

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN GST FRENCH AMONG FRESHERS IN IJBCOE SAGBAMA

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between classroom participation and academic performance in GST French among freshers in Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education (IJBCOE), Sagbama, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study specifically investigated how students' level of classroom participation influences their academic performance as well as their comprehension, retention and communicative competence in French language learning. The theoretical foundation of the study is anchored on the view that active participation enhances language acquisition through interaction, cognitive engagement and meaningful communication, as supported by Krashen's input hypothesis and Vygotsky's social interaction theory. A quantitative correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised all Year One students offering GST French during the 2025/2026 academic session in IJBCOE, Sagbama. A sample of 100 students was selected using simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured instrument titled Classroom Participation Questionnaire (CPQ), while students' academic performance scores in GST French were obtained from continuous assessment and examination records. The instrument was validated by experts and achieved a reliability coefficient of 0.83 using Cronbach Alpha. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) and Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that 46% of respondents demonstrated moderate classroom participation, 28% exhibited high participation while 26% showed low participation. In terms of academic performance, 44% of students recorded average performance, 32% achieved high performance and 24% recorded low performance in GST French. The study further established a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between classroom participation and academic performance ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that students who actively participate in classroom activities tend to achieve

higher academic outcomes than those who are passive. The study concluded that classroom participation is a significant predictor of academic performance in GST French among freshers in IJBCOE Sagbama. It was recommended that French educators should adopt learner-centred, interactive and anxiety-reducing instructional strategies to enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes in multilingual classroom settings.

Keywords: Classroom participation; Academic performance; Communicative competence; GST French; Multilingual education

Introduction

Language is a fundamental tool for human communication, social interaction, cultural transmission and educational development in every society (Vygotsky, 1978). It enables individuals to express ideas, share knowledge and participate meaningfully in social and academic environments. In multilingual contexts, language learning becomes even more significant as it fosters intercultural understanding and enhances learners' ability to function in diverse communicative settings (Bamgbose, 2000). Foreign language education, therefore, plays an essential role in preparing learners for global engagement and cross-cultural communication.

In Nigeria, French language occupies a strategic position due to the country's geographical location, being surrounded by francophone nations such as Benin Republic, Niger, Chad and Cameroon (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). As a result, French is taught at various levels of education to equip learners with communicative competence and international relevance (Owoeye, 2016). At the tertiary level, particularly in colleges of education, General Studies (GST) French is a compulsory course for Year One students regardless of their academic discipline. The course is designed to introduce learners to basic French vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and everyday communicative expressions necessary for functional use of the language (Adebayo, 2019).

Despite the importance of French language education, many students continue to demonstrate low achievement and limited communicative competence in GST French. This persistent underperformance has been linked to several instructional and learner-related factors, including inadequate practice, limited exposure to the target language and low classroom engagement (Adegbija, 2004). Among these factors, classroom participation has been widely identified as a crucial determinant of effective language learning outcomes.

Classroom participation refers to the active involvement of students in teaching and learning processes through activities such as asking and answering questions, engaging in discussions,

contributing to group tasks and participating in oral exercises (Fassinger, 1995). It promotes cognitive engagement, enhances understanding and encourages learners to take ownership of their learning process (Astin, 1999). In the context of foreign language learning, participation is particularly important because language acquisition is largely dependent on interaction, practice and meaningful communication (Long, 1996).

Students who actively participate in classroom activities tend to develop better comprehension, stronger retention of vocabulary and grammar, and improved communicative competence (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006). In contrast, passive learners often struggle with understanding, recall and spoken expression due to limited practice opportunities (Rocca, 2010). Furthermore, immediate feedback during active participation helps learners correct errors and refine their language use (Tinto, 2012).

