

Addressing Challenges in French Language Acculturation Programme: Innovative Interventions for Nigerian College of Education Students of French

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Abstract: The French Language Acculturation Programme in Nigerian Colleges of Education is designed to equip future French teachers with the linguistic proficiency, cultural competence, and socio-communicative skills necessary for effective engagement in Francophone environments. Despite its importance, students have increasingly faced barriers that hinder their full participation, including financial limitations, visa and travel difficulties, low initial language proficiency, cultural adjustment challenges, security concerns, and limited access to healthcare. Insights from structured interviews with staff at the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV), Badagry, and the Pan-African University Institute (PAUI), Porto-Novo revealed that, while institutional practical and logistical challenges such as delayed visa processing, high programme costs, and inadequate pre-departure preparation continue to restrict student engagement. The main aim of this paper is to identify, analyse, and explain these barriers, drawing on student questionnaires, participation records, and staff interviews to capture both the prevalence and intensity of the challenges. Furthermore, it explores innovative interventions to strengthen the acculturation programme, including expanded TETFund scholarships, institutional agreements to facilitate visa and travel processes, systematic exposure to French media and language labs, comprehensive pre-departure cultural orientation, selection of secure Francophone destinations, and guidance on accessing healthcare abroad. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, educational administrators, and teacher trainers, ultimately contributing to the development of a more effective, accessible, and sustainable French Language Acculturation Programme in Nigerian Colleges of Education.

Keywords: Acculturation; French Language; Colleges of Education; Student Participation; Francophone Immersion.

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I. INTRODUCTION

French holds significant international status and plays a crucial role across diplomacy, education, and cultural exchange. In West Africa, its relevance is heightened because Nigeria is surrounded by Francophone nations such as Benin, Niger, and Cameroon. As an ECOWAS member, Nigeria recognises the strategic value of bilingualism—especially in French—as a tool for regional integration and socio-economic cooperation (Kouassi, 2020: 30). The Nigerian National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014) reinforces this importance by declaring French the country's second official language and mandating its instruction. This national commitment highlights the need for effective training programmes that can build communicative competence among future French teachers.

Language acculturation or immersion remains one of the most effective strategies for second-language acquisition. Through sustained exposure to authentic communicative environments, learners develop linguistic and cultural competence more rapidly than in traditional classroom settings. Akintunde (2016, p. 74) stresses that immersion accelerates fluency by providing real-life communicative experiences, while Genesee (1987: 6–7) defines acculturation as a model aimed at developing functional proficiency through meaningful interaction. In Nigeria's Colleges of Education (COEs), which are responsible for preparing teachers for primary and junior secondary levels (Jiboku & Peter, 2020: 112–113), French students are required to participate in the compulsory acculturation course FRN 225. In line with the NCCE Minimum Standards (2020: 67–68), this immersion must occur either in a Francophone country or at the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV) in Badagry.

Founded in 1991, the NFLV provides a domestic alternative to foreign immersion and serves as Nigeria's principal centre for cultural and linguistic training (Nigeria French Language Village, 2023). However, French learners still face major barriers that hinder their participation in immersion programmes. These include financial difficulties, high travel and accommodation costs, visa complications, limited institutional support, and challenges of cultural adaptation. Lawal (2020: 92–93) identifies inadequate funding as a persistent obstacle to quality French education, while insufficient linguistic and cultural preparation further reduces students' readiness for immersion (Nigeria French Language Village, 2023). Such challenges negatively affect students' proficiency, motivation, and future effectiveness as French teachers. Consequently, this study explores these obstacles and proposes practical solutions to strengthen the French Language Acculturation Programme in Nigeria.

