

Attitude of Hotel Management Students in Learning French as a Mandatory Subject: A Pilot Study

Alka Anto

Lecturer, Department of French, St. Agnes College (Autonomous), Bendur, Mangalore – 575002, Karnataka

Abstract: French is a mandatory subject in all the Hotel Management institutes of India. The inclusion of French as a compulsory foreign language is due to the importance of the French cuisine in the hospitality industry. A good knowledge of vocabulary related to the cuisine and a good command over the language is a necessary prerequisite for students to excel in the work domain. But the use of outdated text books and obsolete teaching methodology in teaching French are the two main aspects of our pilot study. This article intends to bring out an overview of the present situation of French in the Hotel Management institutes by conducting a pilot study with 54 students from one of the institutes of Mangalore, Karnataka.

Keywords: Curriculum; French; Hotel management

1. Introduction

In this era of globalisation, the Hotel Management industry is becoming more and more universal. The opportunities of trained Hotel Management professionals are ascending on an international platform. Students pursuing this field should possess strong communicative and reasoning skills. Under graduate courses for Hotel Management prepares students to work in any domain of the hospitality industry. [1]

The inclusion of the French Language as a mandatory subject in the Hotel Management curriculum is to develop students with indispensable skills to manage operations and business in the hospitality industry. French is being spoken by over 250 million people around the globe; competency in the language ensures an assured position in the job market. [2] But the French syllabus prescribed for the Hotel Management students of Karnataka does not meet the aims of the programme. The inclusion of the French language is made with a specific purpose but the use of outdated textbooks and redundant teaching methodologies do not allow the students to attain communicative competency in the foreign language.

Therefore the purpose of the present study is to evaluate the attitude of Hotel Management Students in learning French and also to highlighting the difficulties faced by students in learning French as a foreign Language.

2. Methodology

To attain the above purpose, an anonymous questionnaire survey was conducted among 70 students in one of the Hotel Management institutes of Mangalore, Karnataka.

Inclusion criteria: The students in final year of Hotel Management were assigned the task of answering the questionnaire.

Exclusion criteria: The questionnaires which did not receive adequate responses were eliminated while tabulating the data collected.

The questions were designed to determine the needs of students in learning French in the Hotel Management

institute. The students were asked to mention the text books used for learning French and the number of hours of French classes per week. The attitude of the students towards learning French as a foreign language and the difficulties faced were assessed with the help of the questionnaire. The data collected from the questionnaire was tabulated and a descriptive analysis of the statistics was derived. The responses to the questionnaire were expressed in percentage.

3. Results

A total number of 70 questionnaires were distributed among the final year students of the Hotel Management institute of Mangalore. Out of which, only 54 were considered for analysis based on the exclusion criteria.

The first question posed was “Have you learnt French before?” It was observed that out of 54 students (Figure 1), a majority (72%) had no previous knowledge in French while a few (28%) students had the opportunity of learning the language beforehand.

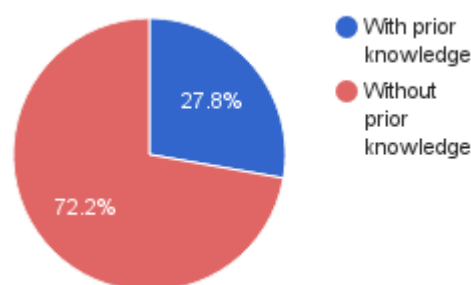


Figure 1: Number of students with and without prior knowledge in French

The second question was raised only to the section of students with prior knowledge in French, “Was learning it previously useful?”. Figure 2 shows that out of the 15 students, 73% felt that previous knowledge was helpful in learning French in the Hotel Management programme.

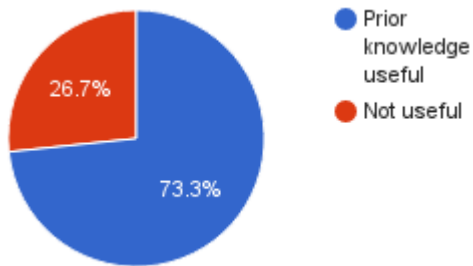


Figure 2: Usefulness of prior knowledge in French

The next question aims at understanding the importance of the French language in the Hotel Management Curriculum from the student's perspective. The question asked was "Do you think French is important in the Hotel Management Syllabus?"

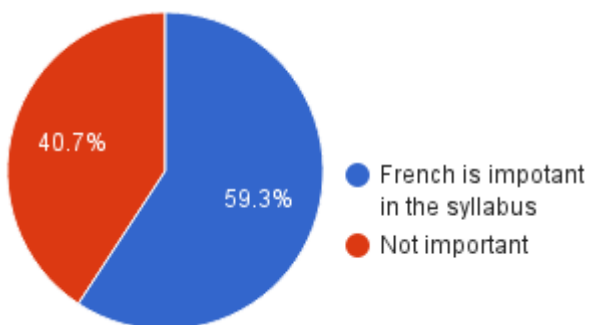


Figure 3: Illustrates the attitude of students towards inclusion of French in the curriculum

Out of the 54 students, 59 % felt that learning French is important in the field of Hotel Management. Whereas 41% thought that learning French wasn't essential in the hospitality industry.

The following question helped us to evaluate the prescribed French syllabus for the Hotel Management students. The question raised was "Is your present Syllabus helping you to communicate in French?" Figure 4 illustrates that 63% of the students felt that the prescribed syllabus does not help them to communicate in the foreign language while 37% felt that the French programme helps them to achieve communicative competency.