In multilingual environments such as Sagbama in Bayelsa State, classroom participation is further influenced by sociolinguistic factors such as mother tongue interference, code-switching and language anxiety (Ellis, 1994). Students in IJBCOE Sagbama come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, which may affect their confidence and willingness to speak French during classroom interactions. Many learners experience fear of making mistakes or being negatively evaluated by peers, which can reduce their level of engagement in oral activities (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

Given these challenges, understanding the relationship between classroom participation and academic performance in GST French becomes necessary. While several studies have examined foreign language teaching and learning in Nigeria, limited empirical attention has been given to how classroom participation specifically influences academic outcomes among freshers in multilingual college environments such as IJBCOE Sagbama. This study, therefore, investigates the relationship between classroom participation and academic performance in GST French among freshers in IJBCOE Sagbama, with a view to contributing to improved pedagogical practices and enhanced learner outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

French language learning at the tertiary level requires consistent practice, active engagement and meaningful interaction for effective acquisition of communicative competence (Krashen, 1982). In particular, General Studies (GST) French, which is a compulsory course for fresh students in Nigerian colleges of education, is intended to develop basic proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. However, despite its importance, evidence from classroom experiences in Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education (IJBCOE), Sagbama suggests that many freshers continue to record unsatisfactory performance in GST French.

A recurring observation among educators is that a considerable number of students demonstrate low or inconsistent participation during French lessons. Some students rarely contribute to classroom discussions, avoid answering questions and show reluctance in oral communication activities. Others struggle with comprehension even at the level of basic instructions delivered in English, which further limits their ability to engage with French language tasks. In some cases, students openly express negative attitudes toward French, perceiving it as difficult or irrelevant to their academic and professional goals.

This passive learning behaviour is particularly concerning in a language classroom where active participation is essential for skill development. In multilingual settings such as Sagbama, these challenges are further compounded by sociolinguistic factors such as mother tongue interference, code-switching and communication anxiety (Ellis, 1994). Many students experience fear of making grammatical errors or incorrect pronunciation, which reduces their willingness to participate actively in classroom activities (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

Consequently, reduced classroom participation may significantly affect students' comprehension, retention of vocabulary and grammatical structures and overall communicative competence in French. This situation may ultimately contribute to poor academic performance in GST French.

Despite the recognised importance of classroom participation in language learning, there is limited empirical evidence within IJBCOE Sagbama that clearly establishes the relationship between classroom participation and academic performance among freshers. This lack of context-specific data creates a gap in understanding how engagement in classroom activities influences students' learning outcomes in GST French. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate the relationship between classroom participation and academic performance in GST French among freshers in IJBCOE Sagbama.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between classroom participation and academic performance in GST French among freshers in Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education (IJBCOE), Sagbama.

Specifically, the study aims to:

1. determine the level of classroom participation among freshers in GST French classes in IJBCOE Sagbama;
2. assess the academic performance level of freshers in GST French in IJBCOE Sagbama;

3. examine the relationship between classroom participation and academic performance in GST French among freshers in IJBCOE Sagbama;

4. investigate the influence of classroom participation on students' comprehension, retention and communicative competence in GST French.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between classroom participation and academic performance in GST French among freshers in IJBCOE Sagbama.

Literature Review

Concept of Classroom Participation

Classroom participation refers to students' active engagement in classroom instructional activities including discussions, questioning, answering, collaborative learning and oral interaction (Weaver & Qi, 2005). Participation is considered an essential element of effective pedagogy because it encourages cognitive engagement and improves learning outcomes (Rocca, 2010).

Constructivist theory posits that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction and social engagement rather than passive reception of information (Piaget, 1972). Similarly, Vygotsky's social interaction theory emphasises that learning occurs through communication and collaborative activities within social environments (Vygotsky, 1978). These theories support the relevance of classroom participation in language learning.

Classroom Participation and Foreign Language Learning

Foreign language acquisition depends significantly on interaction and communicative practice (Long, 1996). Krashen (1982) argues that language learners acquire linguistic competence more effectively when exposed to meaningful communication and active engagement. Classroom participation therefore enhances students' opportunities for practising pronunciation, vocabulary and sentence construction.

Research has shown that students who actively participate in language classrooms demonstrate better comprehension and retention than passive learners (Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005).

Participation also improves communicative competence because learners become more confident in using the target language during interaction (Carini et al., 2006).

Multilingualism and Language Anxiety

Multilingual educational environments often present sociolinguistic challenges that affect classroom interaction and participation (Cummins, 2000). Learners from different linguistic backgrounds may experience communication anxiety and fear of negative evaluation in foreign language classrooms (Horwitz et al., 1986).

