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CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVING FRENCH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN GRYK BOARDING SCHOOLS IN ZINDER NIGER

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ABSTRACT

In the boarding schools operated by the non-governmental organisation Guidan Raya Yaran Karkara (GRYK) in the Zinder region of Niger, French language teaching takes place in a context characterised by multilingualism and unequal access to learning opportunities. Some learners from disadvantaged rural backgrounds experience difficulties with comprehension, speaking and writing. This article examines the contribution of educational support activities to improving French language teaching and learning in these institutions. It draws on a mixed-methods survey conducted in three boarding schools in Zinder involving 35 learners, six educational facilitators and four French teachers, supplemented by observations and interviews with school managers. The available data indicate that activities are organised frequently and primarily comprise supplementary classes, language remediation, play-based workshops and educational games. Respondents report improvements in listening comprehension, speaking and reading comprehension, together with greater adaptation of teaching practices. However, difficulties with verb conjugation, vocabulary and grammar persist. The study recommends consolidating these activities, strengthening staff training and introducing pre- and post-assessments to document progress more effectively.

Keywords: Educational Support Activities; French Language Pedagogy; GRYK Boarding Schools; Language Skills; Niger.

1 INTRODUCTION

Proficiency in the language of instruction is an important condition for academic success. In Niger, French plays a central role in formal learning, although many pupils grow up in environments where national languages are the main means of communication within families and communities. This multilingual context is culturally enriching, but it can also

make acquiring the French required for schooling more demanding when opportunities to practise the language outside the classroom are limited.

In rural areas, language difficulties may compound other constraints, including the distance to schools, inadequate teaching resources, differences in prior attainment and interrupted schooling. Pupils entering secondary education may therefore struggle to understand instructions, participate orally, read school texts or produce structured writing. These difficulties extend beyond knowledge of grammatical rules to include self-confidence, language exposure and opportunities to apply learning in different situations.

The boarding schools run by the non-governmental organisation Guidan Raya Yaran Karkara (GRYK), notably in the Zinder region, provide enhanced educational support for young people from rural and vulnerable backgrounds. In addition to formal instruction, these institutions offer supplementary activities, workshops, educational games and remedial sessions. These interventions, collectively referred to here as educational support activities, seek to increase opportunities to practise French and address learners' identified needs.

The scholarly relevance of this topic lies in examining a context-specific educational programme at the intersection of French language pedagogy, academic support and inclusion. The aim is to examine the practices implemented, how participants perceive them and the skills in which progress is reported, without assuming that these activities automatically resolve every difficulty.

Many newly admitted boarders have limited prior attainment in French. Placement assessments and staff observations reveal difficulties that may impede access to content in other subjects. Despite sustained support, progress does not always meet institutional expectations. This situation raises questions about the forms of support most likely to strengthen learning.

The overarching research question is as follows: to what extent do educational support activities contribute to improving French proficiency among learners in GRYK boarding schools? Three subsidiary questions guide the analysis: What activities are offered? How do they influence teaching practices? What changes do learners and supervisory staff perceive in oral and written language skills?

The general objective is to analyse the contribution of educational support activities to improving French language teaching in GRYK boarding schools in Zinder. The specific objectives are to identify the main types of activities, examine their perceived effects on teachers' and facilitators' practices, and describe reported changes in learners' language skills.

The general hypothesis of the source dissertation is that educational support activities contribute to improving learners' French proficiency. Three specific hypotheses elaborate this proposition: regular activities improve teaching practices; structured support promotes oral language skills; and supplementary classes and remedial activities strengthen written language skills.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research design and approach

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative component describes questionnaire responses using counts, percentages and distributions. The qualitative component draws on open-ended responses, session observations and semi-structured interviews with boarding school managers. Comparing these sources allows learners' perceptions to be examined alongside those of staff and the practices observed.

The design is primarily descriptive and exploratory. The findings presented in the dissertation mainly concern self-reported opinions and perceptions. Because the material used here does not include complete sets of comparable standardised scores for each learner before and after the intervention, perceived improvement must be distinguished from an experimental estimate of the activities' causal effect.

2.2 Study setting

The survey was conducted in three GRYK boarding schools in the Zinder region: the original coeducational institution in Zinder and the girls' boarding schools in Gangara and Takiéta. These sites were selected because of their emphasis on academic support and the diversity of learners' linguistic and educational backgrounds. The dissertation describes an environment in which Hausa, Kanuri and other national languages are spoken, while French is the language of instruction.

The boarding schools combine formal instruction, educational supervision and support activities. The interventions examined include supplementary French classes, language remediation sessions, play-based workshops, educational games and exchanges of practice. They aim to provide additional opportunities for comprehension, expression and consolidation of learning.

2.3 Population and sample

The questionnaire survey involved 45 participants: 35 learners, six educational facilitators and four French teachers. Interviews were also conducted with boarding school managers, and activity sessions were observed. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, appropriate for a study focusing on individuals directly involved in the programme.

