

Impact of Language Laboratory and French Students Engagement

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to make an assessment of the impact of language laboratory and French students' engagement. The population of the study consisted of all the 200-level students in the Faculty of Education. The study adopted a survey design, while random sampling was used to select three hundred and eighty-three (383) respondents. The structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents. The data collected were analysed using Pearson's analysis. It was concluded that there is a significant impact of language lab on French students' communication skills as well as a significant influence of language lab on French students' engagement in phonetics. It was also suggested that students develop a positive perception of language laboratories and use them to learn, and that school administrators make language laboratories available in schools and provide lecturers with adequate knowledge of how to use the devices.

Introduction

Globalization is changing the way we teach and learn. Language laboratories in most of our tertiary institutions are used as tools for satisfying accreditation requirements and also developing a passion in those trying to utilise the laboratory. It is becoming quite a challenge to teach using conventional, digital, or multimedia language laboratories and also to establish who is responsible for preparing practicals.

The Language Laboratory is an electronic device that is designed to make the learning process easier. The four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking have to be practiced. Students can benefit from our new multimedia Language laboratory in terms of writing, speaking, and listening. Listening will not be fully comprehended without merging reading and listening together (receptive skills) as well as linking the written word or passage with audio and pictorial views (productive skills). It is surprising that the majority of the schools in Nigeria, both secondary schools and universities, do not have a language laboratory. Even when they do, it is not properly equipped to serve as one (Ajisafe, B., and Okotie, V., 2011).

Language laboratories, among other facilities, are very important to the effective implementation of the French language curriculum in Nigeria (Adebayo 2007). This view was further stressed by

Mambo (2004), who described the language laboratory as one of the foundations of language instruction. Thus, language laboratories are seen as an important instructional tool for language teaching. A language laboratory is an environment designed to enhance foreign language learners' skills. It is generally equipped with analogue and digital hardware and software (tape recorders, video cassette recorders, and computers). The language laboratory provides practise in listening comprehension and speaking (listening and repeating), with the goal of reinforcing the grammar, vocabulary, and function (grammatical structures) presented in class. The language laboratory is an audio-visual installation used as an aid in modern language teaching.

Student engagement has attracted considerable interest among educational research communities in recent years. Despite the disagreement about its definition and the number of its sub-dimensions, there is a general consensus that engagement is a term referring to students' involvement in school-related tasks and activities (Appleton et al., 2006) and an umbrella term covering behavioural, affective, and cognitive engagement (Archambault et al., 2009; Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Sharkey, Sukkyung, & Schnoebelen, 2008; Zaff et al., 2011).

If these students are presented with a context in which these feelings are facilitated, they will feel engaged, which in turn will lead to an increase in the quality of their learning experiences. On the other hand, when they are exposed to contexts where these needs are ignored, they feel disengaged, and as a solution, they withdraw or drop out of school.

Dörnyei, 2019; Ellis, 2010; Philp & Duchesne, 2016, have generated considerable interest in language learner engagement and contributed to the literature in various aspects. Nevertheless, unfortunately, the major focus of these studies was second language acquisition. Issues such as how identity affects the foreign language learner or how foreign language learning environments help construct a new identity have received less attention in many countries (Taylor et al., 2013).

Statement of the problem

The problem of learning and speaking French has been addressed by various scholars in one way or another. Elabo (1995), Okeh (1997), and Alufohai (2010) Despite these studies, the effective teaching, learning, and speaking of French in the nation's schools is still a mirage. On this basis, the researcher decided to investigate the role of language laboratories in the effective implementation of the French curriculum. The problem with the statement, therefore, is that the absence of a French language laboratory in Nigerian schools is responsible for the students' inability to learn and speak French. It is in this light that this study investigates the impact of language laboratories on French students' engagement.

Objective of the study

The major purpose of this study is to examine the impact of language laboratory and French students engagement. Other general objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the impact of language laboratory on French students communication skills.
2. To examine the influence of language laboratory on French students engagement in phonetics.

Research Questions

The study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of language laboratory on French students communication skills
2. What is the influence of language laboratory on French students engagement in phonetics

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were raised for this research;

1. There is no significant impact of language laboratory on French students communication skills
2. There is no significant influence of language laboratory on French students engagement in phonetics

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Students' Engagement

The concept of student engagement has attracted considerable interest among educational research communities in recent years. Despite the disagreement about its definition and the number of its sub-dimensions, there is a general consensus that engagement is a term referring to students' involvement in school-related tasks and activities (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006) and an umbrella term covering behavioural, affective, and cognitive engagement (Archambault, Jano; Zaff et al., 2011; Zaff et al., 2008; Zaff et al., 2008; Sukkyung, Fallu, & Pagani, 2009; Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Sharkey, Sukkyung, & Schnoebelen, 2008; Zaff et al., 2011). Behavioural engagement is defined as learners' active participation and involvement in social groups via interaction and collaboration (Archambault et al., 2009; Powell, Burchinal, File, & Kontos, 2008), while the affective dimension is described as learners' positive feelings and attitudes towards teachers, peers, learning, and school (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993; Watt, 2004).

