

MOTIVATION CHANGES OF FIRST YEAR FRENCH SPECIALIZATION STUDENTS AT YUFL*

Su Paing Swe¹

Abstract

This study is carried out to investigate how the motivation of beginner-level French specialization students at YUFL (Yangon University of Foreign Languages) has changed during their course of study. Students' perspectives on the French language can change before and after studying it for some period of time. Its aim is to find out the language-related factors that influence their motivation changes, done through three research questions focusing on how the motivation of YUFL French specialization student's changes after 3 months of study, how their motivation changes after 7 months of study, and the factors for which they change motivation for the French language with two questionnaires completed after two different periods of study. This study is hoped to be helpful for curriculum designers and French language teachers to make the most of learners' motivation in the foreign language teaching and learning process.

Keywords: motivation changes; French language learners; multilingualism

Introduction

Motivation is one of the social-psychological aspects of language learning and acquisition. It plays an important role for learners to dedicate time and effort to learning a second or foreign language, which can be familiar or not with the language of the community to which they belong.

Motivation had been studied along with second language acquisition (SLA), as it was considered one of the most important variables in the development of language acquisition (Gardner, 1985). According to the motivation literature (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Genesee, 1978), learners' motivation for languages can be characterized into two main kinds: instrumental motivation, which makes learners achieve some utilitarian goals such as job opportunities, good grades, etc., and integrative motivation, which relates to the personal interest of learners toward the country or culture of the people of the target language. Some studies (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Harmer, 1983) mentioned extrinsic motivation which means a person's motivation can be affected by external pressure such as others' suggestions, rewards, etc. to learn a language, and intrinsic motivation which states that a person's motivation is related only to his or her own interest in learning that language.

In the context of foreign language learning (FLL), it is interesting to find out how the instrumental or extrinsic motivation interacts with the integrative or intrinsic motivation, as learners may have various reasons to choose and learn a foreign language. Learning a third or foreign language after a second language is mostly a new beginning of acquisition, requiring high motivation, good attitudes, time, and effort. On the other hand, depending on various factors such as age, effort, exposure, differences in linguistic features between target and mother languages, etc., learners always encounter difficulties holding their motivation for the foreign language they are learning.

* Special Award (2023)

¹ Department of French, Yangon University of Foreign Languages

In this paper, young Myanmar students of French language from Yangon University of Foreign Languages (YUFL) are observed during their first seven months of study. French is a foreign language with some social or cultural distance for Myanmar learners in comparison with the three most popular languages, such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, apart from English, that most of them have learned since childhood in schools. For two decades since then, most of young adults from Myanmar have been learning the three mentioned Asian languages formally as well as informally. The current context of FLL in Myanmar is that most young language learners are more or less familiar with Asian languages, while only a few of them learn European languages such as French, Spanish, and Italian for various reasons. Also, young learners of French or any European languages are mostly those who have already been in contact with one or two Asian languages in Myanmar.

Methodology

Regarding their motivational aspects before investigation, there can be various reasons why students choose French or YUFL, such as the situation of the university, the popularity of foreign language learning, the employment opportunity, etc. It is also hard to obtain students' real motivation, and all the four types of motivations (instrumental, integrative, intrinsic, extrinsic) are very likely to be obtained from each of the students. That is why, instead of focusing on specific types of motivation, two groups among the students were divided as a French-only learners' group (FO) and a multi-language learners' group (ML) in order to do the comparison between them, as it is assumed that multi-language learners, through their experience in a foreign language learning context, may endure the difficulties of a new foreign language and hold their motivation longer than their peers who start learning it for the first time.

Literature Review

In Nikitina, L. and Furuoka, F. (2005), the nature of the integrative motivation of Malaysian students learning Russian at Universiti Malaysia Sabah was investigated with 74 students and two surveys were carried out at the beginning and end of the language course. It aimed to find out how integrative motivation can bring students into the classroom: students' knowledge, conceptions, and opinions about Russia and Russian people drive their motivation and attitudes toward learning the Russian language. As a result, it was discussed that students did not have much knowledge or desire in the beginning of their study, but integrative motivation was developed in the course of their study, and they mentioned positive attitudes and desire for the Russian language in the end. That study highlighted how integrative motivation plays a vital role in learning a foreign language, especially when the target language community is not familiar with it.

