

**POPULATION UPSURGE AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN FREE AND  
COMPULSORY EDUCATION POLICY IN AKWA IBOM STATE AND STUDENT'S  
PERFORMANCE IN FRENCH LANGUAGE.**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study assessed the population upsurge and learning environment in free and compulsory education policy in Akwa Ibom State and student's performance in French language.. Data for the study were collected from 850 randomly selected respondents through the use of questionnaire and Students 'Assessment Test (SAT). Two research hypotheses were tested using t-test and person product moment correlation statistical tools. The results indicate that implementation of free and compulsory education policy in Akwa Ibom State has a significant influence on students performance in French language in secondary schools in Abak Local Government Area. After the implementation of the policy, the number of students increased. Which affected the learning environment of the students. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that a conducive learning environment should be provided by the government by building more school blocks or class rooms for the students.*

**KEY WORDS: Population upsurge, learning environments, students performance,  
French language, Akwa Ibom State.**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria is surrounded by French speaking [francophone] countries like Cameroon, Niger, Chad, Benin, then a little father Togo, Cote Divoire, Senegal and Mail. Nigeria has a lot in common with these countries. Nigerians and people of these countries are black, have similar cultural background and religion. Most importantly, the Nigeria and these countries belong to the same regional organization, the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS).

With the attainment of independence in the 60s by many African countries, it was recommended in an international conference at Yaounde in 1961 that English Language be studied in francophone countries while French Language be studied in the Anglophone countries as an element to encourage understanding and cooperation among African countries.

In a report on the position of modern language in the education system of great Britain, it was decided that modern language which French is one of them are needed for scientific instruction and information as well as for the civil, diplomatic and armed service for "they alone can give us intimate knowledge of foreign countries and of the best thoughts of the citizens".

Similarly in Nigeria, a one time head of state late General Sanni Abacha made it compulsory for French language to be taught from the cradle; that is, from primary school. Many Nigerians do business in Francophone countries and business transactions cannot be appreciated through an interpreter. Speaking foreign language would make the owner of the language love the speaker. Language builds bridges and cements friendship, it is the vehicle of promoting social interaction, national cohesion, cultural preservation, functional literacy and phatic communion.

Knowledge of French language enhances diplomatic ties and ensures job opportunities in foreign missions. The study of French language also has intellectual and educative advantages. If properly taught, it will train the students in habits of accuracy and clarity of thoughts and expressions. At such, it cuts across subject boundaries. The psychological environment is an umbrella of the level of speed of teaching cohesiveness, distraction, interests, motivations, anxieties, confusion and difficulty of classroom learning activities. When there is effective teaching and learning, one of the outcomes of that situation is high academic performance across all subjects. For a school environment to be conducive for learning particularly foreign language like French, there must be adequate provision of these infrastructures and a well equipped language laboratory.

### **Statement of problem**

Education plays an important role in the wellbeing of any nation that wants to sustain its prominence in the global scene. It is broadly viewed as a lifelong process spanning the years from infancy to adulthood. Plato explains that education liberates one from ignorance and barbarism. He further explains that education is training which is given by suitable habits to the first instincts of virtue in children when pleasure and pain are rightly implanted in non-rational soul. Despite the cost of education, it is a must for anybody that wants to function well in the society.

Acquiring sound education is often difficult for many poor people in the society. To break the web of poverty that does hamper the poor people to educate their children, free education policy was first introduced in Nigeria by a late political icon chief Obafemi Awolowo. The intention of this policy was to give privilege to the poor to educate their children and delineate the best legacy a Government can bequeath to its posterity. Free education policy is the antidote to high cost of formal education. Apart from being the panacea for total extermination of illiteracy and its attendant menace; mediocrity, barbarism and the like, is also sure instrument of civilization and revolution.

In furtherance of this kind of gesture, the Governor of Akwa Ibom State Chief (Dr) Godswill Obot Akpabio in 2008 stepped into footstep of the late Nigeria's icon Chief Obafemi Awolowo by provision of free and compulsory education policy in the state. The essence of this policy is to make education accessible and affordable to every Akwa Ibom child as an opportunity to the less privileged; it is also a therapy to inferiority complex that engulfed Akwa Ibom Child in the past. It is a screwdriver capable of accelerating the fulcrum of rapid development of individual's vis-à-vis every nook and cranny of the state.

To this effect, the long forgotten and abandoned dilapidated structures in the state public schools have been piously revisited with solemn touch by the inter-ministerial direct labour agency,

whose duty is to give the state a new phase. The effect of this agency, though appreciated still face challenges because their tentacle is not evenly spread, and with this policy of free and compulsory education, there is massive influx of students in public schools. Due to the new policy, most schools either rural or urban have registered students that cannot be taken care of with the existing facilities.

