

COMBINED EFFECTS OF PRE-READING ACTIVITIES AND LOCATION ON SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS' INTEREST IN FRENCH ORACY

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Abstract

The Study found out the Combined Effects of pre-reading activities and school location on students' interest in French oracy. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The quasi-experimental research design was used. The sample for the study was made up of 154 senior secondary one (SS I) students drawn through a multi-stage sampling technique from four schools in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria. Out of this sample, 75 students were in the urban schools while 79 students were in the rural schools. The instrument for data collection was the researcher-constructed French Oracy Interest Inventory (FOII). The instrument was face validated by seven specialists. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.62, using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient method. The data obtained were analysed using means, standard deviations and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). The results indicated that students taught French oracy using pre-reading activities showed higher interest in French oracy than those taught with the audio-lingual method. School location had no significant influence on students' interest in French oracy. There was a significant interaction effect of methods and school location on students' mean interest rating score in French oracy. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that workshops should be regularly organized for French teachers on the use of pre-reading activities in teaching French oracy.

Introduction

The French language is one of the most widely used languages in the world. Though it is indigenous to France, a good number of French-speaking countries are in Africa, and Nigeria has a very good share of them as neighbours. Given its geographical location of being almost completely surrounded by francophone countries, Nigeria definitely needs the French language, though it is anglophone. This need is not only for effective understanding and appreciation of its neighbours, but also for economic, political, cultural and educational reasons. It is in recognition of these factors that the Federal Government of Nigeria made French the second official

language of the country. Following the official proclamation of the French language as the second official language in the National Policy on Education, French is made “compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools” (FRN, 2004, p. 10). One of the major objectives of this is to provide the learners with sufficient skills and competence required to make French a tool for communication.

However, the above objective appears not to be achieved and sustained as the majority of the students do not study the subject beyond senior secondary one (SS I) in spite of teachers’ very serious efforts. Even at that, the scholastic achievement of the few students who study French beyond this level is not encouraging. One of the major reasons often given for this is poor speaking and listening skills on the part of the students. According to West African Examinations’ Council (WAEC) Chief Examiners’ Report (2013) and (2014), students performed poorly in French II (Oral). This poor performance in the orals inevitably leads to poor achievement in the subject, and the poor achievement may have been as a result of poor method of teaching oracy.

Oracy refers to the ability to make use of the oral skills of listening and speaking and their interplay in verbal communication. It is one of the terms that have been used over the time to refer to spoken communication in the classroom. It was coined as a cognate of literacy and numeracy to capture the dynamics of teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions (Eze, 2017). It features in the French language curriculum as the first two pedagogical steps put at the disposal of the teacher in order to make his teaching easier and more effective. It features as aural comprehension and oral expression. Aural comprehension aims at leading the learners towards the art of listening to and understanding discussions and instructions in French while oral expression aims at equipping the learners with the ability to speak the language in order to be understood by others (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, 2007). WAEC (2013) in its Regulations and Syllabuses for West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) gives a pride of place to oracy in its French language examination. Two out of the three sections of Paper 2 (Oral) are completely dedicated to oracy. The sections test the candidates’ ability to listen to, and understand spoken French as well as the ability to react freely in French to a number of topics.

In a study on some aspects of oracy, Uwalaka (2013) states that teachers’ poor method of teaching it is responsible for the difficulties students are having on it. The difficulties erode students’ interest in French generally, and in its oracy in particular. This becomes worrisome in the light of the fact that interest is the emotionally oriented trait which determines a student’s urge or vigour to tackle educational programmes and other activities (Chukwu,

2002). So, when one is interested in a particular activity one is motivated to engage in it, and when one is motivated to engage in it, one develops interest in it. In line with this, a study by Torty (2010) affirms that suitable teaching methods boost students' interest in language learning. Similarly, Eze (2010) emphasizes the need for a more detailed analysis of students' background knowledge in French to be carried out in the preparation of their learning materials in order to enhance their interest in the subject. This is necessary because of students' apparent lack of interest in the subject. For instance, between 2010/2011 to 2014/2015 academic sessions, evidence from the statistics unit of the Post Primary Schools Management Board (PPSMB) Nsukka shows that no school fielded candidates consistently for WASSCE, even the former French pilot schools that still have many qualified and experienced French teachers. Thus, this study is aimed at finding out the effects of pre-reading activities on students' interest in French oracy.