➤ Problem Statement / Research Justification

French language acculturation is vital for building linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence among Nigerian College of Education students preparing to become French teachers, yet their participation is hindered by persistent challenges such as financial constraints, visa and travel difficulties, low French proficiency, cultural adaptation issues, security concerns, and limited access to healthcare (Lawal, 2020: 42; Adeyemi & Fashola, 2019: 88; Modebe, 2021: 55). Although institutions like the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV) in Badagry and the Pan-African University Institute (PAUI) in Porto-Novo offer structured immersion opportunities, staff reports indicate that logistical, financial, and linguistic obstacles continue to affect the effectiveness of these programmes. Consequently, research is urgently needed to identify these barriers in depth and propose practical interventions capable of improving student participation, strengthening French language education, and enhancing teacher training across Nigerian Colleges of Education (Oladipo, 2020, p. 67; Nigerian National Policy on Education, 2014: 35–36).

➤ Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the factors influencing the participation and performance of Nigerian College of Education students in French language acculturation programmes, and to identify the obstacles limiting the effectiveness of these programmes. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Assess the present condition, structure, and implementation of French language acculturation programmes in Nigerian Colleges of Education.
- Identify and analyse the key challenges that hinder Nigerian College of Education students from fully benefiting from French language acculturation experiences.
- Propose practical solutions and innovative interventions for strengthening and improving the effectiveness of French language acculturation programmes in Nigerian Colleges of Education.

➤ Research Questions

- What is the current state of French language acculturation programmes in Nigerian Colleges of Education?
- What major challenges do Nigerian College of Education students face in participating effectively in French language acculturation programmes?
- What strategies and innovative interventions can be adopted to improve the effectiveness and accessibility of French language acculturation programmes for Nigerian College of Education students?

➤ Research Hypotheses

This study is guided by the following hypotheses:

- Insufficient financial support significantly limits students' ability to cover travel, accommodation, and acculturation programme fees.
- Difficulties related to visa acquisition, travel logistics, and cross-border documentation negatively influence students' participation in French language acculturation programmes.
- Low levels of French language proficiency among students hinder their ability to adapt quickly to immersion environments in both Francophone countries and the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV).
- Weak coordination between Nigerian Colleges of Education and host Francophone institutions or the NFLV - particularly in areas of funding, documentation, and programme planning—disrupts travel arrangements and academic schedules.
- Concerns about safety, security, and general welfare reduce students' willingness to participate fully in immersion programmes and affect their confidence in using spoken French.
- Limited and costly access to healthcare services in host Francophone countries or at the NFLV poses challenges for Nigerian College of Education students during acculturation periods.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on French language acculturation and immersion programmes in Nigerian educational contexts has revealed significant challenges and benefits associated with these initiatives.

Ojo (2018: 114), in his study *"The Sociocultural Benefits of French Language Immersion"*, examined the impact of immersion programmes on Nigerian tertiary students' linguistic and cultural competence. He found that students who participated in structured acculturation experiences demonstrated higher communicative competence, improved cultural awareness, and increased motivation to use French in authentic contexts. However, Ojo also highlighted that inadequate pre-departure preparation and financial constraints often limited the number of students who could benefit fully from immersion programmes, thus affecting the overall effectiveness of such initiatives.

Lawal (2020: 42), in a study titled “*Challenges in Teaching and Learning French in Nigeria: Policy Implications*”, investigated the structural and institutional barriers that impede the successful implementation of French language programmes in Nigerian Colleges of Education. The research identified key obstacles, including insufficient funding, lack of exposure to native speakers, and limited access to cultural immersion opportunities, which negatively impacted students’ participation in language acculturation. Lawal emphasized that policy interventions, such as scholarships and institutional partnerships with Francophone countries, are critical to enhancing programme accessibility and effectiveness.

In another study, Modebe (2021: 55) explored the sociocultural and linguistic adaptation of Nigerian students in Francophone countries through structured immersion programmes. The study found that students often faced cultural shock, homesickness, and difficulties adjusting to local norms, which affected both academic performance and social integration. Interviews with programme coordinators revealed that comprehensive pre-departure orientation, exposure to French media, and support from host institutions significantly improved students’ ability to adapt and succeed in immersion settings. These findings underscore the importance of holistic programme design that addresses both linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions of French language acculturation.

