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**Choice Of French As a Kenya National Examination Council Examination Subject In
Public Secondary Schools, Nairobi City County, Kenya**

By

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Abstract

Language is a medium of communication or instruction and in Kenya, English and Swahili are typical languages. The government incorporated foreign languages into the secondary schools' curriculum to enhance their learning and usage. Even though statistics attest to good enrollment, there is a significant drop as learners transition to subsequent classes resulting in a low candidature. This paper seeks to discuss the choice of French as an examinable subject in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. The target population included French students, teachers, and career masters. Applying the Social Psychological Motivation Theory, the study found a correlation between integrative motivation and high achievement in learning. Additionally, the macro environment and policies surrounding education also influenced the choice of French. In conclusion, personal desire and reward influenced the genuine interest of learners. However, extrinsic factors such as education and school policies greatly influenced the choice of French as an examinable subject. From the findings, the researcher recommended policy change to favour French practice in schools, provision of more French materials and civic education to stakeholders on the subject.

Keywords: Kenya, Nairobi City County, Motivation theory Attitude, Foreign language, Education policy, Choice, Examinations.

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1. Introduction

To maintain or improve the quality and accuracy of language, humans have developed natural and systematic ways to pass language over to generations over time. This has been meticulously done through nativism, whereby infants learn the language through daily usage. On the other hand, learners may not be born in a language's native environment; hence, they must learn it systematically from a more knowledgeable person.

Kenya being an anglophone (English-speaking country), most learners are not exposed to the French language or culture from birth and hence, have to undergo systematic training and practice to learn. The study dives into the school-based factors such as teaching and learning resources, teachers' influence and examination results, and career aspirations which greatly influence the choice of the subject. The study was guided by the Social Psychological Motivation Theory by Robert Gardner. Motivation can be considered as one of the most critical elements in learning a second language (L2). This is because of the impact it has on the learner's outcome. Gardner's socio-educational model (1985, 2001, 2005) though criticized by several researchers, has had a significant influence in learning various contexts of language learning, including English as a Foreign Language (EFL) English and English as a Second Language (ESL) in various countries. Social motivation is important because learners have different reasons for learning foreign languages. According to Gardner (2005), motivation is people's effort and enthusiasm to achieve an established goal.

Statement of the Problem

Various studies have highlighted the derived benefits of multilingualism. Some of them being communication across different cultures and competitiveness career-wise in the modern world considered a global village. However, the researcher observed that French subject has been gradually registering low enrolment and even where there is a relatively high enrollment, a high dropout rate is also observed. It is in light of these that the researcher sought to know how personal, academic, and social factors influence the choice of French as an examinable subject.

2. Review of Related Literature

Since the inception of foreign language teaching in several countries, rather than increasing in its uptake as anticipated, there has been a steady decline in the uptake and an increased dropping out of foreign language learning in many countries worldwide. The study seeks to investigate academic factors that influence the choice of French as an examination subject in public secondary schools based in three sub-counties in Nairobi County.

2.1 The Social Psychological Motivation Theory

Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert, the proponents of the social psychological theory, focused on the importance of attitudes and feelings of language learners towards the L2 communities and

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the L2 language. Gardner (2001) found a correlation between integrative motivation (desire to understand a new language and culture for interaction purposes) and high achievement in the learning of the L2. He also opined "a genuine interest in learning the second language in order to come closer to the other language community."

Gardner and Lambert (1985) developed the Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), also known as the social and educational models associated scale, to measure the four main factors and their sub-units quantitatively and to predict L2 performance/outcome of the learning. They include integrativeness, attitude towards learning, motivation, and language anxiety.

2.2 Academic Factors that Influence the Choice of French

Macro Environment

English and Swahili are the national languages and the most widely spoken languages in Kenya; a multilingual country with more than 70 local languages. Such an environment alone predisposes foreign language learners to learning challenges. In their social psychological theory, Gardner and Lambert (1972) pointed out that learners' attitudes and feelings play a vital role in learning another language. Additionally, Cook and Artino (2016) observed that learners of a language may be extrinsically or intrinsically motivated. Extrinsically motivated individuals are unlikely to continue pursuing something when external rewards are absent. On the other hand, those intrinsically motivated are likely to be committed to an undertaking even when there are no obvious external rewards.