Conventionally, so many teachers use the audio-lingual method in its weak form in teaching French oracy. The conventional audio-lingual method is a teaching method which states that learning a language means acquiring habits. In it, emphasis is laid on constant drills and practices because it recognizes that language learning is a process of habit formation. Nevertheless, in using the constant drills, the students have little or no control over their own output. Hence, it may not promote meaningful learning process.

Another method which may be used in teaching oracy is the use of pre-reading activities. Pre-reading activities are preparatory exercises engaged upon by intending readers before taking a given reading task. They exist in various forms, namely: pictorial context, vocabulary pre-teaching, pre-questioning, previewing activities, pre-reading discussion via group work, brainstorming and comprehension question presentation. Several scholars (Alemi and Ebadi, 2010; Yusuf, 2011 and Mihara, 2011) have researched on the efficacy and effectiveness of various pre-reading activities as instructional techniques. The above scholars researched on the effects of pre-reading activities on students' achievement in reading comprehension, and the method recorded resounding successes in all the cases. Thus, if the method proved to be successful in facilitating students' achievement in reading comprehension, one may be right to think that it may equally be a useful tool for teachers in boosting the students' interest in other linguistic skills, such as the ones contained in the concept of oracy. After all, reading itself is an active interaction between readers and the texts, a form of interaction which reinforces the learners' other language skills. For the purpose of boosting

students' interest in French oracy, the present researchers made use of pictorial context, vocabulary pre-teaching and pre-questioning.

In addition to teaching method, research has indicated some close connection between school location and interest in language learning. School location refers to an environment where schools are situated. This may be in the urban or in the rural areas. The classification of areas into urban and rural is normally done by the government for statistical and administrative purposes. Location as a concept has attracted the attention of researchers in education over the years. This is mainly because the location of a school in either an urban or a rural area may determine so many things that are important to learning such as learning facilities, number of teachers and class size. However, there are doubts on whether school location has a significant influence on interest in language learning (Omeje, 2009 and Torty, 2010).

In light of the foregoing, therefore, there is the need to find out through empirical evidence, the effect of pre-reading activities on students' interest in French oracy, as well as the influence of location on students' interest in it. Three research questions and three hypotheses were formulated for that purpose.

1. What are the mean interest rating scores of students taught French oracy using pre-reading activities and those taught using the conventional method?
 2. What is the influence of location on students' mean interest rating scores in French oracy?
 3. What is the interaction effect of methods and location on students' mean interest rating scores in French oracy?
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1. There is no significant difference in the mean interest rating scores of students taught French oracy using pre-reading activities and those taught using the conventional method.
 2. School location has no significant influence on the mean interest rating scores of students in French oracy.
 3. The interaction effect of methods and school location on students' mean interest rating scores in French oracy is not statistically significant.

Method

The study was a quasi-experimental study. It was precisely the non-equivalent control group design. The population consisted of all the 1,283 senior secondary one (SS I) students in all the seven public secondary in Nsukka Education Zone who studied French in the 2015/2016 academic session. The sample for the study was made up of 154 SS I students in four

intact classes which were drawn from four urban and rural schools in the area through a multi-stage sampling technique. Out of this sample, 75 students were in the urban schools while 79 students were in rural schools.

A researcher-constructed French Oracy Interest Inventory (FOII) was the instrument for data collection. The instrument had twenty items. The items assessed the students' likes or dislikes for French oracy. The inventory was constructed on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). It was validated by seven specialists. Three of them were teachers of French as Foreign Language (FFL), two in Language Education, one in Curriculum Studies and one in Measurement and Evaluation. All of them were from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient method was used in testing the internal consistency of the instrument. It yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.62.

The French Oracy Interest Inventory (FOII) was administered as pre-test to the subjects before the commencement of the treatment. This was done by teachers of French in the schools that were used for the study. These teachers served as research assistants. The researchers trained these research assistants to get them acquainted with the skills involved in the use of pre-reading activities as well as the conventional method in teaching French oracy. The training was carried out in each of the schools that were used for the study. It lasted for four days. One day each was dedicated to the training of the research assistant in each of the four schools that were used for the study.

