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Assessing the Effect of Acculturation Program on Academic Achievement of French Students in Colleges of Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

One of the compulsory courses needed for graduation of French students at college of education level is FRE 225 - Immersion Program - popularly referred to as Acculturation Exercise (NCCE, 2020). That is why this study assessed the effects of the acculturation program on the academic achievement of French students using colleges of education in Nigeria as a case study. The survey research design was used for this study. The range of 20-50 subjects were conveniently and randomly sampled in each of the three (3) geopolitical zone of south-west, north-central and north-west of Nigeria. Their composition comprised of one state college and one federal college of education. Thus, 230 respondents and a self-developed research instrument tagged "French Immersion Achievement Test (FIAT)" with a reliability coefficient of 0.79 using the Cronbach Alpha SPSS statistical tool were employed for the study. The data collected were statistically analyzed using t-test statistics at α 0.05 level of significance to test the null hypotheses formulated. The major findings, among others, revealed that students who were exposed to the acculturation program (Group I) performed significantly better in French than their counterparts (Group II) who were not exposed to the program. The study, therefore, recommends, among other things, that the acculturation program in French studies in Nigeria colleges of education should be taken more seriously and be intensified in order to achieve the desired objectives.

INTRODUCTION

Foreign language education is perceived as one of the most important areas of attention needed for the balanced diplomatic conscience and socio-economic growth of a nation that aims at being virile and progressive (Sangotoro, 2023).

A major compulsory course needed for graduation in French at the college of education level is the acculturation program. The course is very crucial to the teaching of French language at this level in an Anglophone environment where French is taught as a target language. It is assumed that if properly implemented and conducted, the program could enhance learners' academic achievement in the target language. Unfortunately, the lukewarm attitude with which the program is handled in some colleges of education suggests that there is doubt about the significance and importance of the acculturation program to French students. Therefore, in an attempt to clarify this doubt, this study provides empirical data on the effect of the acculturation program on Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) students' achievement in the French language. The study becomes necessary in view of the quest for improvement in students' academic achievement, which vividly explains the reason why the acculturation program coded (FRE 225) is a compulsory course for all French students at the college of education level (NCCE, 2020). This further explains why Ugwuoti (1992) in Sangotoro (2000, p.50) considers acculturation as the only practically oriented program that will jolt the students into the seriousness of the novel course. This,

however, agrees with Lee (1987) in Anagbogu (1991, p. 7) that "people cannot learn a language really well and enjoyable unless from time to time they can move out and do things while speaking it"

As the case may be, the program is designed to enhance the acquisition of higher language proficiency through familiarization with local settings and interaction with people, especially the French traditional society. It, therefore, becomes imperative, in view of the importance of the acculturation program to students' academic achievement in the French language, that there is the need to investigate the prevailing effect of acculturation program on NCE students' achievement in the French language in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

As part of course requirements for graduation, students of the French language are expected to spend long vacations in an institution or environment where the language is spoken. The students are expected to live among the people improving their speaking skill through contact with the native speakers as well as learning the culture of the people. The guideline also stipulated in the NCCE (2020) that, the cultural immersion program will take place for twelve (12) weeks in a francophone environment conducive to the exercise. In order to be sure of the standardization of the acculturation centre, National Commission for College of Education (NCCE) is to inspect such centre to ascertain whether the centre is conducive or otherwise.

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However, the interest of this study stems from a recent development that emanated out of the 30th annual national conference organized by the Inter-College Association of French Teachers in Nigeria (INTER-CAFT) in July, 2023. In that national conference, the challenges and problems of the acculturation program were paramount in discourse. It was sadly noted that how the French acculturation program is handled in Nigeria colleges of education is worrisome and of a serious national concern (Sangotoro, 2023). The present outcry corroborates the previous and persistent communiqué from Heads of French Departments in College of Education in Nigeria, held under the auspices of INTER-CAFT at the Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Otto Ijanikin, Lagos on Wednesday 20th, August 2008. Therefore, the present study is to cast a searchlight on the effect of the acculturation program on the academic achievement of students in the French language at the college of education level in Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is to investigate the effect of the acculturation program on the achievement of French students at the college of education level. However, specifically, the objectives of the study are as follow:

1. To find out if French students who conducted acculturation program will perform significantly better than their counterparts who did not go through the program.
2. To find out if there is significant difference in the language skill acquisition of French students with acculturation experience and those without similar experience.
3. To find out if there is significant difference in the acquisition of near-native competence of French students who experienced acculturation program and those without such experience.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- 1) Do French students who participated in the acculturation program perform significantly better than their counterparts who did not participate in the same program?
- 2) Does significant difference exist in language skill acquisition of French students who were exposed to acculturation program and their counterparts who were not exposed to the same program?
- 3) Does significant difference exist in the acquisition of near-native competence of French students who experienced acculturation program and their counterparts without such experience?