The existing number of classrooms in schools compare to the blotting population is a far cry from normal. Sequel to this, lots of students are merged into few available classrooms while some study under shades and make shift rooms. Prior to this implementation, schools mostly in peri urban and rural areas were characterized by low class size and less number of streams but due to the implementation, the school environment has witnessed an upsurge in students enrollment while the learning space, classroom, other learning aids and teachers have been virtually static. The question is, could the students population upsurge and learning environments experienced now in Akwa Ibom State policy schools affect the learning effectiveness in French language? This will forms the quintessence of our study.

### **Purpose of study**

1. The purpose of this study is to determine whether population upsurge affects students' performance in French language.
2. It is also to examine the relationship between learning environments and students' performance in French language.

### **Research Questions**

The following are the research questions for this study.

1. To what extent does population upsurge affect students' performance in French language?
2. What is the relationship between learning environments and students' performance in French language?

### **Research hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated to be tested in this study.

1. There is no significant effect of population upsurge on students' performance in French language.
2. There is no significant relationship between learning environment and students' performance in French language.

### **Significance of study**

The findings in this study will help the teachers to identify the deficiencies and limitations as regards to the teaching and learning of French and make necessary adjustment. The students would be aware of how their attitudes whether negative or positive towards French language will affect their present and future career. It will also help the state government through the inter-ministerial Direct labour Agency to build more school blocks and evenly distribute them in Abak Local Government Area in particular and the secondary schools in the state in general.

### **Learning Environment and Effective Learning of French**

According to Anyon (2004) the description of the physical environment is considered necessary with the assumption that school and classroom environment whether pleasant or unpleasant has a lot to do with the learning interest and outcome of the student. It affects the students moral, attitude, pride and self actualization. With regard to this, the school management must provide a conducive atmosphere of learning that is void of external pollution and disturbances. For instance, if a school is located near the public road, the noise of the motorist will certainly distract and disturb the effective listening, teaching and learning of both the teacher and the students. It is the responsibility of the school authority to provide or situate school far or distant from the public road and other noisy sources unnecessary music production from radio shops. Classroom environment is one of the important environments of learning that should be effectively managed and controlled by the teacher.

Guthrie (2003) supported that a good learning environment sets the pace for preventing and responding to misbehavior, using class time well creating an atmosphere conducive that interest the students and the permission of activities that engage students minds and imaginations. In the issue of class time control as a component of effective learning environment, McBurney (2005) asserted that, it is important the teacher uses all of the available time that he has. He further said that there is classroom time; also, teacher should prevent interruptions and from digressing from the topic at hand.

As well, it is important that teachers do not spend too much time on routine things before the actual lesson beings. Goodlad (2002) opines that learning is affected in an environment that lacks available learning facilities example, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities, pipe borne water and medical facilities provided to the student. Students would not attain much when these things are deficient in their educational achievement.

It is also pertinent that urinary and toilet system be provided at a distance from the classroom to avoid discomfort and emotional disorder of the students. Effective learning can be highly affected with the smell of toilet and urinary.

### **Class size and Effective Learning of French**

Psychologically, class size can determine the learning effectiveness of the student. In the words of Guthrie (2006), the proportion or ration of pupils or students in a given class or under the control of a teacher is known as class size. Udofia (2005) explained that at the primary school level, the class size is very pertinent since each teacher has a certain number of students placed under his care such that they interact together throughout the schooling period. A large class size will alternatively and negatively affect effective learning and performance of the students. A lesser class size will rather make the teacher to have a better control of the students while teaching them.

According to Fin and Achilles (2005) there is concurrently a debate within the literature as to whether the class size influence effective learning and achievement of students at school. The debate was perhaps first sparked by a review of the literature by Archills (2005). Using meta-analytic techniques, Achilles reviewed approximately eighty (80) class size studies conducted

between 1992 and 1998. The result revealed that reduction in class size result in increase in learning and performance outcome. To achieve an effective learning and academic achievement however requires a dramatic reduction in class size. Class sizes of 15 or few students according to Glass and Smith (2004) could be expected to increase achievement and learning outcome scores by approximately half a standard deviation.

The assertions made by Odden (2000) were challenged by the Educational Research Service (ERS) 1990, which maintained that many of the studies analyzed by Odden were methodologically faulty. The ERS concluded that the analysis by Odden actually supported few performance differences for classes ranging from 20 to 40 students. This further implies a class size or number of students that is more than 30 will result to distraction and disturbances than a class size of 15-20. The more the students cluster or fill up a small class room, the more they are distracted to one another. Not only would a large class disturb effective learning but it also encourages examination malpractices. Moreso, the teacher will have little or no room to move around to give individual attention to students.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

An Expost-Facto design was used for this study. In this type of design the researcher cannot manipulate the effect on the dependent variable but just obtain the effect already existing in the natural course of events.