The language policy of Kenya and the Constitution of Kenya (2010) recognizes English and Swahili as the official and national languages and hence are compulsory examinable subjects at both primary and secondary school levels. This leaves any other language such as French, Mandarin, Italian, Spanish, German, and others, as elective subjects in the school curriculum. Even though the curriculum has provisions for students learning and being examined for the elective languages, there has been a notable diminishing number of students enrolling in these subjects at the examination level. French, which has had a considerably more significant uptake in the country, has also recorded a significant reduction in enrolments. Eurostat (2012) stated that the European Union language policy emphasized the protection of language diversity and the promotion of knowledge of languages. This policy encourages trilingualism, whereby citizens are encouraged to learn at least three languages; the mother tongue and two community languages.

Motivation among learners can take many forms, including enabling school policies, surrounding environment that is fit for practice and outdoor or natural learning, or even the applicability of the language. According to Chokah (2013), interference and overshadowing of the French language by other local languages in Kenya, such as Swahili and Sheng (slang), greatly demotivates the French learners who struggle to practice speaking the language.

Education Policies and School-based Factors

As highlighted by Chokah (2013), education policies are a significant impediment In Kenya since his research pointed out a lack of clear policy to guide the place of French in the education system. Wazome (2018) indicated that the structuring and placement of the subject also had a psychological effect on students. Since the subject is placed among technical subjects such as Business Studies, Metalwork, Agriculture, and Home Science, some students perceive it as less

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critical and shy away from it. In Tanzania, Iliho (2018), citing Mulinda (2013), stated that one of the significant challenges in the country was the time allocated for French learning in secondary schools – 80 minutes per week – which was inadequate. This made students struggle to create additional time to learn and practice the language and when the pressure was more than they could handle, they abandoned the subject.

The overall anglophone ecology as cited by Meyers and Horne (2017) in their study, discourages the undertaking of the subject. Such an environment deprives learners of practicing opportunities because classroom learning is limited to structured methods. Even with the structured methods, Mulwa, Gathumbi, and Ayot (2015) of Kenya, in their research, pointed out that students still grappled with an inadequate number of contact hours. Given that French is a foreign language, strained or lack of such resources directly harms its mastery.

Despite several efforts by schools and French teachers in Kenyan secondary schools to woo students into taking the subject, it remains a daunting task to maintain the few who join as they drop the subject while transitioning to the next class. One challenge Iliho (2018) reported is the perceived misalignment of students' career aspirations with the choice of French. Students feel that French may not play any role in the learners' aspirations.

Teachers and Learning Materials

In Zambia, Machinyise (2012) conducted research on the factors contributing to the decline of French in Zambian Public and his findings pointed out that a shortage of French teachers, inadequate teaching and learning materials, students' lack of motivation, the status of French in the school curriculum, and pupils' attitude towards French were some of the causes of the subject's decline. This has also been previously researched by Musyoka (2018), who suggested that teachers and learning resources are directly essential for the successful implementation of the curriculum. A challenge that Chokah (2013) identified also is inadequate training of teachers due to insufficient training hours and teaching practice which trickles down to the students.

Musyoka (2018) also pointed out that information communication technology (ICT) appeals to the young generation and that ICT should be integrated into teaching methods. Owino (2017) makes the same sentiments, and Tar (2011) reiterates that modern technology such as ICT is essential in modern-day teaching. He argues that ICT enables students to expose themselves diversely and work at their own pace within their schedule, thus curbing learning challenges such as pace and personal practice encountered by different learners.

Exposure

In their journal, Tar (2011) stated that insufficient exposure to a foreign language in its natural environment and lack of a conducive environment for L2 practice exposes learners to significant challenges in learning a language. Some learners face challenges getting exposed to a foreign language beyond their classroom or school. This is reiterated by Oduke (2013), who in his research, affirmed that institutions lack plans to support students interact with the L2 language in the most natural way possible. This, he pointed out, could have been done by visits to French-themed cultural centres, libraries, and regional resource centres set by the French government through the cooperative language office.

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Examinations

Tinsley and Han (2011) and Rodeiro (2017) have documented their studies on how examinations demotivate French learners, ultimately playing a part in the increased number of students dropping the subject. The fore observed that the overall decline in languages is caused by the unsatisfactory nature of assessment of both GCSE and A-level, and campaigns encourage more students into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects. The latter carried out a study on the uptake of foreign languages in secondary and progression in foreign languages in England. He observed that students were alarmingly dropping foreign languages due to poor performance, which greatly demotivated the affected students and others who saw the trend. The demotivated students would prefer other subjects in which they could perform better. Chokah (2013), on the other hand, stated that the Kenyan education system emphasized on the success of the written exams in all subjects; hence, students did not feel comfortable enrolling in classes where they were uncertain of their performance in the final examination.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design that blended quantitative and qualitative research approaches. This convergent parallel mixed design was chosen because it is suited for collecting, measuring, and analyzing data from the population. The key research techniques employed were questionnaires, telephone and virtual interview guides, as they could provide in-depth information.