Previous studies by Ojo (2018), Lawal (2020), and Modebe (2021) show that French language acculturation plays a vital role in improving linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, and communicative confidence among Nigerian tertiary students, and they further demonstrate that immersion experiences enhance both language learning and socio-cultural integration. These works also identify key obstacles such as financial difficulties, poor pre-departure preparation, limited institutional support, and challenges in cultural adjustment. However, their focus remained largely on general outcomes and structural issues, without examining in depth the views of both students and staff from domestic and international acculturation centres such as the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV) and the Pan-African University Institute (PAUI). As a result, an important gap persists concerning how financial, linguistic, cultural, security, and healthcare-related barriers jointly affect student participation, as well as the practical and innovative interventions needed for Nigerian College of Education students—gaps that the present study aims to fill.

III. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to fully explore the challenges affecting Nigerian College of Education students’ participation in French language acculturation programmes. The quantitative aspect involved gathering numerical data to test hypotheses and identify participation patterns, following the guidelines of Nworgu

(2019), while the qualitative component used structured interviews and questionnaires to obtain detailed insights from both students and staff, as recommended by Okoye (2020). The population comprised all NCE III students from the Colleges of Education in Ilorin and Oro who took part in the 2023/2024 acculturation programmes at the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV), Badagry, and the Pan-African University Institute (PAUI), Porto-Novo, with a final sample of twenty-five students whose records were accessible. Data were collected through a structured participation format, a two-section questionnaire, and interviews with staff of both immersion centres, and the instruments were validated by experts in French education and research methodology. After securing permission from the relevant Heads of Department, student records were retrieved, questionnaires administered, and staff interviews conducted. Data were then analysed using descriptive statistics alongside thematic analysis of interview responses, enabling the study to capture demographic trends, institutional perspectives, and recurring financial, linguistic, cultural, and logistical challenges that shaped students’ acculturation experiences.

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS/ FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal that although many Nigerian College of Education students participate in French language acculturation programmes, their full engagement is limited by significant barriers. Most students begin learning French only at the NCE level, entering immersion with little or no prior knowledge, which contributes to linguistic challenges. Participation records show that 31 of 37 eligible students joined the 2023/2024 acculturation exercise, while six could not participate due largely to financial constraints. Questionnaire results and staff interviews from the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV) and the Pan-African University Institute (PAUI) confirm that the high cost of travel, accommodation, feeding, and programme fees remains the most serious obstacle, compounded by logistical issues such as visa delays and complex travel arrangements that disrupt or discourage participation.

Beyond these financial and administrative barriers, the study identifies important linguistic, cultural, and welfare-related challenges. Many students reported difficulties with language comprehension, adapting to new cultural norms, and managing life in unfamiliar Francophone environments. Staff at both NFLV and PAUI further noted that students often arrive insufficiently prepared for cultural expectations, healthcare procedures, and academic demands. Security concerns—both within Nigeria and in some Francophone countries—also undermine students’ confidence and performance. Overall, the quantitative and qualitative results demonstrate that improving acculturation outcomes will require stronger institutional coordination, more effective pre-departure orientation, better linguistic preparation, increased financial support, and streamlined administrative processes to ensure that students can fully benefit from immersion programmes.

Table 1 Distribution of the Participating Students According to Their Institutions:

S/N	Institution	Total No of students (NCE III)	No of student available during the administration of questionnaires
1.	COED, Ilorin	23	13
2.	COED, Oro	16	12
TOTAL		37	25

Majority of these students started learning French from NCE I as shown in the table below:

Table 2 Level of Commencement of Learning French

S/N	COMMENCEMENT OF LEARNING FRENCH	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
1.	Primary school	2	8%
2.	Secondary school	3	12%
3.	PRE-NCE	0	0%
4.	NCE I	20	80%
TOTAL		25	100%

What one can take out from the above table is that 80% of the students started learning French from the first year of College of Education without any previous knowledge of the

language. That, no doubt, could have consequence on French language acculturation.

