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Assessing the Effectiveness of Blended Learning in the Improvement of French Language Competence in Nigeria Institutions

Iwole, A.Y.

General Studies Department, the Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Ogun State

Abstract		Original Research Articles

This paper explored the effectiveness of blended learning to enhance the competence of students of French language among students in the institution of higher learning in Southwest Nigeria. Using data provided by 456 participants that took an online questionnaire, the study examined how blended learning improved listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The descriptive outcomes were that students had higher levels in receptive skills like reading and listening, with the speaking and writing being lower but nonetheless improved. Correlation analysis showed that all the four skills had strong positive relationships and thus, improvement in one skill enhanced improvement in others. A regression analysis also affirmed the fact that overall French language competence depended on exposure to blended learning, which was a strong and significant predictor. These results point to the importance of using technology with the traditional teaching approach to language education, especially in a situation where teaching materials and exposure to French are scarce. The paper concludes by finding that blended learning is a viable and efficient method of enhancing the acquisition of the French language at the higher level of education and also makes policy, development of infrastructure, and professional training recommendations.

Keywords: *Blended, Competence, Institutions, Language, Learning.*

Introduction

Blended learning- a teaching method a combination of face-to-face teaching with the elements of online learning- has been receiving increasing attention in the field of higher education as a means to improve learning. Its flexibility and learner-centered nature has been highlighted and researchers have asserted that it balances the advantages of face to face communication with the benefits of asynchronous and web-enhanced resources (Gülbahar and Madran, 2009; Sharma and Barrett, 2007). This intermediate format promotes individualized learning, an increase in engagement, and enhanced content accessibility (Tayebinik and Puteh, 2012; Wong et al., 2014) and is regarded as more efficient as compared to the definitely traditional or completely online delivery (Wikipedia, n.d.).

Blended learning environments have been effective in as far as the language learning process, especially the second language acquisition, is concerned. Hamilton (2018) pointed out the benefits of combining digital and in-person activities to increase learner motivation and engagement and achieve outcomes that could be equated or even better than the traditional instruction. This tendency is supported by systematic reviews, where in almost 86 percent of the works in different language settings, positive effects on language competence of students with blended or online instruction are observed (Nathir Ghafar, 2023; Li and Chen, 2021).

In the case of teaching French in Nigerian higher learning institutions, a combination of interactive

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internet materials with the traditional classroom learning offers a conducive and interactive atmosphere. According to Ojiebun and Otegbale (2024), this method promotes cooperation, flexibility, self-regulation, and motivation in students, which are essential attributes of a good language acquisition strategy. They also stress that a carefully designed blended learning implementation can play a key role in helping learners to achieve success when it is strategically integrated into the curriculum design, the development of infrastructures and training of teachers.

Although these benefits exist, blended learning has inconsistent effectiveness; it depends on the situation, the type and traits of learners, and application. According to the meta-analysis by Li and Chen (2021), technological obstacles, inadequate training of pedagogues, and the lack of proficiency in learners can reduce the opportunities of online elements. Therefore, to ascertain how to best exploit blended modalities in enhancing language, careful consideration within a specific context, e.g. tertiary-level French courses, is required.

Blended learning has become a major form of instruction in the tertiary education system, involving real-life classroom action coupled with internet digital materials to improve learning processes to students. According to Garrison and Vaughan (2008), blended learning is considered a considered combination of the classical and online mode in such a way that a more flexible and interactive environment is established during the learning process. This combination has been observed to enhance access, foster self-regulated learning, and offer a balance between the learners themselves and teacher help (Tayebinik and Puteh, 2012; Wong et al., 2014).

The blended learning approach has been especially effective in the second language acquisition (SLA), as it allows maintaining the practice, interactive communication, and exposure to natural materials. According to Sharma and Barrett (2007) this is because the synchronous classroom teaching and the asynchronous online activities have been proven to be effective in terms of reinforcing language input and boosting retention of language learners. Li and Chen (2021) carried out systematic reviews that have shown that blended learning is always more effective in vocabulary acquisition, speaking fluency, and writing than the traditional classroom-based approach. Moreover, Nathir Ghafar (2023) adds that blended learning is flexible, and this aspect promotes a higher level of motivation among learners that is a decisive element of second language learning success.