In Bodian, A. (2017), motivation and achievement, two variables of language learning, were tested in learning French as a foreign language with 213 Malaysian undergraduate students. In that study, no significant correlations between motivation and achievement were found, but it showed that both instrumental and integrative motivation were important for students' choice to learn French, but they were more motivated for instrumental reasons.

In Eiammongkhonsakun, S. (2017), the socio-educational model (motivation, integrativeness, and attitudes) was used to analyze the motivation towards learning French among undergraduate students in Thailand with only 15 participants. As a result, not only instrumental and extrinsic motivation but also interest in French society were observed through

interviews. Regarding students' attitudes towards French, their learning situation was reviewed: students' motivation was more likely to be high with activities related to grammar, four language skills, and pronunciation practice, but low with translation and literature, as they thought that these activities were far beyond reality because of language related difficulties.

Regarding these previous studies above related to motivation for French language learning done in Thailand and Malaysia, it can be hypothesized that the Myanmar context would have similar motivational aspects as the French language community is far from the region and students have similar linguistic backgrounds (French is learned after English as a foreign language).

Research questions

Three research questions were formulated as follow for this study:

- (1) How did the motivation of YUFL French specialization students change after 3 months of study?
- (2) How did the motivation of YUFL French specialization students change after 7 months of study?
- (3) What are the factors for which they change motivation for the French language?

Materials

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to carry out the investigation, as students' motivational aspects were tested through two questionnaires (see Appendix) composed mainly of open-ended questions to seek their opinions and motivation, and the majority and minority of their answers were mentioned in numbers. The first survey was carried out after three months of their study, with the first questionnaire containing 15 questions. The second one was done after their seventh month of study, with 10 questions. Among all these 25 questions, 13 were formulated to be used in the investigation, and the answers were indicated and analyzed in the coming sections. Five of them were only to get students' profiles, and the rest were filler questions.

Participants

In order to investigate students' motivation for French, 33 beginner students from the first year of the 2022–2023 academic year, with an age range of 18–20 and the majority of female students, were selected in September 2022. The reason for the choice was that most of these students were more than 18 years of age, they waited for a certain period of time to join the university during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they would have stronger motivation than those from other intakes for having chosen the bachelor degree course in French language. Most of the students had already learned some foreign languages up to a certain level before studying French.

Findings

After having conducted two questionnaires in their third and seventh months of study, the following findings were obtained from 13 questions. Answers to the other questions were discussed in the next section.

Question 1: Do you have any other languages spoken or learned apart from Burmese and English?

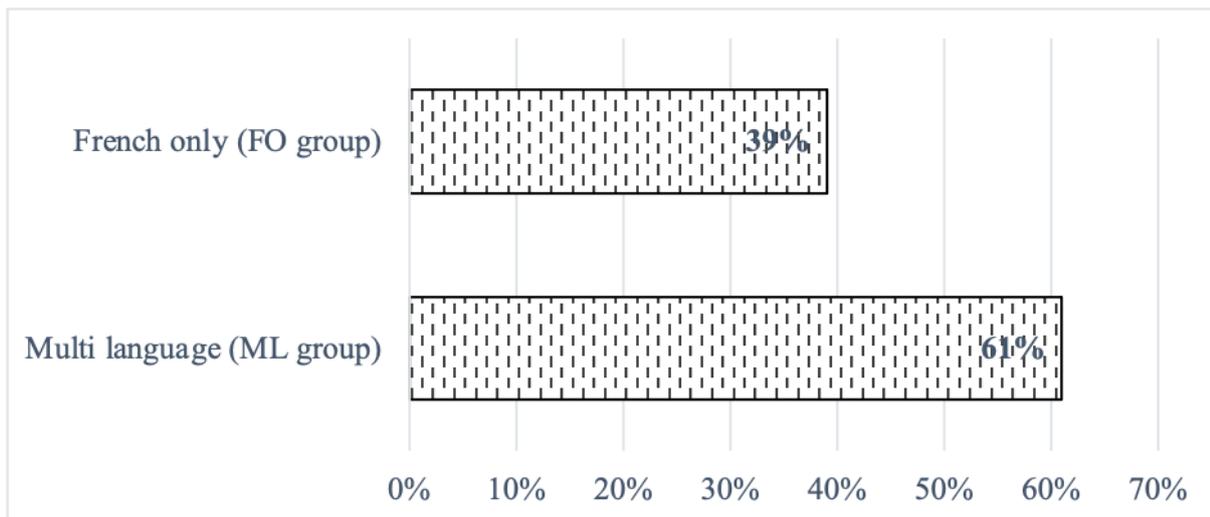


Figure 1: Languages spoken or learned by French specialization students

Question 2: What do you know of French people and culture before studying French at YUFL?

