

Language and Cultural Immersion Programmes in Russian and French Languages in Nigeria 2012 -2022: Problems and Prospects

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Abstract

The linguistic and cultural complexities encountered by students studying Russian and French languages in Nigerian universities, especially during their immersion programmes, have become recurrent in the 21st century. Although studies have been carried out on immersion programmes, to the best of our knowledge none of these studies specifically addresses the peculiar Nigerian dimension to the problem of Nigerian students studying Russian and French languages on immersion programmes. This study investigates the problems and the prospects in language and cultural immersion programmes at the University of Lagos and the University of Ibadan. It identifies the problem of lack of finance, cultural shock, and lack of parental and emotional support as some of the challenges students of foreign languages from these two universities faced during their immersion programmes in Russian and French languages from 2012 to 2022. Furthermore, it recommends ways of addressing these identified problems. The study employs the historical research approach in analysing the progress of language and cultural immersion programmes at the two universities' under study. Questionnaires were created and distributed among 100 students of both universities who have embarked on immersion programmes.. The research employs a semi-structured technique as students were required to respond to a digital survey. The findings of this research reaffirm the importance of language and cultural immersion programmes in the study of Russian and French languages in Nigerian universities. Overall, the paper proposes that language and cultural immersion programmes are pedagogical instruments for addressing the problem of dialogue between cultures and cultural clashes.

Keywords: clash, culture, dialogue, French language, immersion programme, Russian language

1. Introduction

An immersion programme can be defined as a language learning strategy that involves total immersion in a target language and culture, usually through language instruction classes, cultural activities as well as living with a host family. The role of language in education can not be overemphasised. Language has been defined as a vehicle for people's culture and a means of maintaining and preserving their culture (Lori & Okotete, 2017). Healy (1967:24), succinctly describes language as a means of communication and the gateway to a people's culture. Culture itself has been defined as the social heritage of a people, that is, those learned patterns for thinking, feeling and acting that are transmitted from one generation to another including the quintessence of those patterns in physical objects (Maiconis, 2000). According to Abimbola (2021), culture is the manifestation of human intellectual achievements collectively and universally as a "... grouping. Learning a foreign language is an interesting as well as a tasking and a difficult endeavour for anyone. It is, indeed, the starting point of a linguistic journey." However, once a

person has decided to learn a new language, there is always a force discouraging the new learner on this journey. To combat this force, over the years, there have been many approaches and varieties of methods suggested by researchers in the teaching of a foreign language to second and third-language learners. An immersion programme is one of these key methods. A language and cultural immersion programme is an experiential learning programme that is beyond the basic instruction offered by language courses in traditional curriculum programmes. Language and cultural immersion programmes are essential in language acquisition. According to Barimani-Varandi (2012), an immersion programme is one of the interesting innovative approaches employed in the teaching of a foreign language that exposes students to a cooperative form of learning as the medium through which they can acquire a second language in the process of mastering the school's subjects. The problems Russian and French students from Nigerian universities on immersion programmes encounter every year keep growing unabated, with students having different challenging experiences. These unresolved problems call for the need to probe the immersion programme and the experiences of these students during the immersion programme. It is on this note that we will investigate the language and cultural immersion programme for the last decade at the University of Lagos and the University of Ibadan with the view of bringing to light the problems mitigating against students learning Russian and French languages with ease. The digital survey used in this study encapsulates a Google form divided into two sections. The breakdown of the sections is discussed in the latter part of this study. All ethical concerns are fully accounted for as all digital laws that concern data collection were strictly adhered to. The data were collected and analysed for the sole purpose of this research.

The rest of the paper goes on to review the theories relevant to the research and the historical development of the French and Russian immersion programmes languages at the two universities involved in the study. Further, the types of immersion programmes, prospects and problems of immersion programmes are discussed alongside the details on the questionnaires administered while the problems students encounter with the immersion programmes in both languages are discussed. Lastly, the paper closes with the findings from the research and the recommendations therefrom.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Origin and Evolution of the Immersion Programme in the World