At the end of the training, the research assistants administered the FOII as a pre-test. The students completed it on the spot. The completed copies of the instrument were then collected. The experiment started after the pre-test. The experimental group was taught using pre-reading activities while the control group was taught with the conventional audio-lingual method. The teaching in each of the groups was for four weeks. The topics, the specific objectives and the evaluation techniques were the same. Also the indigenous communication model of lesson planning was used for both the experimental and the control groups.

At the end of the teachings, the FOII was administered as post-test. The items in the post-test FOII were rearranged. The data from both the pre-test and the post-test were used for data analysis by the researchers. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to answer all the research questions, and the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test all the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results**Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test Mean Interest Rating Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups in French Oracy**

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Gain Score
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}
Experimental (Pre-reading Activities)	80	2.52	0.33	3.08	0.67	0.56
Control (Audio-Lingual Method)	74	2.57	0.33	2.74	1.08	0.17

Table 1 shows that the experimental group taught with the pre-reading activities had a pre-test mean interest rating score of 2.52 with Standard Deviation of 0.33 and a post-test mean interesting rating score of 3.08 with Standard Deviation of 0.67. On the other hand, the pre-test interest rating score of the control group, taught with the audio-lingual method was 2.57 with Standard Deviation of 0.33, while their post-test mean interest rating score was 2.74 with Standard Deviation of 1.08. The experimental group had a mean gain score of 0.56 while the mean gain score of 0.17 was recorded by the control group. The result shows that the experimental group showed greater interest in French oracy than the control group.

Table 2: Pre-test and Post-test Mean Interest Rating Scores of Urban and Rural Students in French Oracy

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Gain Score
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}
Urban	75	2.49	0.36	2.95	0.67	0.46
Rural	79	2.60	0.29	2.88	1.08	0.28

In Table 2, it is observed that the urban students had a pre-test mean interest rating score of 2.49 with Standard Deviation of 0.36 and a post-test mean interest rating score 2.95 with Standard Deviation of 0.67. On the other hand, the rural students obtained a pre-test mean interest rating score of 2.60 with Standard Deviation of 0.29 and a post-test mean interest rating score of 2.88 with Standard Deviation of 1.08. The urban students also recorded a mean gain score of 0.46 as against the mean gain score of 0.28 by the rural students. This result shows that the urban students showed greater interest in French oracy than their rural counterparts.

Table 3: Interaction Effect of Methods and Location on Students' Mean Post Interest Rating Scores in French Oracy

Group	Location	N	Mean	SD
Experimental	Urban	40	3.26	0.70
Experimental	Rural	40	2.90	0.59
Control	Urban	35	2.54	0.50
Control	Rural	39	2.86	1.43

It can be seen from Table 3 that urban students in the experimental group obtained a mean interest rating score of 3.26 higher than the urban students in the control group who got 2.54. In addition, the rural students in the experimental group got a mean interest rating score of 2.90, ahead of their rural counterparts in the control group who got 2.86. The results show that the urban students in the experimental group had better mean interest rating score than the urban students in the control group, while the rural students in the experimental group had better mean interest rating score than the rural students in the control group. The consistency of the higher mean post interest rating scores of the experimental group across locations could be attributed to the effect of treatment alone and not from the interaction effect of methods and location.

Table 4: Summary of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of Students' Post Interest Rating Scores in French Oracy by Treatment and Location

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Decision
Corrected Model	9.95 _a	4	2.49	3.12	0.02	
Intercept	18.78	1	18.78	23.58	0.00	
Pre-interest	0.04	1	0.04	0.05	0.83	
Treatment	5.54	1	5.54	6.95	0.01	S
Location	0.03	1	0.03	0.03	0.86	NS
Treatment *Location	4.61	1	4.61	5.78	0.02	S
Error	118.72	149	0.80			
Total	1425.84	154				
Corrected Total	128.67	153				

S = Significant at 0.05 level

NS = Not significant at 0.05 level

Results presented in Table 4 show that the F value of 6.95 in respect of treatment is significant at 0.01 level. This means that at 0.05 level, the F value of 6.95 is significant. The results indicate that pre-reading activities improved students' interest in French oracy more than the conventional audio-lingual method. Thus, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean interest rating scores of students taught French oracy using pre-reading activities and those taught using the conventional method is rejected.