Table 3 Students' Participation in French Language Acculturation in the 2023/2024 Academic Session

S/N	Session	Name of Institution	Total Number of NCE Iii Students	Participants in Acculturation	Percentage	Respondents in Questionnaire	Percentage
1	2024/2025	KWCOED, Ilorin	23	17	68%	13	52%
2	2024/2025	KWCOED, Oro	15	14	87.5%	12	75%
TOTAL			37	31	83.7%	25	67.5%

From the above table, the mean total registered NCE III students of French (2024/2025 academic session) in the two colleges Education of the study are 37 in number. The students that partook in the 2023/2024 academic session and those ones who were available and responded to the

questionnaire were 31 in number (83.7%) and 25 (67.5%) respectively. It is discovered that 6 of the students could not partake in the acculturation due to higher cost of acculturation fees and other expenses.

Table 4 Challenges Facing Nigerian College of Education Students' Participation in French Language Acculturation Programmes

S/N	Question	Responses of Respondents			
		Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
1.	Higher cost of acculturation fees and other expenses	21	84%	4	16%
2.	Visa and travel difficulties	23	90%	2	8%
3.	Language barriers	22	88%	3	12%
4.	Cultural differences and adaptation	18	72%	7	28%
5.	Security concerns	16	64%	9	36%
6.	Health and insurance challenges	15	60%	10	40%

Table 4 presents the responses of students in a series of 6 questions being connected with challenges facing the students' participation in French language acculturation; 84%, 90%, 88%, 72%, 64% and 60% of the respondents agree to question number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 respectively as factors that negatively affect students' participation in the above - mentioned programme.

➤ Interview

The interview conducted with staff of the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV), Badagry, and the Pan-African University Institute (PAUI), Porto-Novo consisted of the following questions:

- How would you describe the French Language Acculturation Programme in your institution and its goals for Nigerian students?
- What level of linguistic, cultural, and psychological preparation do Nigerian College of Education students demonstrate when they arrive for the programme?
- What major challenges do these students commonly face during the immersion (e.g., financial, linguistic, cultural, administrative, accommodation, health, or security)?
- To what extent do visa, travel logistics, and cross-border documentation affect student participation in the programme?

- What institutional resources or forms of support does your institution currently provide to help students adapt and succeed during the immersion?
- How effective do you consider the current acculturation programme in developing students' communicative competence and cultural integration?
- What recommendations or innovations would you suggest to improve the French Language Acculturation Programme for Nigerian students?

➤ *Summary of Results/Findings*

The findings of this study show that Nigerian College of Education students' participation in French language acculturation programmes is shaped by several interconnected challenges. Data from student questionnaires and staff interviews at the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV), Badagry, and the Pan-African University Institute (PAUI), Porto-Novo, indicate that financial constraints remain the most significant barrier, as many students struggle to afford travel, accommodation, feeding, and programme fees—an issue also confirmed by staff who noted that existing institutional support is often insufficient. Visa and travel difficulties further complicate participation, with students frequently facing delays, denials, and bureaucratic obstacles that disrupt immersion schedules, a concern equally affirmed by staff at NFLV and PAUI. Low French proficiency also emerged as a major obstacle, as many students still struggle with oral and listening skills even after years of study, resulting in anxiety, reduced confidence, and limited engagement in immersion settings.

