

## **Analysis of the French-English Bilingual Dictionaries in Junior Secondary Schools**

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**Abstract:** The paper appraises the dictionaries used at the junior secondary school level (year 7-9) in Lagos State Nigeria. It has been observed that students at the junior secondary school level do not know how to maximize the use of their dictionary. They require a solid foundation in vocabulary acquisition in order to attain language proficiency. In this regard, a research was carried out in Lagos State in which 4 research questions were raised and answered with over three hundred students in private and public schools who study French as a foreign language. The instruments for data collection were questionnaire, classroom observations and interviews. Result shows that about 63.7% of the students are faced with problems of ambiguity when they check a new word, 83% of the students prefer to learn French with coloured picture dictionary. All the students want to have a more elaborate verb conjugation in their dictionary. Based on these findings, the RON French-English Picture Dictionary for Schools was compiled. The RON French-English Picture Dictionary for Schools consists of five parts: Part 1: Pictorial, Part II: French-English, Part III: English-French, Part IV: Verbs, Part V: Culture and Civilization plus a Pronunciation Guide.

**Keywords:** French-English, dictionary analysis, dictionary skills, vocabulary, culture

### **Introduction**

The environment and the teacher play key roles in motivating students to acquire new vocabulary for French language proficiency. Learners are said to be proficient when they can communicate with interlocutors at native language speaker's level of competence. For this to effectively take place, the teacher needs to know the background and circumstances of the learner such as the age, learner type, style, as well as how much knowledge the learner has of the target language. In vocabulary acquisition, teachers are often confronted with the problem of determining the extent of vocabulary to teach, and in what progression? In terms of progression, normally teachers are encouraged to go from simple to complex. The main purpose of foreign language acquisition is to enable learners to attain language proficiency, in this case the French language. Learners can be proficient when they increase their vocabulary level and size. Dictionary use is one of the most effective ways to increase learner's vocabulary size and level. A dictionary is a reference material which provides users information on the meanings, definitions on how to use the words. Dictionaries do differ in size, scope, content as well as types, such as monolingual, bilingual and specialized dictionaries. Certainly, the individual level of vocabulary plays a very important role in attaining language proficiency. According to Schmitt (2000), lexical knowledge is key to attaining language proficiency. According to Opara (2017), attaining French language proficiency is inevitable for Nigerians to communicate effectively with our neighbours who are mainly Francophones. This can further harness peace and harmony and boost economic investments and bilateral relations. It is therefore necessary to

motivate learners of French as a foreign language to acquire more vocabulary using various dictionary skills and the 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies.

Dictionary skill can be defined as the ability to use the dictionary well. It helps learners of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) to understand word meanings and their uses better. Teachers have a lot of influence on the type of dictionary recommended to users, they should try to prescribe dictionaries that will motivate and enhance the dictionary skills and culture of the users.

Walz as cited by Vahdany (2014), stressed that the use of a dictionary provides users a fast and handy access to information for either personal or guided study. Dictionaries can provide users supplementary information which is not easily available elsewhere, such as giving the grammatical class of the words: noun, adjective, verb forms, gender etc. Some dictionaries could extend the use of the words in other contexts. According to Nation (2001), the use of dictionary goes beyond providing information to understanding and giving a detailed analysis of a text. Despite the useful role dictionary plays in learning new words, students at junior secondary school level have difficulties using their dictionary either because the dictionary in use is not suitable or the users do not know how to use the dictionary. To investigate these, a research was carried out to analyse the dictionary students use at junior secondary schools in Nigeria.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The purpose of this study is to analyse the dictionaries students use at junior secondary schools in Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

- Analyze the effectiveness of the dictionary skills of the students for vocabulary acquisition.
- Assess the students' views of monolingual and bilingual dictionary.
- Determine the level of motivation of the students when they consult the dictionary.
- Investigate if the dictionary in use contains relevant sociocultural traits for vocabulary development.

### ***Research Questions***

- ❖ How effective are the dictionary skills of the students?
- ❖ What are the students' views of monolingual and bilingual dictionary?
- ❖ How motivated are the students when they consult their dictionary?
- ❖ What are the relevant socio-cultural traits contained in the dictionary?