Hypotheses

To guide the study, the following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at $P \leq 0.5$ levels of significance:

H0₁

There is no significant difference in the academic achievement of French students who participated in acculturation program and their counterparts who did not participate in the same program.

H0₂

There is no significant difference in language skill acquisition of French students who were exposed to acculturation program and their counterparts without similar exposure.

H0₃

There is no significant difference in the acquisition of near-native competence of French students who experienced acculturation program and their counterparts without such experience.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The design of this study is a survey research design. This design refers to a particular type of research design where the primary method of data collection is by survey. In this study design, surveys are used as tools by the researchers to gain a greater understanding about individual or group perspectives relative to a particular concept or topic of interest (Awotunde & Ugodulunwa, 2002; Patton, 2002). The justification for the adoption of this design is anchored on the premise that it is an easy accessible way for respondents to share or demonstrate their knowledge or perspectives about a particular research topic (Ugodulunwa, 2008).

Population of the Study

The population of this study covered all state and federal colleges of education offering French language in the south-west, north-central and north-west geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The choice of these geographical zones was motivated on the premise that the study of French language at college of education level is more prevalent in these zones than in other zones.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study involved three (03) geopolitical zones, of south-west, north-central and north-west. The three zones were randomly sampled where French is studied. A simple random sampling without replacement was used to select one federal and one state colleges of education offering French language program from each of the sampled geopolitical zones. Therefore, six (06) colleges of education (three federal and three state) were selected to form the sample of the study. The sampled colleges are:

- i) South-West (a) Federal College of Education (SP) Oyo, Oyo State (b) College of Education, Ila-Orangun, Osun State.
- ii) North-Central (a) Federal College of Education,

Pankshin, Plateau State (b) College of Education, Akwanga, Nasarawa State.

iii) North-West (a) Federal College of Education, Katsina, Katsina State (b) Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, Sokoto State.

The range of 20-50 students were sampled in each college totaling 230 samples across the three geo – political zones. The sampled population was divided into two groups tagged Group I (those exposed to acculturation program, and Group II (those who are not exposed to acculturation program.

Instrumentation, Validation and Reliability

The study employed an instrument developed by the researchers tagged “French Immersion Achievement

Test (FIAT) to test students’ linguistic competence and achievement in French language. The instrument was face and content validated by three French Chief Lecturers who have taught French language at college of education level for over thirty years.

The instrument FIAT’ was taken to Federal College of Education, Zaria, Kaduna State which is not in the sampled population but within the study area for pilot testing in order to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument which was found to be 0.79 using Cronbach Alpha SPSS statistical tool.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Data of Respondents Based on Sampled Colleges

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents Based on Sampled Colleges

Colleges	Frequency	Percentage%
FCE, (SP) Oyo	43	18.7
COE Ila-Orangun	40	17.4
FCE, Pankshin	41	17.8
COE, Akwanga	34	14.8
FCE, Katsina	32	13.9
Shehu Shagari COE, Sokoto	40	17.4
Total	230	100

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents Based on Exposure to Acculturation Program

Based on Exposure to Acc.	Groups	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Exposure to Acculturation	Group I	118	51.3
Non-Exposure to Acculturation	Group II	112	48.7
Total		230	100

The results obtained from the study were analyzed using SPSS package. T-test statistics was employed to determine any significant difference. The results obtained are presented in the tables below:

Research Question 1

Do French students who participated in acculturation program perform significantly better than their

counterparts who did not participate in the same program?

H₀₁

There is no significant difference in the academic achievement of French students who participated in acculturation program and their counterparts who did not participate in the same program.

Table 3: T-Test Analysis Comparing Academic Achievement of French Students who participated in Acculturation Program and their Counterparts who did not participate in the same Program

Variable	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	p-value
Group I	118	26.22	2.10	228	1.93	1.62	0.001
Group II	112	23.24	2.23				

* Significant at $P < 0.05$

The result in Table 3 revealed the p-value obtained was 0.001 at $P \leq 0.05$ level of significance. This shows that there was a significance difference between the mean scores of the French students who participated in acculturation programme and those who did not. The

null hypothesis 1 of no significant difference was thus, rejected. This implies that the French students who had participated in acculturation program performed significantly better than their counterparts who did not undergo the acculturation program.