French as a second or foreign language is associated with special difficulties to the learners, especially in non-Francophone nations. French is mandatory in certain tertiary educational institutions in the Nigerian context, yet it tends to be challenged because of a low level of exposure and practice outside the classroom (Ojiebun and Otegbale, 2024). The combination of blended learning and teaching the French language provides the answers as it allows students to work with multimedia and online activities as well as with a virtual communication with native speakers. The study shows that blended classrooms improve oral and written French skills through offering the real-life situations of communication (Hamilton, 2018). Moreover, blended learning facilitates learner cooperation, self-management and permanent acquisition of linguistic proficiency (Guler and Madran, 2009).

Although there are its benefits, blended learning has a number of challenges that have been experienced during its adoption. Li and Chen (2021) indicate that technological obstacles like ineffective internet connection, poor digital literacy of students and instructors and institutional support may restrict effectiveness. Poor power supply, difficulty in using digital devices, and poor connectivity exist as a further barrier to the workability of blended learning models in the Nigerian environment (Ojiebun and Otegbale, 2024). In addition, the implementation involves specialized training of instructors to digital pedagogy so that technology can become an integral part of classroom instruction.

The available literature proves that blended learning positively affects second language learning and the

level of competence of the learner in the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Nonetheless, most of the studies have been carried out on the English as second language, but not on the application of English in learning the French language in institutions of higher learning in Africa. Considering the relevance of French as a regional and global language, empirical research on the effectiveness of blended learning to enhance student's competence in learning the French language is necessary especially where French is acquired as a foreign language.

The aim of this study is to assess the effectiveness of blended learning in improving French language competence among students in higher institutions, with a focus on its impact in African contexts where French is taught as a foreign language. The objectives are to: examine the extent to which blended learning enhances students' competence in the four core French language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing in higher institutions.

Methodology

In this study, the research design used was a quantitative one to study the effectiveness of the blended learning in enhancing the French language competence among the students in the higher institutions in Southwest Nigeria. Students were selected and interviewed using a convenience sampling method based on the convenience and the willingness of students to respond (students who were taking French language courses). The respondents who completed the questionnaire were 456 individuals and this was considered enough to give a reliable result and meaningful statistical inference. The data collection tool was a questionnaire that was designed to reflect some demographic data, the exposure of the students to knowledge of the blended learning, and their ability to evaluate their proficiency in the four basic skills of the French language listening, speaking, reading and writing. The questions were based on the past researches on second language acquisition and added to the French learning context with the answers being measured on a five-point Likert scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree. The process of data collection was performed electronically using Google Forms, which allowed extensive and convenient distribution of the data among students of different institutions via mailing lists, WhatsApp groups, and institutional contacts. Statistical analysis of the data was conducted in the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25; summary was done using the descriptive statistics which included means, percentages and standard deviations to generalize demographic profiles and perceptions of blended learning. Factor analysis as part of inferential statistics was utilized to examine underlying constructs that explain competence in French and independent sample t-tests and ANOVA were done to test group differences. The regression analysis also established the predictive power of blended learning practices to the French language competence of students. Ethics were taken into consideration in the whole study, since the participation was voluntary and informed consent was electronically taken before the questionnaire was filled. All of the respondents were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and any information gathered was intended solely for academic use.

Result of the findings

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for French Language Skills

Skill	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Listening	3.85	0.82	456
Speaking	3.67	0.88	456
Reading	3.92	0.79	456

Writing	3.74	0.84	456

Table 1 below gives descriptive statistics of student competence in the four skills of the four core skills of the French language-listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Findings indicate that the mean score of reading (M = 3.92, SD = 0.79) is higher, and thus, the students displayed comparatively better competence in reading the French text than the other skills. This can be explained by the fact that reading activities are organized and there are written materials that ensure understanding and development of vocabulary. The next most similar one was listening with the mean score of 3.85 (SD = 0.82), which reveals that students were mostly good at comprehending spoken French, which may be owed to the combination of audio tools and interactive online resources, which were prevalent in blended learning conditions.