### ***Significance of the Study***

The study envisages:

- improving the dictionary skills of the students
- developing students' French language vocabulary acquisition
- enhancing the communicative competence among students
- providing more resources for the teaching and learning French

### ***Review of Related Literature***

#### ***Definition of Vocabulary***

Vocabulary is the sum total of the words that constitute a language. Vocabulary plays a key and fundamental role in language acquisition. According to Cameron (2001), vocabulary development is an integral aspect of language development. Of all the components of the language: grammar, phonology, morphology and vocabulary, vocabulary has received the least attention. But in recent times, more research is focusing on vocabulary development bearing in mind its vital role. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), vocabulary is the core

component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis on how well learners speak, listen, read, and write. Richards and Schmitt (2013), said that vocabulary is a set of lexeme, comprising single words, compound words, and idioms. Ur (2011), stated that vocabulary can be defined roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language.

### ***Role of Motivation in Vocabulary Acquisition***

Intrinsic motivation is important in order to sustain learner's interest in acquiring new words. Learners are intrinsically motivated in dictionary use, when they see dictionary skills as a means for vocabulary acquisition and not an end in itself. The degree to which learners are intrinsically motivated can determine the level of performance (Cerasoli et al. 2014, Grant & Berry 2011). A person who is carrying out a task with more fun can be said to be intrinsically motivated. Motivation therefore becomes a fundamental and determining factor in order to achieve any meaningful goal in life. Dornyei, as cited in Kaboody (2013), said that motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning a foreign language. It is a vital factor that influences every educational process most especially in vocabulary acquisition. Motivation is not static in itself, it changes depending on the context. (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Dornyei, as cited in Bankier (2012), stated that motivation in foreign language acquisition in the first place is all about getting learners enthused and sustained. It is obvious that increase in motivation leads to the enjoyment of the activities that learners are involved in.

### ***Bilingual and Monolingual Dictionaries and the Theory of Word Meanings***

The decision and choice to use a dictionary depends on the user. This may not be applicable in situations where specific dictionaries are prescribed for use in schools. According to Rezaei and Davoudi (2016), "A dictionary is a tool for learning vocabulary and language skills." There are essentially two categories of dictionaries: a bilingual and monolingual dictionary. A bilingual dictionary gives equivalent definition of the words or of the lexical items from one language to another. In a comparison between monolingual and bilingual dictionary, a bilingual dictionary can be as useful as the monolingual dictionary and is able to perform most of the tasks that a monolingual dictionary does, even in a more interesting and motivating way such as enabling users to learn the meaning of the words and phrases, word forms, origins, functions, pronunciations, orthography, or lexical relations such as antonyms, synonyms, collocations. Hayati (2006), affirms that bilingual dictionary gives learners more confidence and certitude in giving concrete answers. However, one argument against bilingual dictionary according to Wingate (2002), as cited in Lew (2004), is that the bilingual dictionary encourages translation from the source language and prevents users from thinking in the target language. With a monolingual dictionary certain expressions are obvious to native speakers but not to foreign language learners. It gives the exact information about the words in the target language. Baxter, as cited in Abbasi (2019), noted that high frequency words receive more appropriate treatment in monolingual dictionaries than with other types of dictionaries. The monolingual dictionary contributes to the ability of learners to speak fluently. Hartman, as cited in Abbasi (2019), affirms that proficient users undoubtedly benefit from monolingual dictionaries. Underhill as cited by Abbasi (2019), also affirms that monolingual dictionaries compel learners to think in the target language and enable them to get rid of translation habits. There is a general belief that monolingual dictionaries are of a higher standard than bilingual ones. Despite the apparent usefulness of monolingual dictionary, Bogaards (2003), insists that second language teachers prefer their students using bilingual dictionaries

### ***Dictionary Skills***

The published work of Nesi deposited in CURVE (2015) enumerated six stages in the specification of dictionary reference skills for higher education learners. The first stage is the stage before study. This stage entails knowing the different types of dictionary available and knowing which one to buy. The second stage is the stage before dictionary consultation. The third stage is the dictionary consultation itself that requires being able to locate the

entry information. The user at this stage, needs to understand the structure of the dictionary in question. The fourth stage requires knowing the cross-referencing system for print dictionaries and hyperlinking for the electronic dictionaries. The fifth stage is the recording of entry information. This requires the ability to compile a vocabulary notebook. The sixth stage entails being able to understand lexicographical issues such as knowing what a dictionary is and being able to analyse it.