Genesse, Paradis and Crago (2004) conceptualizes an immersion programme as a method of second language instruction in which the regular school curriculum is instructed through the medium of the target language. Immersion education has been defined as a bilingual type of learning that gives students a sheltered classroom environment in which they receive at least half of their subject matter – instruction through the medium of a language that they are learning as a second, foreign, heritage, or indigenous language (L2) (Lyster & Genesee, 2012). In the view of Genesse et al. (2004), for a programme to be regarded as an immersion programme at least half of the instruction during a particular academic year must be provided through the second language. Cummins (2009), cited in Barimani-Varandi (2012), however, avers that language and cultural immersion programmes on the one hand imply organized and planned forms of bilingual education through which students are immersed in a second language instructional environment to develop proficiency in the two languages. On the other hand, it denotes the immersion of immigrant language children in a classroom environment where teaching is mainly carried out through their second or third language to develop literacy and proficiency in both languages (Barimani-Varandi, 2012; Cummins, 2009). There is no controversy on the origin of the immersion education programme among researchers. Canada is regarded as the place where the immersion programme was birthed in the early 1960s (Baruiani-Varandi, 2012). The term immersion education was first used to depict novel and innovative programmes in which the French language was employed as a medium of instruction for elementary school children who are native English speakers (Cummins, 1998).

The immersion programme began in response to a lack of fulfilment in traditional classroom settings. Wallace Lambert, Richard Tucker, and several other scholars and educators at McGill University started to implement language immersion programmes in Quebec in the 1960s. This was done in a private classroom, where teachers communicated with pupils solely in the target language, even though the majority of them were bilingual. Students were encouraged, if not required, to learn to communicate in the target language using this approach. Nikula and Mard-Miettinen (2014) observe that the creation of immersion education in Canada was purely for sociolinguistic and societal purposes to help monolingual students in a bilingual society become functionally bilingual. The original approach evolved into a first-grade French immersion programme. In the first class of this programme, the instructors only spoke French to local English speakers, and every 12 months, they increased the amount of English in their language classes. This was a successful strategy since those students were the best among their classmates and they had a deeper comprehension of French.

Cummins (1998) also avers that the Canadian French immersion programmes were the first time immersion programmes which were exposed to an extensive long-term study review, although some research had been conducted earlier on the subject in other contexts. Johnson and Swain (1997) opine that the concept of immersing the student in a second language (L2) instructional environment is not a new concept and the usage of L2 as a medium of instruction has existed as a rule rather than an exception throughout the history of formal education. This view was reaffirmed by Bostwick (2001), cited in Barimani-Varandi, (2012) who notes that the origin of the immersion programme is traceable to 300 BCE. However, the bilingual type of education generally referred to as immersion education that was used at Katoh is believed to have started in Quebec (Barimani-Varandi, 2012; Bostwick 2001). This type of immersion education practiced in Quebec in the view of Bostwick (2001) is a good example of an immersion programme. Fortune & Tedick (2003) observe that some researchers believed that second language skills developed naturally and proficiency in an L2 arises from the experience of content study within a richly interactive environment that involves language proficiency adults and language learning peers.

Lyster and Genese (2012) observe that in Language and Cultural immersion, students acquire instruction in a common main language that is widely spoken in the community. Immersion programmes are not the same as submersion classrooms. It implies a school situation in which individual minority language pupils receive no support in their first language (L1).

Mehisto, Marsh and Frigola (2008) and Nikula and Mard-Miettinen (2014) opine that immersion education and the “content and language integrated learning” programmes that are referred to as CLIL may also be considered similar variants of bilingual education, since the aim of CLIL is to integrate content and language instruction.

The distinctive features of immersion programs include teaching an L2, its culture, and content without using the learner’s L1. Barimani-Varandi (2013) avers that this approach, however, is a difficult method to implement. Unlike other traditional approaches that lack the enthusiastic support of many people, learners, teachers, students, and even parents may encounter difficulties due to the program’s implementation. In general, a successful immersion program, according to Met (1987), is defined by the following criteria: administrative assistance; parental and community support for qualified teachers; items in the appropriate foreign language; time for teachers to construct language-based educational materials and continual staff development.

2.2. Types of Immersion Programmes

Today, there are many models of immersion programmes that have been practised in many parts of the globe. These models of immersion programmes can be grouped into different categories based on two main factors: the age of the immersion programme and the extent of the immersion programme. The age of the immersion programme implies the time at which the immersion programme was created. Barimani-Varandi (2012) asserts that based on the time the immersion programme was created, immersion programmes can be classified into four categories and these include: early immersion, middle immersion, late immersion programme and late-late immersion programmes. He stressed further that the immersion programme in early immersion starts between the ages of 5 and 6 years for pupils in preschools, kindergarten or first grade of elementary school. Pupils are exposed to middle immersion kind of immersion from the ages of 9 and 10 while late immersion is carried out between the ages of 11 and 14 years. The late-late immersion period starts when the students are in universities. The extent of the immersion programme refers to the fraction of curricular content covered in the L2 teaching. It is generally believed that immersion programmes can be divided into two kinds based on the extent of the immersion programme – total immersion programmes and partial immersion programmes (Lyster & Genesee, 2012; Barimani-Verandi, 2012).