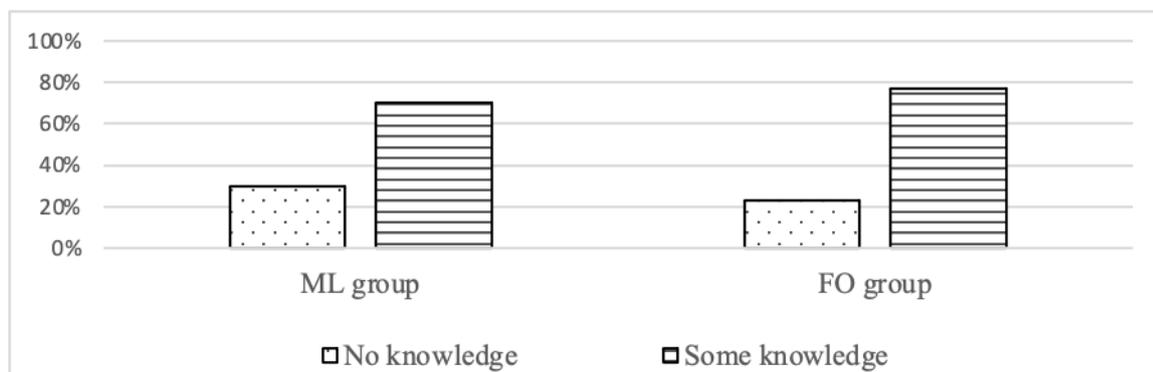


Figure 2: Knowledge for French people and culture of both the ML and FO groups

Question 3: What do you know of French language before studying French at YUFL?

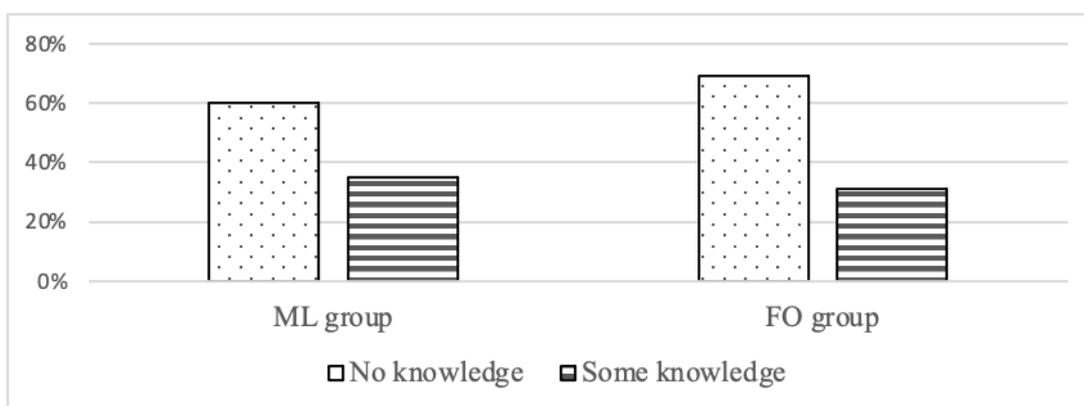


Figure 3: Knowledge for French language of both the ML and FO groups

Question 4: Why did you choose French to learn at YUFL?

