



Promoting Quality French Language Achievement in Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The paper focused on promoting quality achievement of students in the French language in Cross River State. Two factors were considered: use of time and space. 1496 junior secondary 3 and 19 teachers of the language made up the population, while 748 (50%) were randomly selected for the study. Two null hypotheses were raised. Two instruments were adapted, namely: Time and Space Factors Questionnaire (TSFQ) and a 40-item achievement test. Data generated were analyzed using the independent t-test analysis. The results showed that time and space significantly influence students' academic achievement in French. Based on these findings recommendations were made.

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM

In recent years, the federal government of Nigeria has placed more emphasis on the study of French language. Its teaching and learning have become interesting and challenging exercises for all concerned. It is one whose outcomes draw the attention of a host of people, institutions and the nation as a whole. However, there are a number of factors that militate against its learning outcome. Two of such factors: time and space, may indicate teachers' inefficiency if not properly handled, while producing unwanted performances (Arends, 1991).

This may not be a healthy development, rather, it could be evidence of a shortfall in attainment of the goals and objectives of Nigerian education as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004). Researches have been conducted on the ways teachers manage their students' use of classroom time and space, as well as their own personal time across many different professional activities. Arends (1991) stipulates that these two factors are resources over which teachers have considerable control. Although they must

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still abide by the concept of a school period of fixed duration, and cannot make their classrooms larger, teachers have a wide variety of options available to them. He stated that there was however, an interesting difference between time and space. Both were finite and limited but time was the more crucial and coveted resource in terms of academic goals. Time pressures led to considerations of efficiency, such as, “how can I maximize instruction to increase students’ time on task?” (p. 78). He, moreover, said that space, although finite, was in less demand for most teachers and was less likely, therefore, to produce considerations of efficiency. The primary concern with space is not to race with it as it is with time, but to experiment reflectively with rearranging the design of the classroom.

In another study, Nwagwu (2003) wrote that overcrowding, excessive heat and restricted movement result in restiveness and indiscipline among students. He remarked that within the last three decades, the amount of time allocated and actually used for teaching and learning activities has reduced to a dangerous level. He was of the opinion that planners and designers of the curriculum should estimate the minimum and optimum time required to complete the prescribed programme or course content and activities. Any shortfall in the time available means either non-completion or rushed and inadequate completion of the content. Nwagwu then concluded that the consequences on learning outcomes and students’ achievement were obvious.

In the same vein, the way space is managed has important cognitive and emotional effects on students (Clayton, 2001). Patton, Snell, Knight and Gerken (2001) were able to demonstrate how students’ achievement in a primary classroom changed as a result of changes in physical space. The teachers and researchers were concerned that students were not evenly distributed across the room, which meant overcrowding in some areas and under utilization in others. By reorganizing the room arrangement, the researchers were able to change students’ choice of and participation in the centres.

In a typical French classroom of 25-60 students, teachers are forced to direct attention to groups of students rather than individuals, and the end-product is not always satisfactory. Offorma (1993) confirmed that some other problems of French language teaching in Nigeria include time allotment. Time allotment to the teaching of French is inadequate for the students to learn the language. French has only two or three periods of 35-40 minutes duration per week. This does not seem sufficient for learners to attain mastery of the language particularly taking cognizance of the bilingual orientation facing the nation with the enormous diversity and variability of students, she stated.

The cardinal purposes of this study are: i) the determination of whether in a French language classroom in Cross River State, time and space factors influence students’ academic achievement; and ii) the recommendation, if any, of how French language teaching can be made more effective in the classroom by incorporating variables that are found to be relevant to French achievement.

METHODOLOGY

The population of the study comprised all the Junior Secondary Three (JS3) students studying French and their teachers in Cross River State. A total of 1,496 JS3 students and 19 teachers of French, met by the researcher in the field, made up the population of the study. From the population, 50 percent of the students population (=748) was randomly sampled using gender of the subjects. The 19 teachers were used, one from each school.