Results shown in Table 4 indicate that the calculated F value of 0.03 in respect of location as a main factor is significant at 0.86 level and, therefore, not significant at 0.05 level. This means that the difference in the mean interest rating scores of urban and rural students in French oracy was not statistically significant. As a result the null hypothesis that school location has no significant influence on the mean interest rating scores of students in French oracy is upheld.

Table 4 shows that the calculated F value with regard to the interaction effect of methods and school location on students' mean interest rating scores in French oracy is 5.78 at 0.02 level of significance. This is less than 0.05 level of significance set for the study. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Hence, the interaction effect of methods and school location on students' mean interest rating scores in French oracy is statistically significant.

Discussion

The result of this study indicates that pre-reading activities had a significant effect on students' interest in French oracy. The students taught with pre-reading activities showed significantly higher interest in French oracy than those taught with the conventional audio-lingual method. This finding is in agreement with that of Torty (2010) which revealed that suitable teaching methods enhanced students' interest in language learning. The study by Torty (2010) for instance, suggested that it was possible that the students' active involvement in her treatment increased the students' interest. However, in the present study on the effect of pre-reading activities on students' interest in French oracy, the indigenous communicative model of lesson planning used for both the experimental and the control groups encouraged the active participation of the students. So, active involvement of the students might not be responsible for this significantly higher increase in the interest of the students in the experimental group. The result might be due to some qualities inherent in pre-reading activities. One such quality is the fact that pre-reading activities have the capacity to activate students' prior knowledge for effective top-down processing in order to facilitate students' understanding of linguistic tasks. This possibility is in agreement with Eze (2010)'s position on the need

for a more detailed analysis of students' past experiences and background knowledge in French to be carried out in the preparation of their learning materials.

Also, evidence on the influence of school location on students' interest in French oracy reveals that urban students had a higher mean gain than their rural counterparts. However, the difference in the urban and rural students' mean interest rating scores is not statistically significant. The result indicates that pre-reading activities improved the interest of both the urban and the rural students in French oracy. The degree of improvement in the two groups is almost at par. This result is in consonance with the findings of Omeje (2009) and Torty (2010) which did not establish any significant difference in the mean interest rating scores of students in urban and rural schools in language exercises. In this study, it is possible that the pictures, the vocabulary pre-teaching and the pre-questioning activities added colour and spice to the topics, thereby making the lessons pleasurable to the learners irrespective of whether they were in the urban or in the rural schools. The accompanying happiness and curiosity helped to enhance the students' interest in French oracy.

On the other hand, this study established a significant interaction effect of methods and location on students' interest in French oracy. This indicates that location could have contributed to students' interest in French oracy in addition to the treatment used. This finding departed from that of Omeje (2009) which showed that there was no significant interaction effect of method and location on students' interest in Igbo letter writing. This result of a significant interaction effect of methods and location on students' interest in French oracy could be from the learners' previous knowledge and experience in French oracy. The urban students had a relatively better prior knowledge of French and French oracy. Besides, the recommended French textbooks are more readily available in the urban schools. These conditions could have better improved the urban students' interest in the lessons regardless of how the topics were presented.

Conclusions

Students taught French oracy using pre-reading activities showed significantly higher interest in French oracy than those taught with the conventional audio-lingual method. Also, school location had no significant influence on students' interest in French oracy. On the other hand, there was a significant interaction effect of methods and school location on students' mean interest rating scores in French oracy.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

1. Centres for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTDs), Alliance Françaises and Ministries of Education should regularly organize workshops, seminars and conferences for French language teachers on the use of pre-reading activities in teaching French oracy.
2. Adequate provisions should be made by the government to ensure an equitable distribution of qualified teachers and instructional resources to urban and rural schools so that no school will be disadvantaged because of its location. In this way, the chances of achieving inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, as envisaged in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 4, would be greatly improved.

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