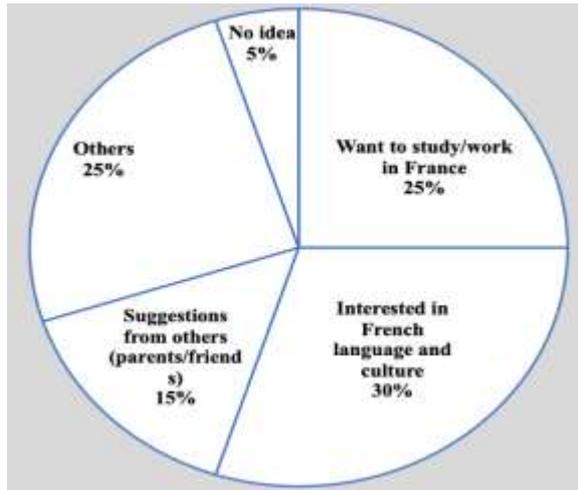


Figure 4: Reasons for the ML group

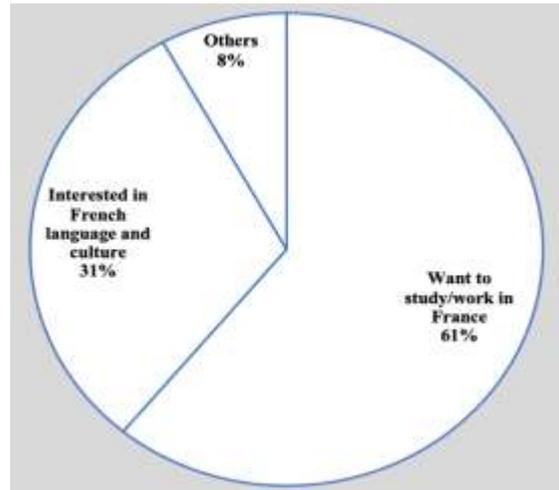


Figure 5: Reasons for the FO group

Question 5: What do you know of French language after studying for 3 months at YUFL?

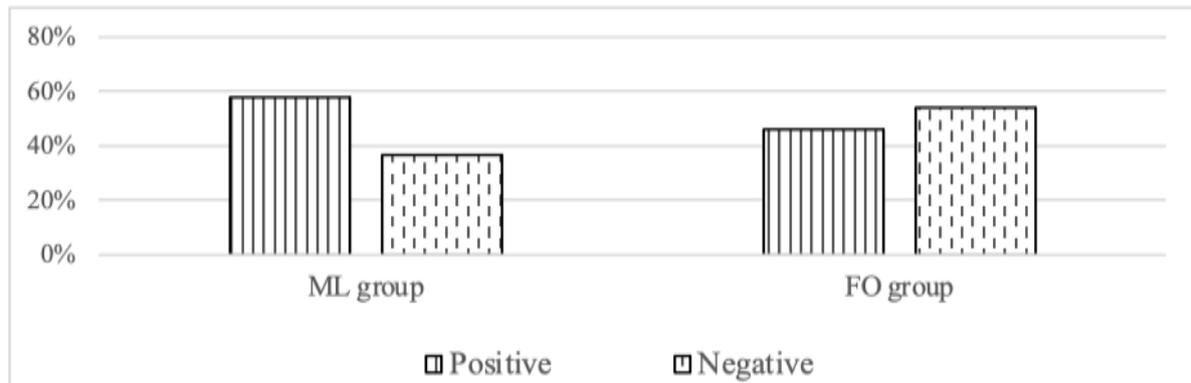


Figure 6: Knowledge for French language of both the ML and FO groups

Question 6: How do you feel about learning the French language after 3 months?

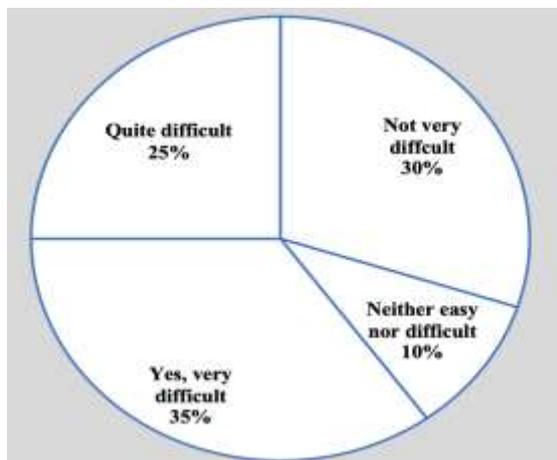


Figure 7: Reactions of the ML group

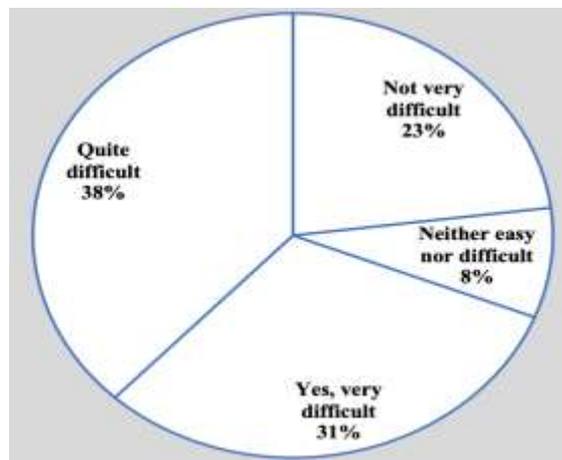


Figure 8: Reactions of the FO group

Question 7: Do you think that your French skills will improve in the coming months?