Two instruments were used, namely: Time and Space Factors Questionnaire (TSFQ) and an achievement test. The TSFQ was a rating scale adapted from Fraenkel and Wallen (2000), and designed to obtain information from students on how they evaluated their teachers' use of time and space using 'Never', 'Sometimes', or 'Always'. The achievement test which was a 40-item French test was to measure students' academic achievement in French. To ascertain their reliability, the instruments were trial-tested. For instance, the reliability of the 40-item achievement test was determined using the Spearman-Brown's prophesy formula. The reliability was 0.76. To establish the reliability of the TSFQ, it was administered in 9 secondary schools in the state, from the same population. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was computed and used to test each of the factors of the study. The value of the reliability indices for the two factors were determined and found to be high; which showed that the items in the scales had very high internal consistency.

Data analysis

Hypothesis 1: Time factor does not significantly influence students' achievement in French.

To test this hypothesis, the academic achievement of students with sufficient time for learning was compared with that of students with insufficient time using the independent t-test analysis. The result was as shown below.

Table 1: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of time on students' academic achievement in French.

Time	N	X	SD	t
Sufficient	381	66.78	10.29	
Insufficient	367	63.14	12.18	4.41*
Total	748	62.86	11.73	

*significant at 0.05 level; df=746; t=1.96.

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The calculated t-value is more than the critical. This means that time factor influences significantly students' academic achievement in French. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected at the level presented above.

Hypothesis 2: Class space does not significantly influence students' academic achievement in French. To test this hypothesis, the academic achievement of students with sufficient class space for learning was compared to that of those with insufficient space using the independent t-test analysis, as presented in below.

Table 2: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of class space on students' academic achievement in French.

Time	N	X	SD	t
Sufficient	381	63.27	9.22	
Insufficient	367	61.14	11.15	2.84*
Total	748	62.26	10.09	

*significant at 0.05 level; df = 746; t = 1.96.

The calculated t-value is greater than the critical t needed for significance at 0.05 level. This means that class space influences significantly students' achievement in French. Hence, the null hypothesis was equally rejected.

DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis showed that the null hypotheses were rejected in the two cases; indicating that time and space influence significantly students' academic achievement in French. The result as was expected, agrees with those of the works reviewed earlier in the study. However, the researcher is aware that our normal educational system is so structured that the teachers cannot vary much time and space. Even at times when teachers would wish to rearrange the classroom to suit some particular topics, they may find this impossible due to the compact nature of the desks, and the small size of the room. Above all, trying to do so for conducive learning to occur may use some of the allotted time for the lesson; which already is pre-determined. Thus, teachers and learners have little or no freedom of manipulation.

Teachers of French who want to make impact on students' learning may give some take-home assignments or organize extra classes outside their own class periods, maybe in the school hall where students will have enough space for demonstration purposes. The issue of take home assignment is concurred by Winne and Marx (1982), who suggested that one way to achieve extended time was to give students homework. They strongly proposed that if students practice their drill and skills at home; more time will

be available during the school day for academic instruction. For instance, they could be encouraged to purchase 'French for Beginners' cassettes and practice speaking skills at home instead of all the time watching of non-academic films.

This research also re-affirms the counsel of Butin (2000) that teachers should develop an attitude of flexibility and experimentation about these features of classroom life. They need to know that the French language class is different, and therefore plan about the use of time and space must be adjusted to suit particular circumstances.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it was concluded that time and space factors significantly influence students' achievement in French. Thus for students' academic achievement in French to be effectively enhanced, teachers of this language must maintain and restore (when necessary), the variables under study for successful classroom management. Teachers of French today, should not only see themselves as trainers but as facilitators of learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the sensitivity and extent with which time and space factors have shown in influencing students' academic achievement in this study, it was recommended that, in terms of the implementation of the policy on language teaching, there is need for a uniform application of the modes of implementation, if not in all schools for now, at least in all those designated as pilot schools as well as in all those currently studying French language in the state. Case in point, the government ought to, through supervision, ensure that the 2-3 periods allotted to the teaching of French is so implemented, while a French language laboratory or enough classrooms be provided to avoid overcrowding, excessive heat and restricted movement resulting in restiveness, thus cause lack of concentration and hence, poor academic achievement of French in students in Cross River.

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