3.2 Target Population

The study was conducted in Nairobi City County - the capital city of Kenya – focusing on three sub-counties - Westlands, Starehe, and Kasarani - out of the nine that sum up the county. Out of 30 public secondary schools in the county, the study used the 30% formula of Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) to narrow the focus to 10 schools. Purposive sampling method was then used to select well-established schools that have taught French over several years and whose respondents have experienced declining enrollment rates in the subject, Kombo and Tromp (2006). To determine the number of students to be sampled, Cochran's (1977) sample size determination formula was used to attain a sample size of 150 students, 10 French teachers and 10 career masters. Stratified random sampling method was used to get 15 students per school. The study further employed simple random sampling to select respondents. The respondents included those who chose French as an examination subject and those that dropped the subject.

3.3 Data Collection

The research instruments employed included semi-structured questionnaires and telephone and virtual interview guide to collect primary data from students, teachers, and career masters. The researcher also conducted document analysis of mark books, mark sheets, and KNEC reports to collect secondary data. The questionnaire return rate was 83% where 145 students, 9 French teachers and 7 career masters filled and returned the questionnaires and interview guides.

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3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis involved a variety of descriptive and inferential statistics where questionnaires were collected, itemized and checked for completeness. The data was then coded and analyzed using SPSS Version 22. This method was chosen because Orodho (2009) points out that data analysis involves a systematic search and arrangement of field notes, data and interview transcripts from the field to understand and present them. Additionally, qualitative data collected for this study was analyzed using thematic analysis. Warren (2020) believed this method is essential when exploring the opinions, views and experiences of the subjects under study.

4. Results and Discussion

The study garnered the following findings.

4.1 What was the percentage drop?

Data obtained was tabulated and presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. The average drop of enrolled students in the year 2020

School	French Enrolment in Form 1 (2020)	French students in Form 3 (2020)	Percentage (%) Drop
School 1	18	6	66
School 2	40	19	52
School 3	80	30	63
School 4	68	36	47
School 5	31	10	68
School 6	106	28	74
School 7	58	13	78
School 8	50	30	40
School 9	49	13	73
Average drop			64

Seven out of the nine schools where data was collected recorded a more than 50% drop in students pursuing French after form 2. Averagely, 64% of the students who enrolled for French in form 1 dropped out at the end of form 2 in favor of other subjects.

4.2 Comparison of the Longitudinal Transition Rate

The researcher also sought to observe the same variables (in this case, students) over four years. This was aimed at noting the changes of the same individuals over a span which will better illustrate the changes.

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Table 2. Longitudinal Transition Rate Comparison

School	Year and class							Overall Percentage reduction
	2014 Form 1	% Drop	2015 Form 2	% Drop	2016 Form 3	% Drop	2017 Form 4	
School 1	20	0	20	85	03	0	03	85
School 2	39	3	38	44	21	0	21	46
School 3	106	72	30	3	27	0	27	75
School 4	60	0	60	77	14	0	14	77
School 5	40	0	40	60	16	0	16	60
School 6	120	54	55	6	48	3	44	63
School 7	36	17	30	61	08	0	08	78
School 8	59	0	59	56	26	10	20	66
School 9	50	80	10	8	06	0	06	88
	570		382		187		177	

The study findings revealed that schools 1, 4,5, and 8 recorded zero to 3% drop during the form 1 / form 2 transition, but between 20% and 60% drop between form 2 / form 3 transition. Schools 3,6,7 and 9 recorded between 17% and 80% drop during the form 1 / form 2 transition, followed by a nominal drop of between 3% and 8% during the form 2 / form 3 transition.

The study also revealed that of all the students who had enrolled for French in form one, only 31% completed and were examined by the Kenya National Examination Council. Therefore 69% dropped between form 1 and form 3.

4.3 Academic Factors that Influence the Choice of French

4.3.1 According to students

Instrumental motivation is key to any undertaking; It can be a reward for an undertaking Gardener and Lambert (1972). Academically, motivation can be derived in various ways: rewarding, praising, or recognition. Students rewarded physically, either due to exemplary performance or improvement, tend to work harder to produce better results for another reward. Another factor highlighted in the study is the availability of resources in school. Schools with more resources, better-equipped classrooms, and libraries tend to attract and retain students taking foreign languages such as French.

Career choices and progression were reasons for either dropping or continuing with French to the examination level. Those students whose careers inclined toward French tend to have continued with the subject even when facing challenges, unlike those who felt that learning French may not give them any advantage in their future careers.