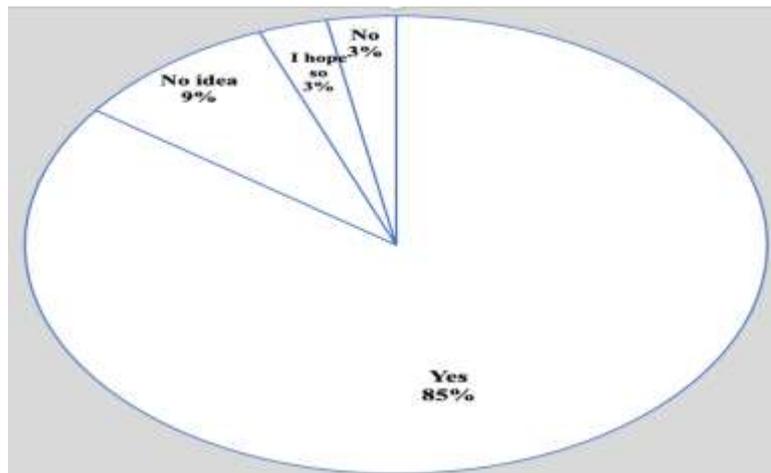


Figure 9: Reactions of both the ML and FO groups

Question 8: Do you think you have made progress after 7 months?

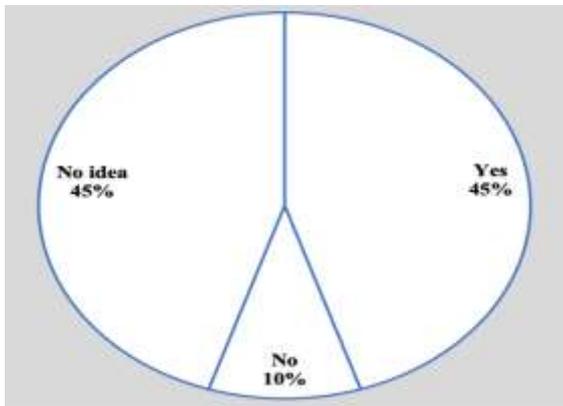


Figure 10: Reactions of the ML group

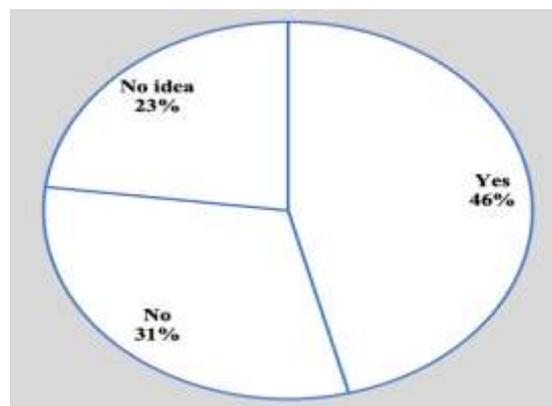


Figure 11: Reactions of the FO group

Question 9: Have you changed your mind to continue learning French?