Taljard and Prinsloo (2019), in a dictionary analysis noted that dictionary compilation should be culture inclusive. Gouws (2016), stated that the genuine reason for dictionary making should go beyond providing information, it should be community driven and should highlight culture. Cignoni as stated in Taljard et al. (2019), stated that learners as target users of preplanned dictionary should contribute to the dictionary compilation. Taljard further stressed that selected design elements should correspond to the lexicographic requirements of target users. The starting point of her study was the users perceptive. Gouws (2013), made reference to the important function that foundation phase plays in establishing dictionary culture in South Africa.

### ***Dictionary making and use from a Historical and Cultural Perspectives***

In this historical narrative, (Duncan, 2012) of the French Academy: Richelieu founded the French Academy in 1635 and its primary responsibility was to codify the French lexicon considering the important role of the French language. The first edition of the dictionary of the French Academy was edited in 1694 about sixty years after the foundation of the French Academy. The dictionary was in two volumes classified essentially in family of words. In 1718, the second volume of the dictionary of the French academy was published with alphabetic classification. Shortly after, two other dictionaries emerged, competing with the first dictionary: those of Ricelet 1680 and Furetiere 1690 respectively.

During these intense period of lexicographic activities, the Academy took special precaution to specify the moral character of the dictionary and its authority. The compilation was made by renowned authors who wanted to protect and represent the French language in its purest state of perfection. Though the dictionary of the French Academy defined a good usage of the French language, it excluded old words that are in usage, as well as the other specialized areas like the arts and sciences. The notion of purity of linguistic preservation was one of its major guides. The French language has its own system with a lot of regional and international variations. These variations evolved in three axis: time (*le temps: variation chronolectales*), space (*l'espace, variation topolectales*) and society (*la société, variations sociolectales*).

The great moments of the diffusion of the French language were the 17th and the 19th centuries which witnessed a variation in the spoken language in the different continents. There is a link between lexical units and culture, lexical units are culturally marked and represented. In lexical acquisition, it is important to indicate the cultural and historical perspectives to the users. These affirm the obvious connection between the language spoken by a society, the lexicon of the individuals and the art of dictionary making. A good dictionary should incorporate both the lexical morphology and culture.

### **Method**

This study used the descriptive survey to gather information through questionnaire, classroom observations and interviews with the students. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher according to the four point Likert Scale: Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). It was based on the variables of the research questions. Items 1, 2 and 3 of the questionnaire are directed to research question 1, while item 5 is directed to research question 2, items 4, 6, 7 and 8 are directed to research question 3. Answers to research

question 4 are obtained through classroom observations and interviews with students. The questionnaire comprises eight questions. Simple percentage score is used considering 70% as significant since the Nigerian educational system bases excellence at 70%. The questionnaire was administered to the junior secondary school students of some selected private and public schools, and was analysed by the researcher and research assistants. The dictionary skills of the students were observed during the French classes by the researcher for a trimester. The French classes held once a week for a duration of one hour twenty minutes. The researcher observed and took note while the regular class teacher taught the lesson.

The following dictionary skills were observed:

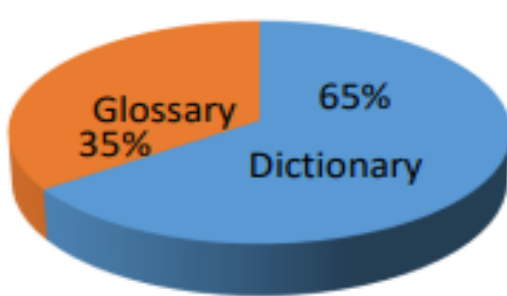
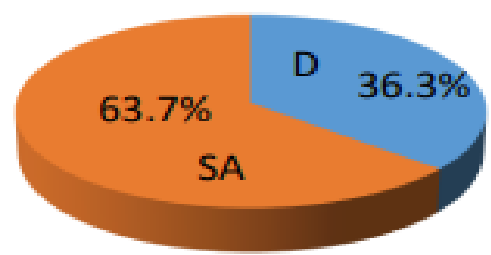
- The frequency and manner students use French dictionary
- The different roles the dictionary played in acquiring vocabulary
- Socio-cultural impacts on dictionary use.