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Availability of resources was another significant factor that was highlighted by a considerable number of students. Schools with available resources such as French books, magazines, playbooks, classrooms, and equipped libraries recorded a higher French uptake and lower subject dropping. On the other hand, those who grapple with strained resources had a higher chance of dropping the subject.

Findings from the study indicated that exposure to interactive French-themed sessions tends to give learners an immersive environment for learning French whereby they can learn the language through organic practice. Contrary to this, students who conduct most of their learning without outdoor activities such as drama and music festivals or even French-speaking days often suffer from the ability to relate mentally or visualize the practicality of the language hence opting out.

4.3.2 According to French teachers and Career masters

French teachers and career masters (teachers who do not necessarily teach French but provide career advice to students) converged in their opinions about why students either study French or drop out of the subject. Like the students, they also believed that the availability of well-equipped French rooms and the provision of a cassette play for French audio lessons and KCSE revision audio kits were significant factors in encouraging students to take the subject to form 4 examination level. From their perspective, students who encounter strained resources when they start learning French are very likely to drop the subject at one point since they may feel disadvantaged. These findings concur with Mtwana (2011) and Chokah (2013), who, in their publications, indicated that the lack of teaching and learning materials in Kenyan schools negatively impacts teaching and learning French.

Another factor was the availability of adequate textbooks, French reading materials, and reference books and guides. The teachers indicated that with adequate reading and listening materials in schools, students get the opportunity to further read on their own and utilize the teachers' expertise in revision or support learning. The absence of this creates a dependent environment where students cannot do anything without a teacher. The same findings were reiterated by Juma et al. (2015), who, in their study, found out that the lack of libraries which led to poor interactions of students with reading materials in Vihiga County, led to low enrollment levels and poor performance.

Reading without practice leads to a poor grasp of a language or even losing it. A significant number of teachers and career masters agreed that exposure of French learners to outdoor interactive activities such as drama and music festivals periodically and visiting French resource centers would motivate students to pursue French. These findings agree with both Gella and Kwaja (2017), who were of the view that students should also be given a chance to be exposed in co-curricular activities, more so in a French environment context, to increase their language competencies. Furthermore, Niemiec and Ryan (2009) also noted that this is a form of extrinsic motivation which utilizes motivation outside an individual to obtain the desired results.

4.4 Why students drop French

From the study, French teachers pointed out that learners who had a chance to learn French at their primary school level are likely to choose French and are very unlikely to drop the subject, contrary to those who are introduced to French when they join secondary school. Some of the

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students who dropped the subject indicated that French was a difficult subject. The notion of difficulty is shared with Taylor and Marsden's (2014) research findings that students in anglophone countries perceived French to be more challenging to learn than English. This is because being a foreign language introduced at a later stage in the lives of the learners becomes challenging to grasp, especially for those coming from rural or peri-urban areas who most of the time, are not exposed to foreign languages.

Another set of students pointed out that they dropped French, not because it's challenging but because it doesn't give any assurance of being competitive in the job market. This is because they believed that a good percentage of job opportunities on the job market requires English. The few that consider French take it as an added advantage but not a prerequisite. Those that require French as a prerequisite may demand native-level skills that the respondents may not attain in school.

Other students pointed out that school and examination policies were a major deterrent. They pointed out that French requires a lot of verbal practice. Since schools don't have policies to encourage students to speak outside the classroom, they are limited. Additionally, learners are surrounded by individuals who do not know French or are interested in learning it. This makes it challenging for students to have practice partners.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 conclusions drawn from the study findings.

Even though French is a foreign language, it is vital in today's society, and Social Psychological Motivational Theory of motivation applies in this context. Below are the specific conclusions.

Firstly, learners were motivated by integrative orientation or autonomous motivation, which aroused the personal desire and genuine interest to study the second language.

Divergently, the researcher found out that other learners also studied the subject because of instrumental orientation or controlled motivation, where learners studied the subjects for reward purposes.

The study also found that learners' motivation is in synch with their attitudes towards French and culture in addition to the two theories.

Extrinsic factors such as resources, school policies and availability of resources also play a key role in motivating students.

5.2 Recommendations from findings

Schools should organize interactive sessions with practising French professionals between French learners and general talks to guide students in their career goals.

The school principals and other stakeholders should work together to review and adjust school policies to accommodate French-speaking practice among peers outside the classroom, just as they have an English-speaking policy.

The Ministry of Education should strive to provide more learning materials, including reading, audio, and video, to school libraries and internet resources to increase student options and learning variety.

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Lastly, the study recommends the creation of newsletters and other written materials aimed at educating different social groupings such as parents, siblings, and community to educate and enlighten them on different pathways associated with French.

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