



Blended learning on students' performance and retention in French in Rivers State

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of blended learning on students' academic performance and retention in French in Rivers State, Nigeria. Blended learning, which combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online components, has gained increasing attention as a pedagogical approach that enhances students' engagement and learning outcomes. However, this work is focused on the A-la-carte model of Blended Learning Approach because limited research works have been done specifically on this model within the Nigerian educational context. This study has two objectives. Two research questions were answered and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study employed a quasi-experimental research design. The population of the study consisted of 2,230 Junior Secondary School Two Students in Private Schools in Obio Akpor Local Government Area in Rivers State. A sample of fifty-two JSS 2 students in Rivers State participated in the study. Purposive sampling technique was adopted. The instruments for data collection were a performance test titled French Grammar Performance Test and the French Grammar Retention Test which consisted of 30 items. The instruments were validated by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Kuder Richardson formula which yielded coefficients of 0.85 and 0.92. The findings revealed that students who participated in the A-La-Carte model of blended learning approach demonstrated significantly higher academic performance and retention in French compared to those taught with the Teacher Centred approach.

Keywords: Blended learning, A-la-carte model, language learning, connectivism

Introduction

Language learning involves the acquisition of vocabulary, grammar rules, pronunciation, and the ability to use the language effectively in various contexts, involving speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Ezeude 2017) ^[5]. Language learning involves not only gaining knowledge of vocabulary and grammar but also developing skills such as comprehension, communication, and cultural understanding. The French language, is a Romance language that originated in France. It is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. It is an official language of many international organizations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the International Olympic Committee. The Federal Government of Nigeria recognized the importance of the language as the late Head of State Abacha made French the country's second official language. Learning French opens doors to opportunities for travel, study, work, and cultural exchange. It is valued in various industries, including international business, tourism, diplomacy, education, and translation. French language skills can also enhance one's cognitive abilities, as studies suggest that bilingualism promotes cognitive flexibility and problem-solving skills. Overall, the French language holds both practical and cultural significance, making it a popular choice for language learners worldwide. It is taught at different levels in education from the Nursery schools to the Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria.

Generally, the French Language is taught with a conventional classroom approach. This approach (which is also known as the face-to-face approach) entails that the teacher coordinates the learning process by giving out the learning materials in class as students listen and possibly take notes. The benefits of this approach are far-reaching.

According to Cooper (2018) ^[3], the conventional classroom approach encourages physical interaction between teacher and learner, supports socialization among learners and enhances motivation through the learning process. It also encourages teacher in-person instruction where the teacher takes the centre stage. However, this approach may not consider students' learning styles and may not be flexible enough for self-paced learning. As a result, the conventional classroom approach may not be student-centred as students' participation may be restricted to only what the teacher permits in class. Today, computers have become the part and parcel of our lives. Integrating technology into the teaching and learning process (usually known as e-learning) could help to close the gap created by the conventional classroom approach. Ndinechi and Bupo (2015) ^[7] define e-learning as the use of electronic devices in the teaching and learning process. It includes the use of audio and video devices, synchronous and asynchronous procedures, individual and group arrangements, social media, discussion forums, and any other electronic communication tools in the educational process. The Blended Learning approach bridges the gap between entirely online learning and traditional classroom learning. The Blended Learning Approach has several models, notably: the rotation model, the flex model, the A-La-Carte model, and the enriched-virtual model. The A-La-Carte model was chosen for this study. The A-la-carte model also known as the self-blend model is a model of blended learning approach that combines self-paced online learning with in-person instruction.

There is a lot of concern and interest in education over the effectiveness of face-to-face and online learning, especially when it comes to subject matter instruction in light of the technologically advanced and knowledge-driven generations. Although there is growing number of researches on blended learning, more empirical evidence is still required to demonstrate its effectiveness, particularly in connection to student performance and retention in the study of French. As a result, this gave rise to the need to determine whether the A-la-carte model of blended learning approach can improve students' performance and retention in French better than the teacher-centred approach.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, the academic performance and retention of students studying the French language have become worrisome to interested parties as fewer students offer French at the Senior Secondary Level. More worrisome is the fact that those who register for French examinations perform poorly orally and in writing as stated by the chief examiners' reports for Basic Education Certificate Examination (2021) ^[1]. The poor academic performance and retention in French Language studies could be attributed to many factors such as lack of interest, lack of instructional materials, inadequate time allocation, low retention, poor teaching approach. According to Etukudo (2020) ^[4], the fall in the standard of performance is incontrovertibly attributed to the poor delivery approach adopted by teachers in schools. This implies that mastery of the French Language might be fully achieved with the use of a good instructional delivery approach that utilizes instructional materials.