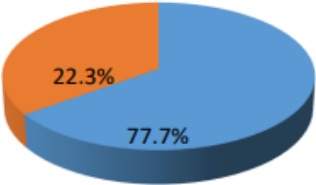
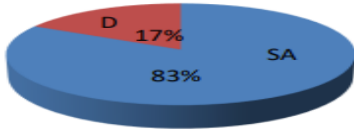
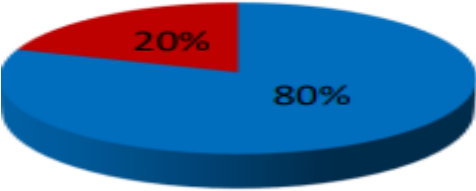
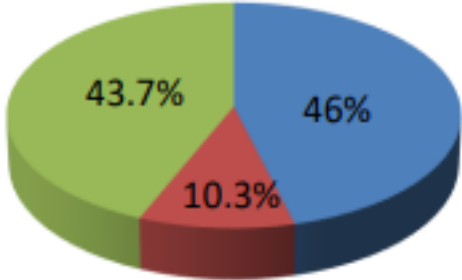
Open ended questions were designed by the researcher to gather more information. Sometimes the same questions were asked in other ways so as to compare and validate the responses. Below are some of the open ended questions: Are there maps and monuments in your dictionary? Does your dictionary contain all the words you search? If not, give example of some of the words your dictionary does not contain.

The population of the study comprised all male and female students that offer French at the junior secondary schools in Lagos State with an average age of 12. This population applies to all schools that offer French in the junior secondary schools in Nigeria, since Lagos is a cosmopolitan state that has all the characteristic traits found in all other parts of the country. The sample size was over three hundred students from the public and private schools.

**Results**

**Table 1: Students’ Response to Questionnaire Items**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Figure 1</b></p>  <p><b>Q:</b> I find a dictionary more practical to check a new word, than a glossary.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Figure 2</b></p>  <p><b>SA - Strongly Agree</b> <b>D - Disagree</b></p> <p><b>Q:</b> When I check a new word in my dictionary and about four words appear as options, I find it difficult to know which one to choose.</p> <p><b>R:</b> Sixty-three point seven percent of students have difficulty knowing which word to choose.</p>
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<p><b>R:</b> Sixty-five percent of students say a dictionary is more practical than a glossary in checking a new word</p>	
<p><b>Figure 3</b> 77.7% Simple 22.3% Complex</p>  <p><b>Q:</b> I find the dictionary I use simple. <b>R:</b> Seventy seven point seven percent of students find the dictionary simple.</p>	<p><b>Figure 4</b></p>  <p>SA - Strongly Agree D - Disagree</p> <p><b>Q:</b> I will learn more French words if I use a coloured picture dictionary. <b>R:</b> Eighty-three percent of students prefer to have picture dictionary in colour.</p>
<p><b>Figure 5</b> 80% - SA 20% - D</p>  <p>SA - Strongly Agree D - Disagree</p> <p><b>Q:</b> I will understand dictionary meanings more if I use a bilingual dictionary. <b>R:</b> Eighty percent of students prefer a bilingual to a monolingual dictionary.</p>	<p><b>Figure 6</b> 46% Teacher 43.7% Textbook 10.3% Dictionary</p>  <p><b>Q:</b> Who is the most important agent in learning of a new word? The teacher, student's textbook or the dictionary? <b>R:</b> Students say teachers contribute about forty six percent in learning a new word.</p>

Result of the questionnaire responses showed that about 63.7% of students were faced with the problem of ambiguity when they checked a new word, 83% of students preferred to learn French with coloured picture dictionary, 80% of students preferred a bilingual to a monolingual dictionary. About 46% of the students said that



the teacher was the most important agent in learning a new word, more than their textbook or a dictionary. Results from the classroom observations and interviews with students affirmed that the dictionary they used contained most of the words they searched but lacked information on socio-cultural aspects such as maps and monuments on francophone Africa. In addition, some dictionaries at the time of the study had very tiny characters and poor prints.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The study found that 80% of students preferred to use bilingual dictionary rather than a monolingual one. This explains why Hayati (2006), in a previous research work, affirmed that bilingual dictionary gave learners more confidence and certitude in giving concrete answers. On the contrary Wingate as cited in Lew (2004), criticized bilingual dictionary, because it encouraged translation from the source language and prevented users from thinking in the target language. Rezaei and Davoudi (2016), further countered the argument of Lew (2004), stating that with a monolingual dictionary, certain expressions were obvious to native speakers but not to foreign language learners. Bogaards (2003), and Rezaei and Davoudi (2016), were in favour of bilingual dictionary. Bogaards (2003), affirmed that second language teachers preferred their students using bilingual dictionaries, while Rezaei and Davoudi (2016), stated that a bilingual dictionary could be as useful and interesting as the monolingual dictionary and could perform most of the tasks that a monolingual dictionary did, even in a more interesting and motivating way such as enabling users to learn the meaning of the words and phrases. Learners of French as a foreign language find it difficult to decipher meaning of French words, they therefore opt for bilingual dictionary. Monolingual dictionary reduces the ability of learners of French as a foreign language to acquire more vocabulary. Of what use is the monolingual dictionary if it contributes very little to the vocabulary development of learners of French as a foreign language? These justify why only 20% of users in this study preferred to use a monolingual rather than a bilingual dictionary. According to GU (2013), increase in learner's vocabulary size is an important factor in order to attain language proficiency.