Cognitive engagement, integrated into most models, is referred to as a superordinate construct used to define students' personal investment in learning activities, including self-regulation, the commitment to mastery learning, and the use of studying strategies (Greene, 2015; Sedaghat, Adedin, Hejazi, & Hassanabadi, 2011).

There is a considerable amount of literature published describing the role of student engagement in learning (e.g., Appleton et al., 2006; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Finn, 1989; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Researchers have put forward several theoretical models indicating the relationship between engagement and learners' success at school (Fredericks et al., 2011). Each model has adopted a different view about the number of its sub-dimensions. However, in the latest studies, engagement has mostly been referred to as a multi-dimensional construct with behavioural, affective, and cognitive dimensions (e.g., Fredericks et al., 2004; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012; Svalberg, 2009).

concept of language laboratory

A language laboratory is a dedicated space for foreign language learning where students access audio or audio-visual materials. They allow a teacher to listen to and manage student audio, which is delivered to individual students through headsets or in isolated sound booths (Schmitt, N. 2006).

The Language Laboratory is an electronic device that is designed to make the learning process easier. The four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking have to be practiced. Students can benefit from our new multimedia Language laboratory in terms of writing, speaking, and listening. Listening will not be fully comprehended without merging reading and listening together (receptive skills) as well as linking the written word or passage with audio and pictorial views (productive skills). It is surprising that the majority of the schools in Nigeria, both secondary schools and universities, do not have a language laboratory. Even when they do, it is not properly equipped to serve as one (Ajisafe, B., and Okotie, V., 2011).

The language laboratory gives every learner the freedom to learn at their own pace. It does not require the teacher's presence at all times. Teachers can, however, provide assistance to students individually or collectively. In fact, the language laboratory is a very helpful tool for practising and assessing one's speech in a language. A language laboratory is used to learn pronunciation and all other aspects of the phonetics of a language. The significance of a language laboratory cannot be overemphasised in the domain of communication. The language laboratory exists to help one use technology effectively to communicate. According to Richards (2001), to acquire the sensibility of the sounds and rhythm of a language, one has to hear the best samples of all spoken languages. This declaration was further corroborated by David Wilson and Thayalan (2007), who opined that a language laboratory is required by any language learner to have a good command of the language for communication purposes, with clarity and accuracy being vital for effective and efficient communication.

The student is not the only beneficiary of the language laboratory. The teacher also gains a lot, being that the process of teaching pronunciation is made easier. The system of language laboratories provides the teacher with the opportunity to listen to the individual sound articulation of students as many times as possible, unlike in the classroom situation where the teacher gets one chance to process the linguistic input (Schmitt, N. 2006). The multimedia device provides the teacher with the platform to teach students individually or in groups. The teacher can assess them based on their individual performances. Students who can perceive English sounds and articulate and pronounce them correctly can then progress to other aspects of phonetics without being held back by slow learners.

Language Laboratory Usage and Effective Learning of Auditory Phonetics

Auditory phonetics, which deals with receptive skills, can be taught effectively in a language laboratory. The introduction of the audio-lingual approach has contributed to shifting the focus of the foreign language learner and the second language learner of French from reading and writing to listening and speaking. Hence, the function of the language laboratory as a technology for

teaching second language learners and foreign language learners becomes ideal for the language teacher (Brenes, C. A. 2006). The audio-linguistic approach is based mainly on systematic pattern drilling (O'Malley, J. C. 1989), in which the repetition of minimally different sentences is allowed. This allows the student to correct his pronunciation through the repetition of minimal patterns generated in different sentences. The electronic device in the language laboratory, in conjunction with high-quality tapes, aids the learner's receptive skills in properly listening to sound, as accurate and intelligent listening is required for second-language and foreign language learners. The listener has many purposes or goals for listening, which determine his level of concentration. The learner can only articulate the correct French phonemes when he listens attentively. Hence, the headphones in the language laboratory enable them to concentrate and listen to the sounds that are encoded through the pronunciation of the teacher or the chosen model.