Conversely, the mean of writing was 3.74 (SD = 0.84) which is quite a high level of competence, but some issues with grammar and syntax can also explain the other slightly lower score relative to reading and listening. The recorded mean score was lowest in speaking (M = 3.67, SD = 0.88), which indicates that oral expression is the most difficult among students. This conforms to the available literature that speaking is usually more demanding in terms of exposure, practice, and confidence, especially in the circumstances where French is being taught as a foreign language (e.g., Al Zumor et al., 2013; Blin, 2016).

On the whole, the descriptive statistics indicate that although blended learning has helped students develop all four skills, the variances in the mean scores indicate that more specific pedagogical solutions are needed, particularly in the increase in speaking and writing competence because they are more challenging to learners.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of French Language Skills

Skill	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Listening	1.0	0.62	0.59	0.55
Speaking	0.62	1.0	0.64	0.6
Reading	0.59	0.64	1.0	0.67
Writing	0.55	0.6	0.67	1.0

Table 2 of correlation demonstrates the interrelation between the four skills of the French language; the listening, speaking, reading and writing. The correlations among all are positive and moderately high meaning that the change in one skill is likely to be related to the change in the others. In particular, the most effective correlation was observed between reading and writing (r = 0.67), which implies that those students who did not score lowly in reading did not anyway show poor performance in writing. This is in line with the complementary aspect of these skills since in most cases, extensive reading can offer vocabulary and other grammatical construction that can help in improving writing skill.

The fact that there is a correlation between speaking and reading (r = 0.64) and speaking and writing (r = 0.60) also points to the fact that oral proficiency is directly associated with literacy-based competencies. This highlights the integrative nature of blended learning of which exposure to multimedia resources may be used to encourage understanding and productive skills at the same time. Similarly, there was a fairly strong interconnection between listening and speaking (r = 0.62), which is natural as oral activities are always paired, as good listeners also make better pronunciation, fluent, and able to hold a conversation.

The least significant, but significant correlation was

between writing and listening (r = 0.55). Listening input, although potentially indirectly useful in itself in serving the development of the written expression, is less valued than other combinations, indicating that the development of writing depends more heavily on reading exposure and direct practice in more structured composition activities.

On the whole, the correlation matrix indicates that blended learning results in an interrelated acquisition of French language competence, though it also indicates that literacy (reading and writing) skills are more closely related than oral and written skills. It means that instructional designs that need to enhance speaking and writing can possibly need more specific strategies that can enhance the inherently strong relationships among reading and writing.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Predicting Overall French Language Competence

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Blended Learning Exposure	0.58	0.07	0.61	8.29	0.0
Constant	1.12	0.15		7.47	0.0

The regression results in Table 3 examine the predictive role of blended learning exposure on overall French language competence. The findings reveal that blended learning exposure made a statistically significant positive contribution to students' competence levels (B = 0.58, SE = 0.07, β = 0.61, t = 8.29, p < 0.001). This indicates that as students' exposure to blended learning increases, their overall French proficiency improves substantially, with the standardized beta showing a strong effect size. The constant (B = 1.12, t = 7.47, p < 0.001) further suggests that even without high levels of exposure, students possess a baseline level of competence, but blended learning significantly enhances these outcomes.

The strength of the predictor demonstrates that blended learning—through its integration of face-to-face teaching with online resources such as audio-visual materials, interactive exercises, and digital communication platforms—provides an effective environment for developing French language competence. The relatively high beta coefficient (0.61) shows that blended learning is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful in shaping learners' abilities across listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

These results align with prior studies (e.g., Graham, 2013; Rasheed et al., 2020) that found blended learning to be a robust approach in second language acquisition. However, unlike the dominant body of research that emphasizes English learning, this study provides empirical evidence from the African higher education context on the effectiveness of blended learning in improving French, a foreign language of regional and international importance. The implication is that institutions should strengthen their blended learning strategies and infrastructure to support more immersive and integrative learning opportunities for French language students.

Discussion of findings

The results of this research give good indication of how blended learning affects the competence of students in the four fundamental skills in the French language listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The descriptive analysis indicated that the mean score in reading (M = 3.92, SD = 0.79) was highest then in listening (M = 3.85, SD = 0.82) and thereafter in writing (M = 3.74, SD = 0.84) and speaking (M = 3.67, SD = 0.88). It implies that students have been more efficient at receptive than productive skills, which is also consistent with existing literature on language acquisition in the second language since comprehension skills in most cases develop faster than expression skills because the former are less cognitively and linguistically

demanding (Vandergrift and Goh, 2012; Nation, 2013). The overall high mean scores of all four skills process point to the fact that the blended learning integration provided one of the enabling environments that facilitated competence in the four domains.