In a total immersion programme, the second language L2 is employed as a medium of instruction in teaching the whole curriculum. According to Barimani-Verandi (2012), in a situation where comprehension is hampered, teachers employ techniques such as dramatization, demonstration, definition, and the use of realia to resolve incomprehensibility. The usage of the target language in teaching during the full immersion programme enables students to achieve a basic level of proficiency (*ibid.*). In a full language immersion programme, it is important to note that the student's L2 is taught as a subject together with other subjects. This is carried out to improve learners' language comprehension, as well as learners, writing skills. In a partial immersion programme, on the other hand, at least half of the curriculum is delivered in the target language (*ibid.*).

Krueger and Ryan (1993) opine that there exist three types of immersion programmes: the theme-based immersion type, the sheltered model type and the linked type of immersion programme. The theme-based type of immersion is a type of immersion programme in which topics and themes are employed when organizing it. The activities assigned to students under theme-based immersion majorly focus on issues that arise from authentic materials rather than grammatical or syntactic issues. In the view of Barimani-Varandi (2012), a topic may be introduced through reading, discussion, audio or video material and the same topic for listening comprehension and written assignments incorporating information from multiple sources.

The second type of immersion is the sheltered immersion programme and in this type of immersion programme, the school syllabus is taught in the target language. The main goal of teaching here is assimilation and mastery of content. Language and cultural immersion schools are a typology of the sheltered type of immersion. According to Briton, Snow and Wesche (1989), cited in Barimani-Varandi (2012), for students learning content in their L2, sheltered instruction creates a low-anxiety learning environment. This implies that sheltered students are separated from students who are native speakers.

The linked type is the third kind of immersion programme in which students participating in this type of immersion enrol in two linked courses as well as the language course. These two linked courses have a common content base and they also complement each other. It is a truism that this type of programme demands a lot of coordination to ensure that the two curricula are compatible (Richards & Rodgers, 1999). An immersion programme's specific objectives and context serve as the basis for selecting the most relevant typology of the immersion programme. When selecting an immersion programme, it is

crucial to take into account the program's specific aims, the languages of teaching, the quality of the staff and their professional growth, and the programme's overall academic level. The curriculum of the immersion programme must also take into consideration the availability of opportunities and ways for students to embrace their linguistic and multicultural diversity and that of the local community. Therefore, the type of immersion programme that is most appropriate depends on the programme's particular objectives, context and the students' cultural background as earlier stated.

2.3. French and the Russian Languages

The French language is the official language of France as well as the official language of many other francophone countries and is considered a second official language in Nigeria. It is a Romance language that belongs to the Indo-European subgroup of languages. It is widely spoken in the Canadian province of Quebec, New Brunswick, in the regions of Wallonia in Brussels in Belgium and Luxembourg in the Western part of Switzerland as well as in parts of the United States, particularly in Louisiana, northern parts of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont (Faloju & Akinlade, 2018).

The Russian language, like the French language, belongs to the Indo-European group of languages. It is an East Slavic language and the official language in Russia, Belarus and Kyrgyzstan. Russian is considered the largest native language in Europe with a population of 144 million native speakers in Russia, Belarus, parts of Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Russian is one of the working languages of the United Nations (UN), alongside Chinese, French, English, Arabic and Spanish. It is the unofficial but widely spoken language in Ukraine, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia and 15 other countries that constituted the former Soviet Union. Russian as an optional subject was introduced at the University of Ibadan in 1965. The full degree programme, however, started in 1980 with two lecturers (Omotade, 2012).

2.4. Theoretical Framework

A historical approach to a subject is critical to understanding its development, present problems, future problems and prospects. It is the study of a subject matter in light of its earliest phase and subsequent development. Lawrence (1980) notes that there is a difference between the historical approach and history. The usage of written documents and artifacts to study attitudes during depression for example is historical research while using historical information about depression to explain differences in attitude today is a historical perspective. History provides the raw material for historical perspective. The historical approach aims to sharpen one's vision of the present and not the past, while history provides the raw material. However, the historical approach utilized in this research implies a present-historical approach to a subject matter. The dominant notion of progress is perhaps considered the major reason the historical approach is often overlooked by researchers. Nisbet (1980) conceptualizes that the idea of progress, inexorable change over time from lower to higher states of knowledge and well-being, has been deeply ingrained in the culture of the Western world from time immemorial. This has resulted in a trend that makes people look toward the future rather than to the past. The historical approach presupposes that the present is both different from and better than the past. The import of the past cannot be overemphasised. It is considered a key to understanding the present.