Given these scenarios, this study sought to answer the question: "if the A-la-Carte model of Blended learning approach is applied to the teaching of the French Language, what effect would it have on the Language students'

performance and retention?" This is the problem this study sought to address.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is to determine if the A-la-carte (ALC) model of blended learning approach has an effect on Junior Secondary School Two (JSS2) students' academic performance and retention in French, in Obio Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Specifically, the objectives of the study are to;

1. Examine the effect of the A-La-Carte (ALC) model and teacher-centred approach on students' academic performance in French;
2. Ascertain the mean retention scores of students taught French using the A-La-Carte (ALC) model and the teacher-centred approach.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered to arrive at the findings of the study.

1. What is the effect of the A-la-carte model and teacher-centred approach on students' performance in French?
2. What is the difference in the mean retention scores of students taught French with A-la-carte model and those taught with the teacher-centred approach?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and they were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught French using the A-La-Carte model and teacher-centred approach.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean retention scores of students taught French using the A-La-Carte model and the teacher-centred approach.

Related Literature Review

Concept of Blended Learning

Blended learning is a way of teaching that combines online and face-to-face methods. It allows students to learn at their own pace, place, and style, while also interacting with their teachers and classmates (Olele & Abraham, 2016) ^[9]. Blended learning has many benefits, such as increasing engagement, personalization, and autonomy. However, it can also have some challenges, such as technical issues, isolation, or confusion. Blended learning is not a fixed model, but rather a flexible approach that can be adapted to different contexts and goals. The goal of blended learning is to leverage the strengths of both traditional and technology-enhanced education to provide a more personalized and engaging learning experience for students. That is to synthesize training media into an integrated mix—one that can be tailored to create a high-impact, efficient, and exciting training program.

Concept of the A-la-Carte Model

One notable variation within the blended learning landscape is the A-la-carte model also known as the self-blend model. This model empowers students to take control of their learning experiences. This model of blended learning is a way of learning that allows students to take online courses in addition to their traditional face-to-face courses (Chukwemeka *et al.*, 2020) ^[2]. The A-la-carte model

combines self-paced online learning with in-person instruction. It puts the student in control of the education they receive. The self-blend model allows students to primarily learn in a traditional classroom setting while incorporating online resources to supplement their education. Students primarily learn in a traditional classroom setting but can supplement their learning with online resources.

In this article, the a-la-carte model is one in which the student can decide to take one or more courses online as a supplement to the other courses that are taken traditionally in a brick-and-mortar classroom. Staker and Horn (2012) ^[12] argued that this model is different from fully online learning and the enriched-virtual learning model because it is not a whole-school experience. That is, the student chooses the lesson(s) that will be taken online and the other courses will be taken in the classroom. The online course can be handled anywhere there is internet service (whether in school or at home) and at a time convenient for the student.

Concept of the Face-to-Face Teaching Approach

This is the approach of teaching where the teacher is present physically with the students in class. According to Redmond (2011), a conventional teaching approach is a process in which learning takes place where the teacher and the students are in the same geographical location. Imogen (2018) also explained that the conventional learning approach is an approach where physical human interactions are encouraged as students interact with the teacher and their classmates face-to-face. Sometimes called the face-to-face teaching/learning approach, the conventional approach refers to a situation where the instructor and the student of an educational institution are in a place devoted to instruction and the teaching and learning take place at the same time (Purdue University, 2019). Some examples of the conventional methods are lecture, group projects, peer tutoring, field trips, role playing, discussions, demonstration method.

Methodology

The design for this study is a quasi-experimental research

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation showing the effect of A-La-Carte model and Teacher-Centred approach on students' performance in French

Treatment Group	N	Pretest Mean	Pretest SD	Post-test Mean	Post-test SD	Mean Gain
A-La-Carte	37	47.54	15.32	83.89	11.82	36.35
Teacher-Centred	15	57.60	18.16	60.20	19.03	2.6

Table 1 presents the results of the effect of the A-La-Carte model and teacher centred-approach on students' academic performance in French. The study involved two groups: a treatment group that received A-La-Carte model of blended learning approach and teacher-centred approach, which was the control group.