RESEARCH METHOD

Area of study

The University of Uyo, Uyo, was chosen as a study area for this study. The Federal University is located in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State's capital. Uyo Local Government Area is located at latitude 0532 degrees North and longitude 07 560 degrees East. It is bordered on the south by Nsit Atai and Nsit Ibom Local Government Areas, on the east by Uruan Local Government Areas, on the north by Itu, and on the west by Etinan Local Government Area. Uyo is located within the low-land coastal region of Nigeria.

Source of Data

The study collected two types of data: primary and secondary. Graham (2009: 141) agrees that the primary data contains a direct or original account of an event or phenomenon given by someone who actually observed the event or phenomenon. These are relevant facts gleaned from other people's works. The following sources provided the information: textbooks, journals, magazines, and unpublished articles; research and project reports in a related field; and manuals containing policy statements of the selected companies.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all the students in French Education, University of Uyo.

Sampling and Sample Size

The Sample size of 383 respondents was chosen out from the population of the study. The sample size was statistically determined using the sample fraction. Siegel (1997) defines a sample size as some of the pertinent observation from a specified population.

Techniques of Data Analysis

Thus, the data obtained were analyzed using Pearson moment correlation analysis.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSES

RESEACRH QUESTIONS

Research Question One

What is the impact of language laboratory on French students communication skills

Table 1: percentage analysis of the impact of language laboratory on French students communication skills

Extent	Frequency	Percentage
Very high extent	122	31.85
High extent	77	20.10
Low extent	96	25.06
Very low extent	88	22.97
Total	383	100

Source, field Survey 2022

The above table 1 presents the percentage analysis of the impact of language laboratory on French students communication skills, the table show that there is very high impact of language laboratory on French students communication skills. Therefore, the result causes the research question to be significant.

Research Question Two

What is the influence of language laboratory on French students engagement in phonetics?

Table 2: percentage analysis of the influence of language laboratory on French students engagement in phonetics

Extent	Frequency	Percentage
Very high extent	137	35.77
High extent	89	23.23
Low extent	78	20.36
Very low extent	79	20.62
Total	383	100

Source, field Survey 2022

The above table 2 presents the percentage analysis of the influence of language laboratory on French students engagement in phonetics, the table shows that there is high influence of language laboratory on French students engagement in phonetics. Therefore, the result causes the research question to be significant.

Research Hypotheses One

There is no impact of language laboratory on French students communication skills. In-order to test the research hypotheses independent t-test analysis was used in comparing the mean score of the two groups.

TABLE 3

Independent t-test analysis of the impact of language laboratory on French students communication skills

Variable	N	X	SD	t
High	234	12.01	1.30	
				21.45*
Low	149	15.15	0.71	

Source, field Survey 2022

*Significant at 0.05 level; df= 381; N= 383; critical t-value = 1.96

The above table 3 presents the obtained t-value as (21.45). This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 level with 381 degree of freedom. The obtained t-value (21.45) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96). Hence, the result was significant. The result therefore means that there is significant impact of language laboratory on French students communication skills.

Research Hypotheses two

There is no significant influence of language laboratory on French students engagement in phonetics. In-order to test the research question independent t-test analysis was used in comparing the mean score of the two groups.

TABLE 4

Independent t-test analysis of the influence of language laboratory on French students engagement in phonetics in University of Uyo

Variable	N	X	SD	t
High	201	12.07	1.34	
				18.31*
Low	191	15.00	1.09	

Source, field Survey 2022

***Significant at 0.05 level; df= 381; N= 383; critical t-value = 1.96**

The obtained t-value is 18.31, as shown in table 4. This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical t-value (1.96 at the 0.05 level with 381 degrees of freedom). The obtained t-value (18.31) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96). Hence, the result was significant. The result therefore means that there is a significant influence of language laboratories on French students' engagement in phonetics.

Discussion

The result of the data analysis in Table 3 is significant due to the fact that the obtained t-value (21.45) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at the 0.05 level with 381 degrees of freedom. This result implies that there is a significant impact of language laboratories on French students' communication skills. The significance of the result caused the null hypothesis to be rejected while the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

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Conclusion

Based on the findings of the data analysis of the study, it is concluded that there is a significant impact of the language laboratory on French students' communication skills and their engagement in phonetics.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the improvement of French in Nigerian schools and Nigeria as a nation.

1. The government should, as a matter of urgency, direct its attention to the provision of language laboratories in tertiary education. The responsibility for carrying out this herculean project rests with non-governmental organizations.
2. Outstanding French teachers should be sent out on training outside the country (a French-speaking country) to see and learn how language laboratories are used.

3. Regular training and re-training programmes should be organised to sharpen the skills of teachers to ensure better performance. These training and re-training could take the form of conferences, seminars, and workshops organised by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the French Embassy in Nigeria on a regular basis.

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