This approach indeed allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the language, which can lead to more effective communication and cultural exchange. This research therefore adopts a historical approach as the conceptual framework to explore language and cultural immersion programme at the Universities of Lagos and Ibadan since language learning includes the cultural context in which the language has evolved. The study of the history and culture of Russian and French languages at these universities helps the learners to gain an in-depth comprehension of the language and its varied contextual usage. The historical approach is aimed at giving language learners an inclusive and distinctive

understanding that can promote more effective communication and cross-cultural interaction. This is crucial in the investigation of trends in the immersion with language learning and cultural adaptation which have become the set principles in the learning of foreign languages out of which Russian and French are considered in this study. Additionally, this approach is utilized because it emphasises how the immersion programmes at the two universities understudied have evolved historically and how students of Russian and French languages at the Universities of Lagos and Ibadan in Nigeria have to embark on compulsory official immersion programmes to Russia and the Nigerian French Village before graduating. This affirms the importance of including cultural training alongside language and academic instructions. The historical approach employed in this paper brings contemporary events on immersion programmes at the two understudied universities into a clearer focus.

2.5. Historical Development of Immersion Programmes at the Universities of Ibadan and the University of Lagos

This paper chooses to focus on the historical development of immersion programmes in Russian and French languages since the two languages were the first European languages to be established in Nigerian Universities after the colonial era and were the first to send students on immersion programmes in Nigerian universities. It is imperative to note that during the colonial period, there existed a parallel between linguistic power and colonial power. The English language which was the language of the colonial masters evolved into the language of power and was viewed as the language of the elite. Nigerians were also forced to acquire the language of colonisers as was the practice in many African countries, while the local Nigerian languages were degraded and this resulted in their marginalization and that of their culture (Adeyanju, 2022). Similary, after the independence of Nigeria from Britain, the English language dominance persisted and it evolved into the language of social prestige and upward mobility. French and Russian were not frequently taught in Nigerian colleges, and those who spoke them were frequently viewed as less intelligent or sophisticated. However, there has been a rising understanding of the value of multilingualism and the necessity of encouraging the study of other languages in Nigeria in recent years. The educational regulations and laws in Nigeria theoretically allow multiple language acquisition because of the country's multilingual status and its geographic location on the African continent (Adebayo, 2002). Consequently, the acquisition of foreign languages, such as French, Russian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic and Chinese, is highly encouraged in the Nigerian educational sector.

The formal introduction and establishment of the Russian and French languages, among other European languages studied in several Nigerian colleges and universities, has developed and entrenched these languages and cultures within Nigeria's linguistic space. With English as the official language of Nigeria, Russian is ranked third in the hierarchy of foreign or modern European languages taught at Nigerian colleges, behind French and German, which come in first and second place, respectively (Udofot, 2010; Omotade, 2012; Anyanwu, Okecha & Omo-Ojugo, 2013). This assertion is mainly because many still believe that the Russian language is an alien phenomenon in many African universities despite its introduction to Nigerian Universities in the 1960s (Omotade, 2012). In the view of Omolewa (1978:379), French and German languages had been introduced to Nigerian secondary schools as a subject in 1859 when the first secondary school was established in Lagos. By virtue of the gentleman's agreement between colonial masters (England, France, Germany, etc.) stating that no two foreign languages should be rivalled in a colony, French was accorded the status of an optional subject in the country. Opaluwah (2020), however, holds a contrary opinion. She asserts that the French language history in Nigeria can be traced to the C16th. Opaluwah further stressed that French was introduced as a secondary subject at the Yaoundé Conference of 1961. The conference recommended the introduction of teaching and learning the French language, and it was to be taught and examined as a school discipline in Anglophone Africa, including Nigeria (Opaluwah, 2020).

French as a degree course started at the then University College Ibadan, now the University of Ibadan, in 1959 in the Department of Modern Languages alongside German. Long before the establishment of the Nigerian French Language Village in Badagry in 1991, Nigerian students learning French languages in universities across the country have taken part in the compulsory language immersion programme outside the country at their 300 Level. The immersion programme is believed to help students attain an enviable proficiency and mastery of the French language which is of great importance to Nigeria in both her bilateral and multilateral relations not only with her Francophone neighbouring countries but also with the world at large. The language and cultural immersion programme in Nigeria is presumed to have started in the 1960s and the first sets of Nigerian students who participated in it were from the University of Ibadan.