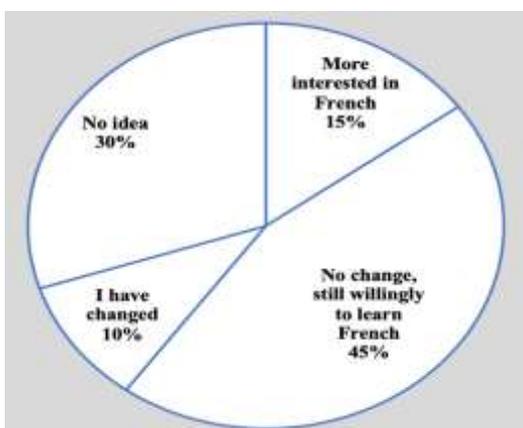


Figure 12: Reactions of the ML group

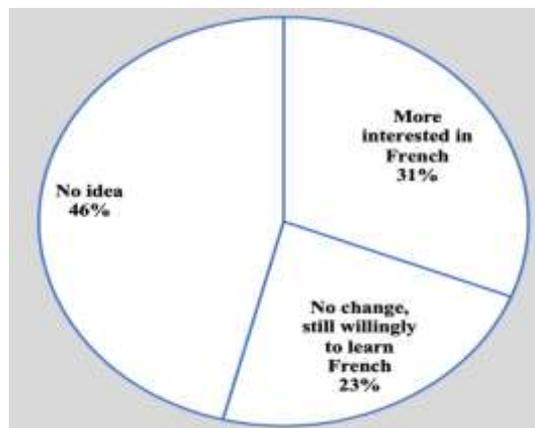
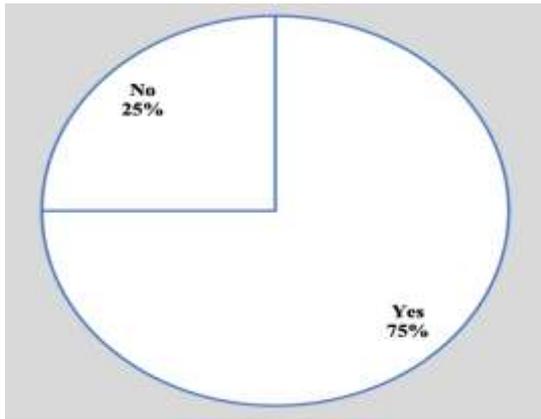
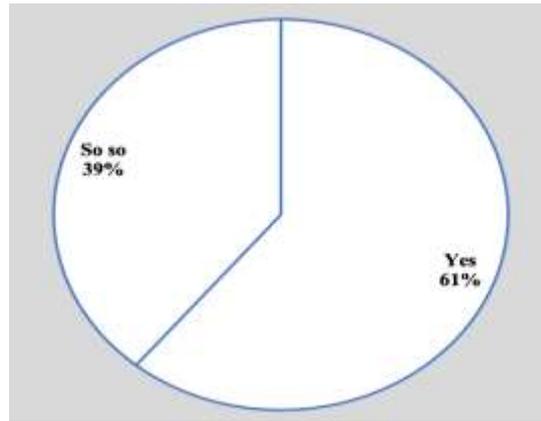


Figure 13: Reactions of the FO group

Question 10: French is fun?



Figures 14: Reactions of the ML group



Figures 15: Reactions of the FO group

Question 11: Do you think that French is easier than other foreign languages?

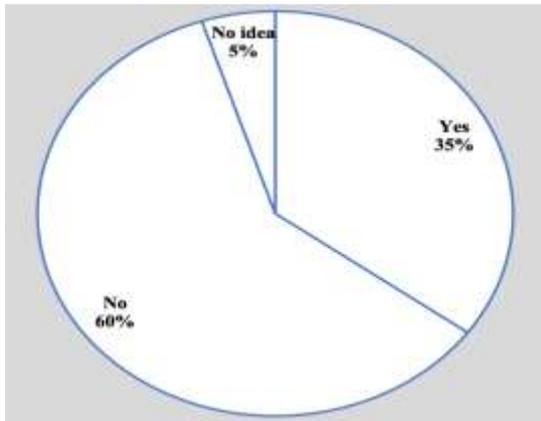


Figure 16: Reactions of the ML group

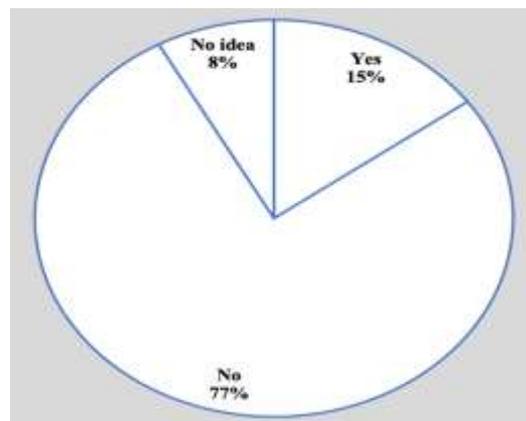


Figure 17: Reactions of the FO group

Question 12: What part of the French language is difficult for you after 3 months of study?