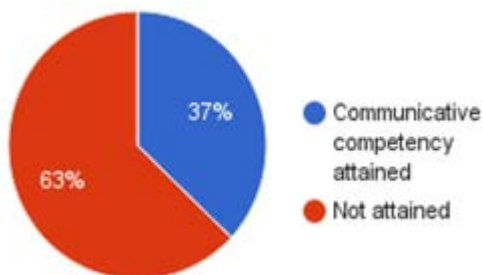


Figure 4: Communicative competency with the prescribed syllabus

The last question of our questionnaire helped us to assess the most significant factor to attain competency in spoken French according to the students. The question asked was "Which aspect accordingly to you is most important to acquire competency in spoken French?"

Figure 5 demonstrates the different aspects of learning a foreign language. Out of the 54 students, 57% felt the need to give more emphasis on interaction activities, 22% felt more emphasis needs to be given to learning vocabulary, while 12% felt grammar should be given less importance and 9% felt the need to emphasis on culture and civilisation.

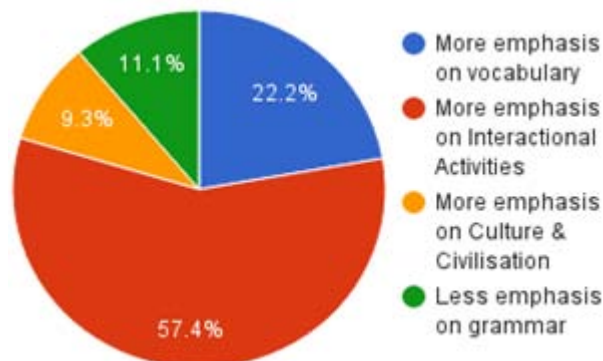


Figure 5: Student's attitude on effective methodology in learning French

4. Discussion

In this study, the questionnaire was used as a methodology tool for determining and analysing the attitude of students towards learning French and the difficulties faced while learning a foreign language with a series of question with multiple choices. The questionnaire survey was used because it is a relatively easy and quick method of collecting information in a standardised way from a large group of subjects. [3]

Out of study subjects, only few students had prior knowledge in French. Within this group, majority of the students thought that prior knowledge was beneficial in learning French in the hotel Management course. However the need for prior knowledge is not necessary as the book prescribed for French in the Hotel Management institute (Le Cours de Langue et de civilisation Française, [Mauger Bleu]) is intended for beginners. The students study French in their first year (two semesters) and have around 3 to 4 classes of per week. They are expected to have completed 160 hours of French at the end of the first year.

It was observed from the study that the students found learning French as a foreign language in the context of hotel management as an essential subject. A majority of the students feel that learning French as a foreign language is essential in the field of hospitality. The students are aware that learning of French language is important to be competent in the work domain. Fluency in the language and a good knowledge in the cuisine based vocabulary will help them in their professional field. [1]

The attitude of the students is a critical factor in learning a foreign language. [4] This questionnaire also helped us to analyse the attitude of Hotel Management students in learning a foreign language. According to Nasser Oroujlou [5] "Motivation and attitude provide primary impetus to initiate learning language and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process. Lack of attention to these factors can lead to inefficiencies in

learning a language". This study shows that the students are interested in learning French as they are aware of its significance in the work domain. But the inclusion of the language only in the first year doesn't help them to be competent to meet the challenges of the hospitality industry. The effectiveness of learning a foreign language is put to test only in their field of work. Unfortunately, these students are exposed to an authentic situation of using French language as medium of communication only three years later (after the completion of the course). Lack of motivation to practice the language after first year makes students forget the language and lose interest gradually in learning the same.

The Hotel management graduates are expected to have competency in the foreign language for intercultural communication. Moreover there are a lot of French terminologies used in the hotel industry. Hence it is imperative to have a good knowledge of the language to be competent in the hospitality industry. The programme prescribes a text book which was issued in the 60s to obtain the goals of teaching French in a general scenario. The use of this outdated text book will not ensure the learning of French within the limited time allotted in the curriculum. The text book used for Hotel Management students is designed for beginners who learn French as a second language. But the inclusion of French in the hotel management courses is intended with a specific purpose. Hence the text book prescribes should be based on the methodology of teaching French for specific purpose (FSP).

A large number of students in the current study felt that the prescribed syllabus is not helping them to attain communicative proficiency at the end of the course. The students feel that the prescribed syllabus is not gives enough emphasis to spoken French. Mauger Bleu is a popular French grammar text book used all over the world. Explaining the rules of grammar and the translations from French to English are recurrent activities which illustrates the use of traditional method in the language class. Teaching French for a specific purpose are usually tailor made courses with definite objectives which will enable the learner to attain communicative skills in a particular field. The above questionnaire helps us to understand that the prescribed syllabus is not equipping the students to communicate in the field of hospitality. The students suggested that the French syllabus should give more emphasis to interactional activities in the class which will help them to understand and communicate effectively in the language.

Since this is a pilot study, the current study needs to be further explored with a larger sample size. In addition, the perspective of French teachers in the hotel management industry also needs to be observed to improve the curriculum. The study will help us to comprehend the actual situation of French in the hotel management institutes of Karnataka by analysing the text book and methodology used.

5. Conclusion

The results of the present study indicates the need for new text books which will help the students to communicate effectively in the field of hospitality and also the use of modern teaching methodologies to efficiently carry out the process of teaching and learning a foreign language with a specific purpose.

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