In the first three decades of the establishment of the French language, the language and cultural immersion programme took place in either France or Francophone African countries such as Benin, Togo, Senegal or Niger Republics. Students' performance in their penultimate year determined where they would go for their immersion programme and only the best students travelled to France while the rest travelled to the aforementioned Francophone countries for their language and cultural immersion. Among the forerunner professors of French in Nigeria were Abiola Irele, Ade Kukoyi, Ade Ojo, M.A. Johnson, Union Edebiri, Victor Aire, Raymond Elahor, Kester Echenim, Egonu, Modum, Tunde Ajiboye and others, who were pacesetters of this new learning adventure. Some of them enjoyed French government scholarships, while some others benefited from Nigerian government scholarships. The travelling expenses and school fees of these students were the sole responsibility of the Nigerian government which paid these fees to the schools abroad through the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). A lot of problems developed with this immersion programme, notable among them was the economic crisis Nigeria experienced in the early 1980s. The Federal government of Nigeria became hugely indebted to the receiving schools abroad. Furthermore, this period witnessed the display of high moral decadence, by Nigerian students on immersion programmes abroad, who were struggling to make ends meet. This led parents to start to contribute to the cost of the immersion programmes for their wards. These problems affected the Nigerian government adversely, and the remittance of the students' school fees to the host institutions abroad by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) became a knotty task. In light of all these problems, the government of Nigeria decided to look inward for a home-based alternative to the language and cultural immersion programme. This move led to the establishment of the Nigerian French Village (NFLV) in Badagry as a local alternative to the language and cultural immersion programme abroad (Ade-Ojo, 1999). Today, all Nigerian Universities offering French as a course, send their students to the NFLV immersion programme for six months yearly in their studies and the parents of the students bear the costs. Qualified French lecturers are employed to teach the students in French. The students participate in a variety of socio-cultural and educational activities such as symposiums, debates, dramatic performances and many others at the NFLV. Apart from these, excursion trips are also organized by the NFLV to the Republic of Benin for the students' further learning.

The Department of Modern European Languages (now European Studies) was created at the University of Ibadan in 1962. French and German were the first set of languages to be introduced after Arabic in the Faculty of Arts of the then University College Ibadan (UCI) during the 1959/60 session with two lecturers in charge (Omotade, 2012). It is also imperative to state that in 1965, the Department of Modern European Languages at the University of Ibadan introduced the Russian Language into its curriculum. Segun Odunuga, who later became the first African Professor of the Russian language, was employed as an instructor, to provide adjunct tuition to science and agriculture students. It is noteworthy to state that during the 1970/71 academic session at the University of Lagos, Russian was introduced as a minor course of study in the erstwhile Department of Modern European Languages, now known as the Department of European Languages and Integration Studies (Omotade, 2012; Aigbovia, 2020). In the 1986/87 session, the Russian Unit graduated its first group of three students with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Russian (Osemeka, 2012). Russian was also established at the University of Nsukka in the early

1960s and it was introduced as a minor course initially before it became a full degree programme. The structure of Russian and French studies programmes at the Universities of Lagos and Ibadan since inception requires students to embark on a one-year compulsory immersion program before graduating. This immersion programme is carried out in partial fulfilment of the award of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in both languages. Russian students during their 300 level of academic studies spent a year in Russia at the Pushkin Institute of Russian Language in Moscow. The late Professor Segun Odunuga, who was the pioneering lecturer at the University of Ibadan, was instrumental in establishing a memorandum of understanding between the University and the Pushkin Institute of Foreign Languages in Moscow in 1981 (Omotade, 2012). At the University of Lagos, students of the Russian language were also sent to the Puskin Institute of Foreign Language in Moscow for their immersion programme. The language and cultural immersion programme at Pushkin Institute of Russian Language has been described as an environmental or situational exposure where students have language and cultural interactions with native Russian speakers (*ibid.*). Furthermore, the immersion programme or year abroad programme helps Russian language students from the Universities of Lagos and Ibadan to tackle the problem of dialogue of culture and conflict of cultures while studying Russian. This immersion programme at the Puskin Institute of Foreign Languages was sponsored by the USSR government and the Nigerian government jointly. The Pushkin Institute of Russian Language, unfortunately, terminated the Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Ibadan and Lagos due to the inability of the Federal government of Nigeria to continue sponsoring students on full scholarships, the debts incurred by the students at the Institute as well as the collapse of the USSR (*ibid.*). The cancellation of the immersion programme for Russian language students of both universities implies that the students had nowhere to go for their immersion programme from the mid-1990s.