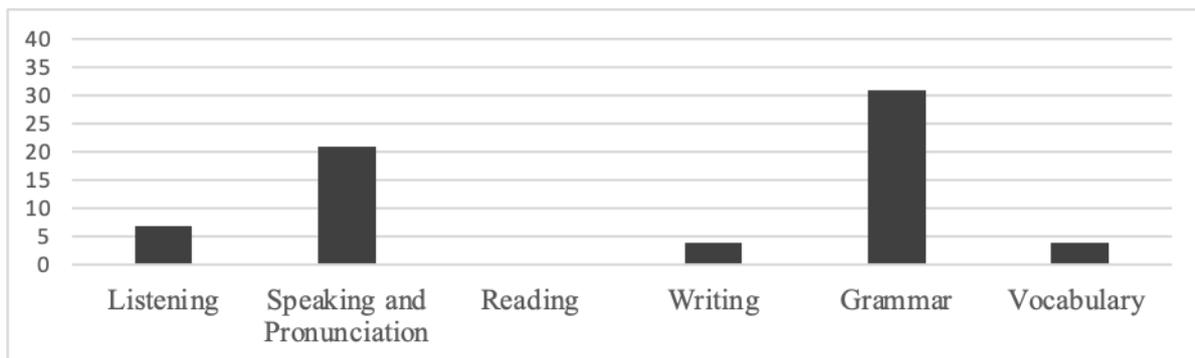


Figure 18: Difficulties after 3 months of study

Question 13: What part of the French language is difficult for you after 7 months of study?

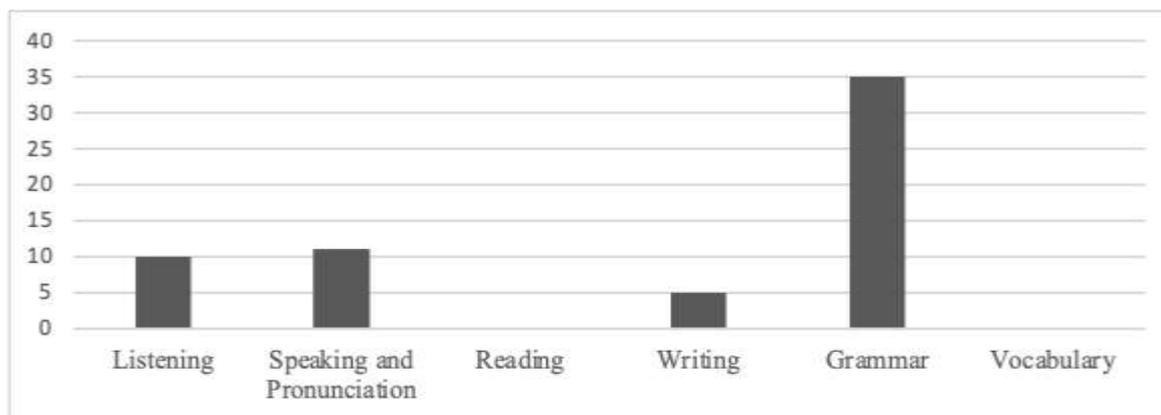


Figure 19: Difficulties after 7 months of study

Discussion

First of all, students who have already learned other foreign languages apart from English were found to be 61%, and those who have not were found to be 39%. Their knowledge of French people and culture was said to be good, as more than 70% of each group could give the answer to what they had known. However, only a few students responded with knowledge of the French language, with 30.8% and 35% in each group (see figures 2 and 3).

Regarding their answers for the reasons to choose French, the motivation of more than half of the FO (French Only) group was found to be instrumental as they responded that they wanted to study and work in France; the motivation of nearly half of the ML (Multi-language) group was found to be extrinsic as they decided to study French because of the suggestions from friends and parents and also of the other various reasons; and nearly the same number of students from both groups had integrative motivation, representing 30% and 31%, respectively (see figures 4 and 5).

Relating to the questions about the reactions after their 3 months of study, 58% of the ML group responded positively to their acquired knowledge of the French language, while 53.9% gave negative reactions (see figure 6). Nearly 70% of the FO group responded “very and quite difficult” to the French language, while 40% of the ML (multi-language) group answered “not very difficult” and “neither easy nor difficult” (see figures 7 and 8). However, they all had positive opinions about their learning in the coming months, as they mostly said yes, with 84.8%, to question no. 7 (see figure 9).

Relating to the questions about the reactions after their 7 months of study, nearly half of both groups (46% and 45%, respectively) responded that they made progress (see figures 10 and 11), while 30.8% of the FO group replied directly ‘no’. However, learning French was still difficult for both groups, but there were some changes in motivation: 46% of the FO group had no idea about their minds, while 45% of the ML group had not changed their minds and were still willing to learn French (see figures 12 and 13). Interestingly, 75% of the ML group said yes to the question “French is fun?” while only 61% of the FO group said the same, but 39% had no idea ‘so so’ (see figures 14 and 15). Only 15.4% of the FO group thought French was easier than other foreign languages, while 35% of the ML group said yes to that question (see figures 16 and 17).