Based on the table, it can be inferred that the A-La-Carte model had a significantly positive effect on students'

design. According to Nwankwo (2017), in a quasi-experimental design, the researcher takes advantage of naturally occurring groups or conditions and compares their outcomes after introducing an intervention or treatment. A non-equivalent control and experimental control group pre-test, post-test, and post post-test were used. This design enabled the researcher to determine the effect of A La Carte model on students' academic performance and retention in French. The research was conducted in Obio Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State

The study's population consist of 2,230 Junior Secondary School Two students from private schools in Rivers State's Obio Akpor Local Government Area. The sample of this study comprised 52 Junior Secondary School Two Students drawn from intact classes in three private schools in Obio Akpor Local Government Area of Port Harcourt. Purposive sampling technique was used. The schools were selected based on the following criteria: (a) they teach French language. (b) schools that have affiliations with Google and other technological companies that provide students with personal Chromebooks and PCs and (c) administrative consent. The instruments used for the collection of data were a Performance test titled, French Grammar Performance Test (FGPT) and The French Grammar Retention Test (FGRT). Trial testing of the French Grammar Performance Test (FGPT) and the French Grammar Retention Test was carried out using 17 JSS II students in a Private Junior Secondary School outside the sample but have characteristics similar to the sample schools. The reliability coefficient of the FGPT was determined with Kuder Richardson Formula 21 (K-R 21) technique. Reliability analysis produced a Kuder Richardson reliability coefficients of 0.85 and 0.92 respectively.

Analysis and Interpretation

1. What is the effect of the A-La-carte model and teacher-centred approach on students' performance in French?

performance in French. The treatment group showed a substantial increase in post-test scores, along with a higher mean gain compared to the control group.

Hypotheses One: There is no significant difference in the effect of A-La-Carte model and Teacher- Centred approach on students' performance in French.

Table 2: ANCOVA analysis showing difference in the effect of A-La-Carte model and Teacher-Centred approach on students' performance in French

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	6569.836 ^a	2	3284.918	16.895	.000	.408
Intercept	15839.295	1	15839.295	81.466	.000	.624
Pretest	578.976	1	578.976	2.978	.091	.057
Grouping	6566.789	1	6566.789	33.775	.000	.408
Error	9526.991	49	194.428			
Total	324867.000	52				
Corrected Total	16096.827	51				

The table 3 shows that the computed $F(1, 49) = 33.775$ $P < .05$, i.e. $p = .000$ is statistically significant at the chosen alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the effect of A-La-Carte model of blended learning approach and Teacher-Centred approach on students' performance in French as $F(1, 49) = 33.775$ $P < .05$, i.e. $p = .000$. The null hypothesis of no significant difference in the

effect of A La Carte model and Teacher-Centred approach on students' performance in French is rejected and the alternate accepted.

Research Question Two: What is the difference in the mean retention scores of students taught French with A-La -Carte Model and those taught with the Teacher-Centred Approach?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation showing the mean retention scores (post post-test) between students taught with A-La-Carte model of blended learning approach and students taught with the Teacher-Centred approach

Treatment Group	N	Post-test Mean	Post-test SD	Post post-test Mean	Post Post-test SD	Mean Gain
Exp Gp(A LaCarte).	37	83.89	11.82	75.83	15.42	
Con (Teacher cent).	15	60.20	19.03	42.40	15.34	

Table 3 presents the mean and standard deviation values for the post-test and retention score (post post-test scores) of both groups, along with the mean gain. Based on these, it can be inferred that the experimental group which is the A La Carte model had a higher post-test mean score and a post post-test score representing the retention mean scores compared to the

teacher-centred approach.

Hypotheses Two: There is no significant difference in the mean retention scores of students taught French with A-La-Carte model and those taught with the teacher-centred approach.

Table 4: ANCOVA showing significant difference in the mean retention scores of students taught French with A La Carte model and those taught with the teacher-centred approach

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	12008.206 ^a	2	6004.103	24.966	.000	.505
Intercept	12951.081	1	12951.081	53.854	.000	.524
PRETEST	74.756	1	74.756	.311	.580	.006
GROUPING	11530.107	1	11530.107	47.945	.000	.495
Error	11783.871	49	240.487			
Total	251626.000	52				
Corrected Total	23792.077	51				

The table 4 reveals that the computed $F(1, 49) = 47.945$ $P < .05$, i.e., $p = .000$ is statistically significant at the chosen alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the mean retention scores of students taught French with A-La-Carte model of blended learning approach and those taught with the teacher-centred approach. The null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean retention scores of students taught French with A- La-Carte model of blended learning approach and those taught with the Teacher-Centred approach is rejected and the alternate accepted, this implies that the difference that exists in the retention between these two groups (Students taught using A-la-carte method and those taught using teacher-centred approach) statistically is significant.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the A la carte model of blended learning approach which combines self-paced online learning with in person instruction has a positive impact on both the academic performance and retention of students studying French in Obio Akpor LGA of Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the finding and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. French language teachers should adopt the A la Carte model of blended learning approach.
2. Teachers to pursue trainings in the use of at least one learning management system.
3. Schools should encourage the use of technology.
4. Rivers State secondary education should insist on the use

of A la carte model of blended learning approach.

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