### **Area of the Study**

The research area for this study was Abak Local Government Area.

### **Population of the study**

The target population comprised all junior secondary school classes in Abak Local Government Area being approximately 9750 students. (Source of the information: LEC, Abak)

### **Sample /Sampling Technique**

Multistage sampling technique was adopted. At first stage purposive sampling technique was used to select schools that offer French language and note taken of their respective class size at the junior secondary school level. At stage two, stratified random sampling was used to select classes based on size thirty five as small, wile above is large. At third stage, based on stratified simple random sampling, a proportionate sample size of 250 students per stratum was selected which made a total sample size of 500 students.

### **Instrumentation**

The main instrument used for this research was researcher-developed questionnaire, tagged “students assessment scores (SAS)” this was obtained before and after the implementation of

free and compulsory Education policy. The data collection was based on variables such as test<sub>1</sub>, test<sub>2</sub>, test<sub>3</sub> and examination. The extracted data is limited to two academic sessions which are 2007/2008 and 2008/ 2009 respectively.

The second instrument is a validated questionnaire was in two parts. Section “A” was based on demographic data of the respondents while section “B” contained (10) items of closed ended typed questions based on four points are modified techniques for eliciting responses: Strongly Agree SA (4), Agree A (3), Disagree D (2) and Strongly Disagree (1)

Interview schedules was done with teachers on learning environments.

### **Validation of the instrument**

The instrument was given a face and content validation by two other lectures in the Department of language studies in University of Uyo. Correlations were made by the experts and thereafter, the corrections were affected by the researcher.

### **Reliability of the instrument**

A pretest was conducted using a sample of 30 respondents who were not part of the main study. A reliability index 0.69 was obtained using Pearson correlation or a determinant index for the reliability of the research instrument for the study.

### **Research Procedure**

A letter of permission from the head of Department of language studies was addressed to the head of the school involved. Permission was given to carry out the study. The records were retrieved by the assistance of the clerical officer.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The records gotten was analyzed using T-test and Pearson product Moment Correlation Statistical tool to analyze the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significant.

### **Results and discussions**

Data generated in the study were analysed and summarized as follows.

#### **Hypothesis One**

There is no significant effect of population upsurge on student’s performance in French language.

**Table 1**

**Independent t-test analysis of the difference in student’s performance in French language.**

Variables	N	X	SD	T	Remarks
Before free education policy	350	0.44	1.55		
				2.130	Sig

After free education policy	500	0.59	1.83		
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**T-cal =2.130, t-crit =1.196, n=850, df =848, p< 0.05**

The above table presents the test (2.130). The value was compared with the critical Table value of 1.196 at 0.05 level of significance with the degree of freedom 848. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is significance effect of student’s population upsurge on learning effectiveness in French language. These findings were at variance with Udofia (2005) which stated that population, which is characterized by class size would definitely affects effective teaching and learning in the sense that if the class size is larger, the teacher would find it difficult to manage the class and that a lesser class size would alternatively and positively affect learning and performance of the students in any subject.

**Hypothesis Two**

There is no significant relationship between learning environment and student’s performance in French language.

**Table 2**

**pearson product moment correlation of relationship between learning environment and student’s performance in French language.**

Variables	$\sum x \sum y$	$\sum xy$	r.cal	r.crit	Remarks
Learning environment [x]	4,600				
		69,240	0.63	0.139	Sig
Student’s performance in French [y]	26,034				

**r-cal =0.63, r-crit=0.139, n=400; df=398, P<0.05**

The calculated r-value of 0.63 was greater than the r-critical value of 0.139 at 0.05 level of significant with the degree of freedom 398. These findings were in accordance with the assertion of Achilles (2005) that too many student crowded in a small classroom would make them feel uncomfortable and reduce their listening capability. Therefore, the null hypothesis stated was rejected.

**Conclusion**

From the findings of the study, it is concluded that a lesser class size enhances effective academic performance of students whereas a larger population size of students would pose a challenge to the teacher in terms of classroom management and teacher attention to individual student. Also to be concluded from the study is the fact that the environment plays a vital role in

learning. Thus, a student who studies in a poor and un-conducive environment would not be able to achieve as much as those studying in a conducive environment.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made.

1. The school management should assign a specific number of students that is required or stipulated by the educational policy to the teacher to control.
2. Government should provide a conducive learning environment to enhance effective teaching and learning.
3. The Government should make available supervisors who would visit the school from time to time. This is to make sure there is consistency both from the teachers and the students.

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