudes and perceptions into actual practice by actively participating in classroom learning activities in the target language. Consequently, foreign language teaching should use students' engagement and interaction in the classroom to turn such positivity into reality. This outcome can be achieved by making students aware of the importance of learning foreign languages, organising competitions among students, etc.

Another pedagogical implication is to consider the language of instruction in the foreign language classroom. Since the results indicate that some students are unable to participate in classroom interaction because they lack lexical items, the students' multicultural approach and plurilingualism should be considered to promote greater participation in the learning process. The acceptance of plurilingual competences in the classroom improves the confidence of individuals who later grasp the appropriate use of the target language (Kaiza & Chachu, 2023). This aspect can potentially influence students' participation, which would gradually change their behaviour towards the actual language practice in class. Lastly, dynamism and resourcefulness insofar as employing teaching techniques, teaching and learning materials (e.g., authentic documents), audio-visual aids, games, and other learning activities would encourage students' enthusiasm for and involvement in the teaching and learning process.

Conclusion

This study sought to analyse the attitudes and perceptions of postgraduate students towards foreign language learning (in this context, French) in LECIAD, a non-linguistic discipline at the University of Ghana. Foreign language learning in an environment far removed from native speakers and mostly confined to the classroom can be very complex and generate various attitudes and perceptions among students. Data were collected for analysis through participant observation and a questionnaire. The results of the observations indicated that although the students attended class, few were willing to participate in the learning process. A questionnaire was then designed to collect information on the students' opinions and views, and how they perceived foreign language learning in their programme. The analysed data show that students display positive attitudes to and perceptions of foreign language learning, reflected in the various reasons why learning French is relevant to them. These reasons include the opportunities foreign languages provide in the labour market, the geographical location of Ghana, understanding the geopolitics of francophone countries, and career advancement. However, the students' perceived importance of language learning emanating from this study seems at odds with their actual behaviour in the classroom and their exam performance, which

should be further explored. It is therefore not surprising that attitudes and perceptions can sometimes be deceptive. Thus, the data show that French is not one of the languages students use or practise in their environments. This finding could significantly impact students' participation, classroom interaction, and exam performance. Given these findings, the study suggests that teaching and learning foreign languages should include techniques and strategies that motivate learners to realise their dreams and expectations, and that learning should be based on the understanding and needs of learners and their environment, especially in non-linguistic disciplines.

In conclusion, the study was predominantly limited to the theoretical aspect, using questionnaires and observation. Therefore, further research in the area of performance comparison and instructional intervention would contribute to determining whether students' intentions (if well managed) could translate into actual practice of the target language.

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