Results from the interviews carried out with the students showed that most of the dictionaries in use at that time, lacked socio-cultural factors such as maps, monuments, and did not contain translations of some basic words in the source language. Learning is more harnessed from known to the unknown. It is necessary to put into consideration the cultural dimension of the target users which can incorporate vocabulary items, maps and monuments typical of that geographical area. In the Nigerian context for example, a learner who is asked to describe the process of preparing a typical Nigerian dish in a descriptive essay, should be able to find the translation of the basic ingredients. The French dictionary used in Anglophone and Francophone regions should contain basic words, maps and historical monuments of Francophone Africa. Taljard and Prinsloo (2019), in their research on African Language Dictionaries for Children emphasized on how designed elements should align with the lexicographic needs of the target users. They solicited for an Afrocentric approach in the conceptualization of children's dictionaries which should take the target user's frame of reference as the point of departure.

In this study, 83% of students preferred to learn French with coloured picture dictionary. Pictorial illustrations obviously captivate the interest of foreign language learners. Colourful images in picture dictionary at the junior school level are restful for the eyes and the mind. They enable learners at the beginner's and elementary stage of foreign language acquisition to associate colourful images with lexical items. Some dictionaries lacked aesthetic values, they have tiny characters and poor prints. Such dictionaries can be described as not being user friendly or

motivating. This is in line with Dornyei's findings cited in Kaboody (2013), and Bankier (2012), where Dornyei highlighted the importance of motivating and sustaining the interest of foreign language learners.

77.7 % of users, affirmed that the dictionaries in use were simple and contained most of the words but had problem of ambiguity. 63.7% of students were faced with problems of ambiguity when they check a new word. In addition, some of the dictionaries lacked aesthetic values: they had tiny and poor prints. The verb conjugation was also not elaborate. Based on the findings the RON-French English Picture Dictionary for Schools was compiled. The RON French-English Picture Dictionary for Schools consists of five parts: Part 1: Pictorial, Part II: French-English, Part III: English-French, Part IV: Verbs, Part V: Culture and Civilization plus a Pronunciation Guide.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the analysis of the French-English bilingual dictionaries in use at the junior secondary schools (year 7-9), learners of French as a foreign language preferred to use bilingual to monolingual dictionary. Bilingual dictionary gives learners more ease of access to practise dictionary skills such as being able to check and find new words readily and to understand them. Learners at the beginner's and elementary level of foreign language acquisition who use bilingual dictionary are more confident and focused on checking up news words. On the other hand, they are more disoriented when they use monolingual dictionary. Result from this study also shows that learners found the dictionary they use to be ambiguous. They were often confused in determining which word to choose. Some lexicographers are of the school of thought that different word meanings should be given to the keywords in learning a new word, since it will help to enlarge the vocabulary scope. Of what use is it, if some of the words are ambiguous, confusing and unnecessary at the beginner's level?

Explaining a keyword with several word meanings could be more suitable at the intermediate or advance level, but not at the beginner's level. While making dictionary at the junior school, lexicographers should endeavor to compile simple, unambiguous and user friendly dictionaries. They should also put into consideration the cultural perspective of the users, for an optimal benefit of their work. In order to motivate learners and sustain their interests the dictionary for beginners should have big and good prints, and where possible the grammatical class can be highlighted in colour. There is no doubt that pictorial illustration enhances dictionary skills. It encourages more look ups and contribute to the ability to retain newly consulted words. If learners are able to retain new words it can help to increase their vocabulary size and level in order to attain language proficiency.

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