A local alternative was sought after the cancellation of the memorandum of understanding between the Puskin Institute of Foreign Languages and the two Nigerian universities. This led to the suggestion of Ajakouta Steel Rolling Company in Kogi State as an alternative to the year abroad programme. The steel rolling company at that time was run by Russian interests. Lecturers from the University of Lagos and Ibadan visited the steel company and there was a consensus among them that it would be a better alternative to travelling abroad. The dream of having Ajakouta Steel Rolling Company as an alternative to the year abroad programme, however, failed to materialise since the contract between the Federal government of Nigeria and the Russian government on the construction of the Ajaokuta steel rolling company was cancelled.

Students of the University of Lagos from 2005 to 2012 were sent to Volgograd State Polytechnic in Russia for their language and cultural immersion programme while students from the University of Ibadan had no immersion programme. In 2013, an agreement was reached between Ivanovo State University, Russia, and the University of Lagos on an immersion programme. A set of three students were sent to Russia for their language and cultural immersion programme. It is imperative to state that the University of Ibadan also reached the same agreement with the same University in 2016 and Russian students like their University of Lagos counterparts were sent on a language and cultural immersion programme to the Ivanovo State University in Russia. Since the signing of these agreements, Russian language students from both universities have been having their compulsory year abroad at the same institution in Russia. At the Ivanovo State University in Russia, the students are exposed to the world of the Russian language, *руssкая душа* (Russian soul), Russian mentality and culture through books, lectures, conferences, films, quiz competitions, debates, symposiums, seminars, exhibitions, tourist excursions to museums, parks, cinemas, theatres, public places, and other cities. These activities help in developing the student's language acquisition skills.

3. Method of Data Analysis and Discussion

3.1. Demographic Characteristics and Educational Background of Respondents

The focus of this section is on the data collected through the online survey of students who were on their immersion programme in Russia and Nigeria. The study area for this research is South Western Nigeria. The main ethnic group in this region is Yoruba and it has an estimated population of 32.5 million inhabitants. The South Western region is also home to the largest proportion of universities in Nigeria and an appreciable number of these universities run programmes on European languages, predominantly Russian, French, German and Spanish. The sampling for this research is multistage and the first stage is purposive with the focus on the two major universities in southwestern Nigeria, that is the University of Lagos and the University of Ibadan, while the second stage involved a snowball sampling approach. A Google online questionnaire form was designed and sent to key persons in the relevant Departments in both universities while they passed it on to other people in the same department. The data was collected via Google online form as well.

Table 1: Demography of Sampled Population; **source:** Original Research

Characteristic	Factors	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	17.4
	Female	80.4
	Prefer not to say	2.2%
Age	20 and below	27.7
	21-25	51.1
	26-30	15.3
	31+	5.9
Geographical distribution	West	58.1
	East	22.9
	North	8.0
	South	11.9

Table 1 delineates the demographic characteristics of the samples. 17.4% of respondents are male, 80.4 % are females while 2% prefer not to state their gender. The above data shows that more females answered the questionnaire. The percentage representation of the respondents' age distributions is as follows: respondents who are 20 years below are made up 27.7%, those who are between the ages of 21-25 comprised 51.1%, and those who are between the ages of 26- 30 are 15.3% while those who 30 years and above comprised 5.9% of the respondents. The respondents who are between the ages of 21-25 years old are the majority and this is due to the fact that this age bracket, is regarded as the active age, and respondents under this category are more technologically inclined. The geographical distribution of the state of origin of respondents reveals that 58.1% of the respondents are from the Western part of Nigeria, 22.9% are from the Eastern part of Nigeria, 8% are from the Northern part of Nigeria and 11% are from Southern Nigeria. This is because both universities' under study are located in the western part of Nigeria.

Further results showed that 52.2 % of the respondents studied Russian, 46.7% studied French and 1.1% of the respondents did not specify their course of study. 94.6% of the respondents finished from/are from the University of Lagos, while 5.4% finished from/are from the University of Ibadan. In relation to the country where the immersion programme occurred, 48.9% of the respondents had their language and cultural immersion programme in Russia, none of the respondents had their immersion programme in

France, 50.1% did their language and cultural immersion programme in the NFLV in Badagry, while 1.0% indicated that they had not yet had an immersion programme.