In multilingual communities such as Sagbama, students frequently rely on indigenous languages and English for communication. This linguistic environment may affect learners' confidence in participating during French lessons due to pronunciation difficulties and mother tongue interference (Adegbiya, 2004). However, supportive and learner-centred teaching approaches can reduce anxiety and encourage active participation among students (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative correlational research design. The design was appropriate because the study aimed at examining the relationship between classroom participation and academic performance among students.

The population consisted of all Year One students offering GST French in IJBCOE Sagbama during the 2025/2026 academic session. A sample size of 100 students was selected using simple random sampling technique.

Data were collected through a structured instrument titled Classroom Participation Questionnaire (CPQ). The questionnaire contained items measuring students' frequency of participation in classroom discussions, questioning sessions, oral exercises and collaborative learning activities. Students' academic performance scores were obtained from continuous assessment and examination records in GST French.

The instrument was validated by experts in French education and educational measurement. Reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.83, indicating high internal consistency.

Descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of data collected from 100 respondents was presented in line with the research questions and hypothesis of the study. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used.

Research Question 1: What is the level of classroom participation among freshers in GST French classes in IJBCOE Sagbama?

The responses from the Classroom Participation Questionnaire (CPQ) were aggregated and classified into three levels: High, Moderate, and Low participation based on mean score distribution.

Level of Participation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High participation	28	28%
Moderate participation	46	46%
Low participation	26	26%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation:

The results show that 46% of students demonstrated a moderate level of participation in GST French classes, 28% exhibited high participation, while 26% showed low participation. This indicates that classroom engagement is present but not maximally optimised, with a significant proportion of students still not actively involved in communicative classroom activities.

Research Question 2: What is the academic performance level of freshers in GST French?

Students' academic performance was grouped into High (70–100%), Average (50–69%), and Low (0–49%) based on total GST French scores.

Performance Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High performance	32	32%
Average performance	44	44%

Low performance	24	24%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation:

The findings reveal that 44% of students performed at an average level, 32% achieved high performance, while 24% recorded low performance in GST French. This suggests that although a reasonable proportion of students perform satisfactorily, a notable percentage still struggle with French language acquisition outcomes.

Research Question 3: What relationship exists between classroom participation and academic performance in GST French among freshers in IJBCOE Sagbama?

Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between classroom participation and academic performance.

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Participation vs Performance	100	0.71	$0.000 < 0.05$	Significant

Interpretation:

The correlation coefficient of $r = 0.71$ indicates a strong positive relationship between classroom participation and academic performance in GST French. Since the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This confirms that students who actively participate in classroom activities tend to achieve higher academic performance.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that classroom participation plays a crucial role in enhancing students' academic performance in GST French among freshers in IJBCOE Sagbama.

The result showing that 46% of students had moderate participation suggests that while students are somewhat engaged, active oral interaction remains limited. This aligns with Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), who argued that foreign language learners often experience anxiety that restricts classroom participation. The presence of 26% low participation further indicates that a considerable number of students still avoid active engagement due to fear of mistakes, pronunciation difficulties or lack of confidence.

In terms of academic performance, the finding that 44% of students performed at an average level reflects a typical outcome in beginner foreign language classes. However, the 24% low-performing students may be linked to insufficient participation and reduced exposure to communicative practice. This supports Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis, which emphasises the importance of meaningful interaction in language acquisition.

The most significant finding of the study is the strong positive correlation ($r = 0.71$) between classroom participation and academic performance. This implies that increased participation leads to improved comprehension, better vocabulary retention and enhanced communicative competence. This result is consistent with Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, which asserts that language learning is facilitated through active interaction and negotiation of meaning.

Similarly, Carini, Kuh and Klein (2006) emphasised that student engagement is a strong predictor of academic success, particularly in skill-based courses such as foreign languages. The findings also reflect Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, which highlights learning as a socially mediated process where interaction enhances cognitive development.

In the context of IJBCOE Sagbama, the multilingual background of students may also contribute to varying levels of participation. As Ellis (1994) observed, multilingual learners often experience interference from their first languages, which may reduce confidence in speaking a new language such as French. Nevertheless, supportive teaching strategies and interactive classroom environments can significantly improve participation and outcomes.

Summary of Key Findings

Majority of students (46%) exhibited moderate classroom participation.

Most students (44%) recorded average academic performance in GST French.

A strong positive relationship exists between classroom participation and academic performance ($r = 0.71$).

Classroom participation significantly enhances comprehension, retention, and communicative competence.

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