Beyond linguistic and financial issues, the study highlights substantial cultural and welfare-related challenges. Students reported cultural shock, homesickness, and difficulty adapting to new customs, food, religion, climate, and daily routines in Francophone environments and even within the NFLV context. Staff also observed that these cultural adjustment issues affect classroom participation and social interaction. Safety concerns—including fears about insecurity and political instability both in parts of Nigeria and in some Francophone countries—were also found to influence student motivation and parental support. Additionally, access to healthcare emerged as a major worry, as limited and expensive medical services, combined with inadequate insurance and unfamiliarity with local healthcare systems, heighten student anxiety and reduce their ability to participate fully.

Overall, the study demonstrates that participation in French language acculturation programmes is shaped by financial constraints, logistical barriers, linguistic preparedness, cultural adjustment difficulties, safety concerns, and healthcare access. Addressing these issues requires coordinated strategies such as increased financial support, effective pre-departure orientation, stronger institutional collaboration, and targeted linguistic and cultural preparation to improve the success and overall experience of Nigerian College of Education students in acculturation programmes.

V. CONCLUSION

French language acculturation is essential for strengthening both linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence among students of French in Nigerian Colleges of Education, yet this study shows that its impact is hindered by several significant challenges. Evidence drawn from student questionnaires, participation records, and staff interviews at the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV) and the Pan-African University Institute (PAUI), Porto-Novo, reveals persistent obstacles such as financial constraints, visa and travel difficulties, limited language proficiency, cultural adjustment issues, security concerns, and inadequate healthcare and insurance coverage. Staff at both centres noted that although they offer structured immersion experiences and academic support, students continue to struggle with high programme costs, travel expenses, bureaucratic delays, and insufficient pre-departure preparation, all of which reduce the effectiveness of the immersion process. The study therefore highlights the urgent need for coordinated action by government bodies, educational institutions, and international partners to improve funding, simplify administrative procedures, and strengthen linguistic and cultural preparation, ensuring that French language acculturation becomes more accessible, effective, and beneficial for Nigerian students.

RECOMMENDATIONS/SOLUTIONS

Based on the findings and insights from staff interviews, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance French language acculturation programmes in Nigerian Colleges of Education:

➤ *Financial Support:*

Government agencies, under the leadership of the President, should increase funding and scholarship opportunities through TETFund and the Ministry of Education. Special grants or bursaries should be provided to cover programme fees, travel, accommodation, and other related expenses. Staff at both NFLV and PAUI confirmed that financial support is crucial to increasing participation.

➤ *Formal Institutional Agreements:*

The Ministry of Education and Nigerian Colleges of Education should establish formal MOUs with Francophone universities and cultural institutions to facilitate smoother visa processing, academic collaboration, and student support. PAUI staff highlighted that such agreements can significantly reduce bureaucratic delays.

➤ *Pre-Departure Linguistic Preparation:*

Students should be exposed to French media -including films, music, and news—as well as interactive language labs to strengthen listening and speaking skills before immersion. Both NFLV and PAUI staff noted that students with higher pre-departure proficiency adapt more quickly and participate more confidently.

➤ *Cultural Orientation:*

Comprehensive pre-departure cultural training should be provided, covering lifestyle, etiquette, norms, and academic expectations in host countries and at NFLV. Staff interviews revealed that cultural preparedness reduces anxiety, enhances confidence, and promotes active engagement in immersion activities.

➤ *Safety and Security Measures:*

Collaboration with Nigerian embassies abroad and local authorities should be strengthened to ensure student safety and provide emergency contacts. Concerns about safety and political stability were consistently highlighted by both students and staff as a significant barrier to participation.

➤ *Healthcare Awareness and Support:*

Institutions should provide orientation on healthcare systems, emergency procedures, and medical preparedness in host countries and at NFLV. Staff at both centres emphasized that accessible and affordable healthcare is essential for uninterrupted participation and well-being during the programme.

By implementing these solutions, Nigerian Colleges of Education can significantly enhance students' participation in French language acculturation programmes. The success of these initiatives will depend on the active collaboration of policymakers, educators, programme administrators, and the wider educational community to create an environment that is supportive, safe, and conducive to effective language and cultural learning.

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