Research Question 2

Does significant difference exist in the language skill acquisition of French students who were exposed to acculturation program and their counterparts who were not exposed to the same program?

H0₂

There is no significant difference in language skill acquisition of French students who were exposed to acculturation program and their counterparts without similar exposure.

Table 4: T-Test Analysis Comparing Language Skill Acquisition of French Students who were exposed to Acculturation Program and their Counterparts without Similar Exposure

Variable	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	p-value
Group I	118	46.5	28.91	228	13.62	1.92	0.001
Group II	112	39.6	17.2				

* Significant at $P < 0.05$

The result of Table 4 showed that t-calculated observed was 13.62 and the t-critical was 1.92 at degree of freedom of 228. Since the t-calculated is greater than t-critical, then the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is significant difference in the mean language skill acquisition of French students who were exposed to acculturation program and those without similar exposure.

Research Question 3

Does significant difference exist in the acquisition of near-

native competence of French students who experienced acculturation program and their counterparts without such experience?

H0₃

There is no significant difference in the acquisition of near – native competence of French students who experienced acculturation program and their counterparts without such experience.

The result of Table 5 revealed that, t-calculated observed

Table 5: T-Test Analysis Comparing the Acquisition of near-native competence of French students who experienced Acculturation Program and their Counterparts without such experience

Variable	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	p-value
Group I	118	27.21	10.24	228	2.15	1.96	0.001
Group II	112	24.16	7.13				

* Significant at $P < 0.05$

was 2.15 which is greater than t-critical with value 1.96 at degree of freedom 228 and 0.05 level of significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, there is significant difference in the mean acquisition of near-native competence of French students who experienced acculturation program and their counterparts without such experience. This shows that the near-native competence of French students who experienced acculturation program was significantly higher than their counterparts without such experience.

Discussion of Findings

The result in Table 3 showed that the mean scores of academic achievement of samples in Group I were greater than those of the samples in Group II. This indicates that the acculturation program is potentially viable in enhancing students' academic achievement at NCE level in French studies. This result is supported by the findings of other scholars like Ugwuoti (1992), Emenanjo (1992), Sangotoro (2000), Ojo (2007), Olajide (2010), Ansah (2018), Faloju, *et al.* (2023), Azalmad (2023), Aller & Tangonan (2023).

In Group I, students were already exposed to French language at work, on the roads, in the streets, markets, industrial, governmental, political and social establishment

through the process of acculturation. The students had direct contact and interaction with the near – native or official speakers of French language, thereby learning the practical aspects of the language outside the rigid school formal setting and the normal class routine they were formerly exposed.

The result in Table 4 revealed that the Group I language skill acquisition was higher than that of Group II. Therefore, the result of t - test analysis showed that the Group I displayed some language skills in French which is significantly higher than the Group II. The results agree with the findings of Roy (2010), Doghonazde and Cepik (2011), Savage and Hughes (2014) who in their separate studies reported that, acculturation program was indeed very superior in increasing students' language skill acquisition in French language.

The result in Table 5 showed that the mean scores of Group I in the acquisition of near-native competence in French language were more higher than the Group II. This indicated that those who were exposed to acculturation program achieved higher in acquisition of near- native competence than their counterparts who were not exposed to acculturation program in French language. This finding is in line with that of Alvarez-Osorrio, *et al.* (2017) who reported that new immersion

program is designed at suiting learners' peculiarities for better linguistic and cultural proficiency. This is why Alvarez-Osorio *et al.* (2017) developed a model of linguistic immersion program, where students, through an ethnographic experience, will have to socialize with the host community by collecting data through the participants' observation technique on a key subject that they are expected to study and acquire.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the acculturation program is crucial to the teaching and learning of the French language. It establishes that if properly conducted, the program could enhance learners' achievement in the French language, thereby improving their linguistic performance and communicative competence in the language.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are pertinent:

1. The acculturation program in French language should be intensified most especially in colleges of education in Nigeria.
2. The authority in each college of education should bear the cost of acculturation program. A situation where students are requested to finance the cost of acculturation program in French language is discouraging.
3. Since acculturation program is a compulsory course, it should be made compulsory for NCE French language certification. The course should not be waived for certification of NCE French language.
4. The previous practice of sending French students to French native speaking countries should be restored. A situation where students are mandated to undergo acculturation at Nigeria French Language Village, Badagry should be discouraged as this centre cannot guarantee near – native competence in French language.
5. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) should, as a matter of urgency, closely monitor the conduct of the acculturation program in French studies to ensure that the minimum requirements and period stipulated in the Minimum Standards are strictly adhered to by the participating colleges.

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