With respect to Institutions where the immersion programme was conducted, 47.2% of the respondents had their immersion programme at Ivanovo State University in Russia, 9% did their immersion at Volgograd State Polytechnic in Russia and 47.2 had their immersion at the NFVL in Badagry Nigeria. The duration of the immersion programmes ranges from 6 months to 9 months to 12 months and up to 2 years. 36.7% of the respondents underwent the language and cultural immersion programme for 6 months. 51.1 % of the respondents had their immersion programme for 9 months, 11.1% had their immersion programme for a year and 1.1% had their immersion programme for 2 years. The year of the immersion programme was grouped into 3 categories from 2006- to 2012 and only 11 of the respondents had their immersion during this period. The table further shows that from 2013- to 2019, 51 of the respondents had their immersion programme during this period while 38 of the respondents had their immersion programme from 2020- to 2022.

3.2. Challenges Encountered by Respondents

Respondents were asked whether they thought that adequate measures had been put in place by their university before the programme began, 66.7% thought that there had been, 13.3% that there had not and the remaining 20.0% were not sure. The respondents that answered yes believed that the language and cultural immersion programme had helped them in developing their communicative and writing skills, it had also given them a deeper comprehension of the culture of the people whose language they were studying as well as the cultural nuances in the language. In addition to these, the language and cultural immersion programme has increased their cognitive skills and problem-solving skills. 7.6% of the respondents are of the opinion that the immersion programme has not impacted their language study positively because they are still struggling to understand the languages today and they lack confidence and communicative skills in the languages. Some respondents who were French students believed that this problem existed because their immersion programme should have taken place in a French-speaking country rather than at Badagry in Nigeria where they were communicating in their L1. 10.9% of the respondents are not sure if the immersion programme has had an impact on their language ability. This category of respondents, unfortunately, did not explain why.

Figure 1: Perceived Problems Encountered by Respondents before embarking on a Language and Cultural Immersion Program; **source:** Original Research

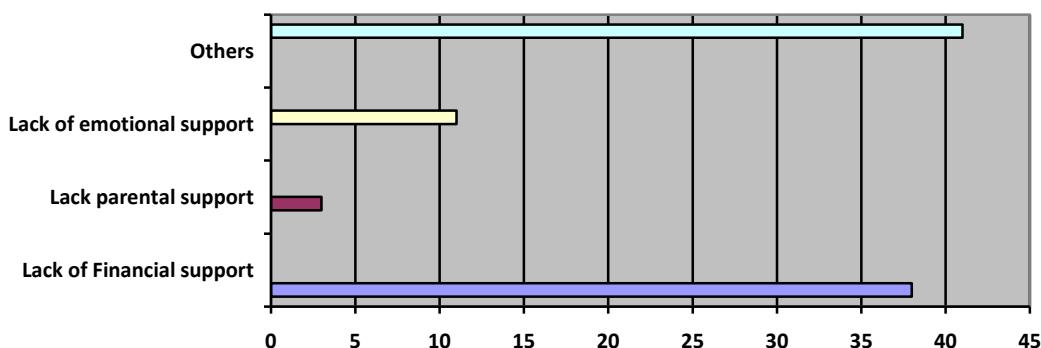
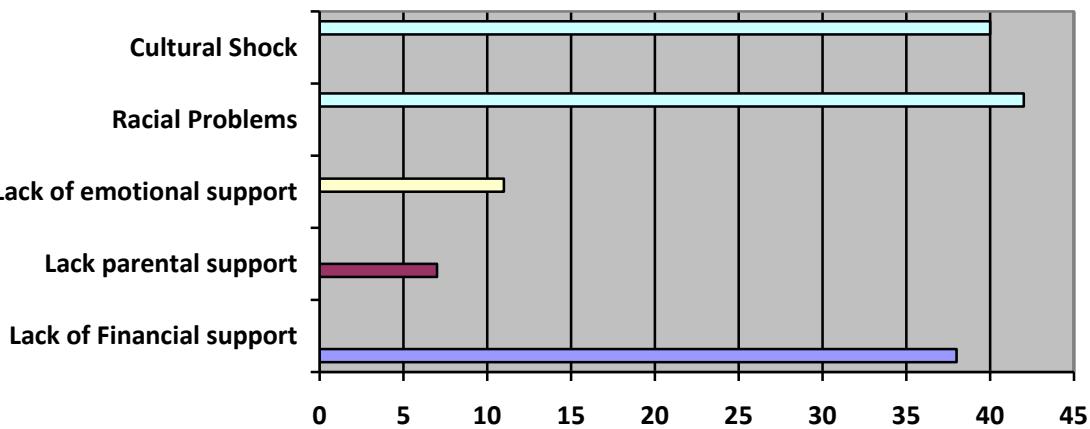