The most common difficulties in learning the French language were grammar and speaking skills for both groups after 3 months of study (see figures 18), and grammar was found to be the most difficult after 7 months of study (see figures 19), even though the difficulty for speaking skills declined slightly.

By the comparison between these 2 groups above, students' motivation can generally be said to decline slightly after their 7 months of study. It was found that the ML group had fewer negative reactions than the FO group to most of the questions about motivation related to the French language. It is possible that students from the ML group have already experienced some difficulties as very beginner-level learners of other foreign languages, and they are more capable of holding their motivation for another foreign language than their peers from the FO group. Moreover, having mentioned that grammar and pronunciation were their common difficulties, it is interesting to study whether their motivation will regain or not if they get more materials and support from teachers and activities in the classroom.

Conclusion

This study is an initial observation of the motivation of French language learners at YUFL, carried out over a certain period of time. It would be better and more complete if more variables could be added to be observed, such as attitudes, achievements, more students, and a longer time. Most of the young learners of foreign languages in Myanmar are now learning more than one foreign language apart from English, and multi-language learners or multilingual speakers are about to appear in the foreign language learning community. It is for teachers and curriculum planners to consider this potential situation in order to make the most of students' motivation with appropriate materials and activities.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the teachers of the department of French at the Yangon University of Foreign Languages for their support of my research. Then, I am grateful to 33 students who participated actively in answering and analyzing my questions.

References

- Bodian, A. (2017). Motivation and achievement in learning French as a foreign language in Malaysia. In: International Conference on Language Students (ICLS 2017), 09-10 August 2017, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Kuching, Serawak.
- Deci, E. L. & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*, New York: Plenum Press.
- Eiammongkhonsakun, S. (2017). Motivation towards learning French among undergraduate students in Thailand. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(1), pp. 211–219.
- Gardner, R.C. (1985). *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers.
- Gardner, R.C. & Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Genesee, F. (1978). Individual Differences in Second-Language Learning. *Canadian Modern Language Review* 34: pp. 490-504.

Harmer, J. (1983). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. London: Longman.

Nikitina, L., & Furuoka, F. (2005). Integrative motivation in a foreign language classroom: A study on the nature of motivation of the Russian language learners in Universiti Malaysia Sabah. *Jurnal Kinabalu, Jurnal Perniagaan & Sains Sosial*, 11, pp. 23-34.

Appendix

First Survey for Students' motivation (French language)

1. Gender Male Female
2. Age 10-15 16-19 20-25 26-30 31-40
3. Native town
4. Nationality
5. Do you have any siblings or family member or friends speaking French? Yes No
6. Do you have any other languages spoken or learned apart from Burmese and English?
Mention Languages spoken 1. Myanmar 2. English 3....., 4. 5.....
7. Why did you choose French to learn at YUFL?
8. What do you know of French people and French culture, **before** studying French at YUFL?
9. What do you know of French people and French culture, **after** studying French for 3 months at YUFL?
10. What do you know of French language **before** studying French at YUFL? / How did you feel like learning French?
11. What do you know of French language **after** studying French for 3 months at YUFL? / How do you feel about learning the French language after 3 months?
12. Is French language very difficult or not very difficult for you now? Why?
13. What part of the French language is difficult for you after 3 months of study? (For example, grammar, pronunciation, conjugation...)
14. Do you think that your French skills will improve in the coming months?
15. Please give your suggestions for better teaching and learning French below.

Second Survey for Students' motivation (French language)

1. What do you know of French people and French culture **after** studying French for 7 months at YUFL?
2. Do you think that you know more of French people and culture **after** studying French for 7 months here?
3. Do you think you have made progress after 7 months?
4. What part of the French language is difficult (or still difficult or the most difficult) for you after 7 months of study? (For example, grammar, pronunciation, conjugation, tenses ...)
5. How do you feel like learning French now? French is fun?
6. Have you changed your mind to continue learning French?
7. Do you think that French is easier than other foreign languages?
8. Do you have any languages that you are currently learning while studying French here? Since when?
9. Do you have any interest in learning other languages while studying French?
10. What languages do you want to learn while/after studying French? Why?