The interdependence between the skills as they are shown in the correlation matrix also highlights the complementary aspect of language development. The strongest association was seen between reading and writing (r = .67), highlighting the mutually reinforcing nature of literacy skills in which reading promotes vocabulary and grammatical awareness that directly facilitates written expression (Grabe, 2009; Hirvela, 2016). There was also a strong relationship between speaking and both reading (r =.64) and writing (r =.60), an aspect that underscores the interdependence of oral and literacy skills in blended learning settings where both input and output task are carried out. There was also a significant positive correlation between listening and speaking, which were inseparable in the communicative competence, (r =.62), and this supports the notion that the foundation of oral production is the auditory exposure (Field, 2008). The weakest relationship, listening and writing (r =.55), was still moderate, which indicates that the acquisition of skills in one area helps to develop other areas, which theoretical models that support integrated approach to teaching languages propose (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

Further insight on predictive power of exposure to blended learning was given by the regression analysis. The model showed that blended learning had a notable predictive effect on general French language competence (B = 0.58, 82.61 = 0.61, t = 8.29, p <.001) with higher levels of competence demonstrated by students who were more exposed to blended learning. The substantial blended learning contribution to language outcomes indicated by the relatively large standardized beta coefficient indicates that blended learning plays a role beyond marginal gains to meaningful gains in proficiency. This observation is consistent with earlier research indicating that blended learning improves the acquisition of a language by combining in-person learning with technology-based platforms that offer a wide variety of input, independent work, and interactive learning opportunities (Graham, 2013; Rasheed, Kamsin, and Abdullah, 2020; Sun and Chen, 2016). Notably, although the majority of the literature that exists has been English-focused, the current results can be generalized to French, a language of increasing influence in the African context of higher education, thus a significant gap in applied research.

Collectively, the descriptive, correlational, and regression findings depict a consistent image of the blended learning as a successful pedagogical approach to the development of competence in French language skills. The better result of receptive skills shows the relative facility of learners in comprehension-based activity whereas the marginally low but positive performance of productive skills in the result necessitates more specific attention in the speaking and writing. The high degree of interdependence of all the four skills reaffirms the value of holistic instructional strategies that view language as a system but not a set of disjointed skills. Importantly, the predictive quality of blended learning highlights the necessity of long-term investment in technology-enhanced pedagogies in colleges and universities because these methods not only promote academic success but also boost communicative competence of students who learn globally relevant languages (Richards and Rodgers, 2014; Graham, 2013).

Conclusion

The research has shown that blended learning contributes greatly to the competence of students in the French language skills in higher institutions in Southwest Nigeria. The results showed better performance on receptive skills, especially reading, and listening, but somewhat on speaking and writing, which also grouped as beneficiary of blended learning exposure. The interrelationships between the four core skills are positive, which explains the integrated nature of the language acquisition process, whereas the regression outcomes identified blended learning as a powerful predictor of the whole competence. These findings confirm the value of technology-based pedagogical strategies as sources of significant benefit in the acquisition of a second

language, which offers a sustainable framework of enhancing language learning in the institutions of higher learning.

Recommendations

According to the results of the present study, some of these recommendations are offered. To begin with, institutions of higher learning must embrace and reinforce blended learning systems in teaching the French language such that online and the face to face aspects of the teaching are highly integrated as a way of ensuring optimal learning (Garrison and Vaughan, 2013). In particular, digital infrastructure, including the availability of reliable internet, learning management systems, and multimedia resources is essential to facilitate the implementation. Second, a continuing professional development regarding the application of blended pedagogies should be offered to french language instructors who ought to develop interactive and engaging activities promoting the four fundamental skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Rasheed et al., 2020). Third, it is recommended to use online learning facilities to promote self-directed training in students, especially in speaking and writing, as these areas had the lower mean scores than receptive ones. Lastly, policymakers and curriculum developers must consider blended learning strategy in national and institutional language policies because it has the potential to enhance not only language proficiency, but also general student engagement and performance in second language acquisition (Graham, 2013).

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