Figure 1 represents the perceived problems encountered by the respondents before embarking on the language and cultural immersion programme. From this bar chart it is evident that 38 out of the

respondents had financial problems before embarking on the immersion programme, 4 of the respondents had a lack of parental support, 13 encountered lack of emotional support while 42 had other diverse problems like poor academic performance, health-related problems and others.

Figure 2: Problems Encountered by Respondents during the Immersion Programme; **source:** Original Research



The above bar chart depicts the challenges the respondents experienced during the language and cultural immersion programme. Out of 92 respondents, 42 respondents experienced racial problems, and 41 respondents who were Russian students confirmed that they had experienced culture shock. The Russian students also experienced cultural misunderstanding, 11 of them stated that they lacked emotional support, 7 said they experienced a lack of parental support and 38 had financial problems. Some of the respondents also encountered the problem of over-dependence on rote learning.

4. Recommendations and Conclusion

There are no two ways about the fact that language and cultural immersion programmes play a significant role in helping L2 Learners in Russian and French languages from Nigerian universities. To meet the current needs of students, there is a need to revamp their essence since the best way to learn a language is to learn the language in the linguistic community where the language is domiciled. The curriculum of the universities offering Russian and French should be re-modified to include entrepreneurship and internship in French-speaking African countries. This will enable students to acquire other skills apart from the language skills and this would be of immense benefit to them in a global and dynamic world. In addition to this, the government should also enter into educational and economic bilateral agreements with French-speaking countries such as Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, and Cameroon as well as with Russia to give students studying Russian and French on immersion programme opportunities to work as interns. Nigerian universities should be encouraged to send their students on internships there to work between 3-6 months after their compulsory language and cultural immersion programme at the NFVL in Badadagry. This will increase the students' communicative competence. The Russian language curriculum in Nigerian universities should also be re-modified to give room for a two year language and cultural immersion programme just like the split degree of the Chinese study model in Nigerian universities. The Russian students should be allowed and encouraged to also engage in an internship for 3-6 months in Russian companies in Russia. This implies that the students would embark on their language and cultural immersion programme at Russian Universities after their first year and they will return to complete their programme in the fourth year of their study. This is to allow the students to be well immersed in the

language and culture. Furthermore, the government should start giving students of Russian and French in Nigerian universities financial aid during their year abroad programme to help alleviate the financial problems the students encounter. Educational foundations, organizations and individuals could also be encouraged to sponsor foreign language students.

In this research paper, we examined language and cultural immersion programmes at the University of Lagos and Ibadan. We argued that immersion programmes are essential aspects of language learning and that different types of immersion programmes serve different purposes. Focusing especially on the Russian and French languages at the University of Lagos and Ibadan, we reveal the historical background and development of immersion programmes in the world as well as the evolution of the Russian and the French languages at the University of Lagos and Ibadan. We further show that language and cultural immersion programmes not only improve learners' communicative competence but also develop their cognitive skills thus making the students better listeners and more creative in their language usage. We reaffirm the import of immersion programmes to language learning and to solving the problems of conflict of culture and dialogue of culture existing in second language learning.

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Appendix: Immersion Programme questionnaire



IMMERSION STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

eebelechukwu@unilag.edu.ng Switch account Cloud Draft saved

* Indicates required question

Email *

Your email _____

! This is a required question



Language Immersion Programs

IMMERSION STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

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* Indicates required question

Email *

Your email



It is a truism that learning a foreign language, brings about an interaction of language and human nature as well as expands the learner's view and liberalizes learners' opinion. However, despite the positive advantages in the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Nigerian Universities, there exist enormous problems and challenges for the learners.

What are the problems you encountered before embarking on the immersion programme. (Choose all that applies)

- Lack of financial support
- Lack parental support
- Emotional support
- Others

What are the problems you encountered during the immersion programme. (Choose all that applies)

- Language barrier
- Unfavorable climatic conditions
- Finance
- Racism
- Unfavorable living conditions
- Other: _____

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