Table 1. Composition of the questionnaire sample

Category	Count	Reported characteristics
Learners	35	2021 and 2022 intake cohorts; varied grade levels
Educational facilitators	6	Delivery of supplementary and remedial activities
French teachers	4	Language teaching and support
Total questionnaire respondents	45	Data collected over four days

Source: Survey data, March 2026

The learner sample comprised 25 girls (71.42%) and 10 boys (28.57%), aged 13–18 years, with 16-year-olds strongly represented. These characteristics describe the sample studied and should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all boarders.

2.4 Data collection instruments and procedures

Four main techniques were used. First, documentary research examined internal GRYK documents, including activity reports, placement assessment results and activity schedules, as well as external documents cited in the dissertation. Second, questionnaires collected learners', teachers' and facilitators' perceptions of activity frequency, participation and perceived changes in French proficiency.

Third, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 20–30 minutes were conducted with managers. The interview guide addressed the types and organisation of activities, their presumed influence on teaching practices and observed progress. Fourth, observations of play-based workshops, role-play activities and supplementary classes examined interactions, learner engagement and the use of French.

A pilot survey involving ten learners assessed the clarity of the questions and completion time. Following this stage, "year of admission" was added to the questionnaire. The main survey took place over four days. Participants were informed of the study objectives and the anonymous nature of their responses. Data were recorded and processed using Google Forms.

2.5 Data analysis

Quantitative data were examined using descriptive statistics: counts, percentages, means and response distributions. The findings were organised around four areas: participation in and satisfaction with activities; perceived effects on French language skills; overall changes in proficiency and perceptions of failure; and persistent difficulties and suggestions for improvement.

Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Open-ended responses were grouped into meaningful categories concerning activities considered useful, difficulties encountered and support needs. Triangulation involved comparing learners' statements, supervisory staff assessments and field observations.

2.6 Methodological considerations

Three limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample is small and non-probabilistic; the findings therefore cannot be directly generalised to all boarding schools in Niger. Second, some indicators rely on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by recall, expectations or social desirability. Finally, the dissertation findings used in this article do not provide an exhaustive series of pre- and post-test scores from which individual gains could be estimated statistically.

These limitations do not negate the study's usefulness. They indicate that the findings should be interpreted as a context-specific account of practices and perceived changes that can inform programme improvement and the development of more robust evaluations.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Profile of surveyed learners

The 35 surveyed learners had varied educational profiles. The largest age group was 16-year-olds, comprising 15 learners (42.85%). Eight participants were aged 15 (22.85%), four were 17 (11.42%), four were 18 (11.42%), three were 13 (8.57%) and one was 14 (2.85%). This distribution describes a predominantly adolescent population.

Table 2: Gender and current grade levels of surveyed learners

Indicator	Count	Percentage
Girls	25	71.42%
Boys	10	28.57%
Current level: Grade 9 (3e)	16	45.7%
Current level: Grade 7 (5e)	6	17.1%
Current level: Grade 10 (2nde)	5	14.3%
Current level: Grade 6 (6e)	4	11.4%
Current level: Grade 8 (4e)	4	11.4%

Source: Survey data, March 2026

Regarding educational level at admission, 25 of the 35 learners (71.4%) joined the programme on entering Grade 6 (sixième), while 10 (28.6%) joined from Grade 3 (CE2). The 2022 and 2021 intake cohorts comprised 24 participants (68.57%) and 11 participants (31.42%), respectively. Hausa was the main first language of 25 learners (71.42%), followed by Kanuri, reported by eight learners (22.85%), and Tuareg, reported by two (5.71%).

These data highlight the importance of support that accounts for differences in attainment and the multilingual context. They do not imply that using a national language is itself an obstacle: difficulties arise particularly when learners have few opportunities to develop the skills required in the language of schooling.

3.2 Staff profile

The adult respondent group comprised six facilitators and four French teachers. According to the dissertation findings, 40% of staff had one to three years of experience in GRYK boarding schools, 30% reported four to six years, and 30% had seven or more years. This diversity of experience may encourage the exchange of practices, provided that opportunities for coordination and training are available.

3.3 Frequency and types of activities

Educational support activities were conducted regularly. Of the 35 learners, 23 reported participating very frequently, meaning several times a week (65.7%). Seven participated once a week (20%), three approximately once a month (8.5%) and two two to three times a month (5.7%). Overall, 85.7% reported participating very frequently or weekly.

Table 3: Frequency of participation in educational support activities

Reported frequency	Count	Percentage
Several times a week	23	65.7%
Once a week	7	20.0%
Once a month	3	8.5%
Two to three times a month	2	5.7%
Total	35	100%

Source: Survey data, March 2026

Supplementary classes were the activities most frequently attended by learners, followed by language remediation sessions, play-based workshops, educational games and exchanges of practice. Among staff, the dissertation indicates that language remediation was the most frequently implemented activity, followed by supplementary classes and play-based workshops.

These activities are complementary: supplementary classes can revisit concepts covered in class, while remediation addresses specific difficulties. Play-based workshops and educational games can provide less formal settings for using vocabulary and encouraging learners to speak. Their value nevertheless depends on clear objectives, suitability for pupils' proficiency levels and feedback following each activity.

3.4 Assessment of participation

Most learners assessed participation positively. Sixteen participants (45.71%) rated it as very satisfactory and nine (25.71%) as satisfactory. Seven considered it average (20%) and three unsatisfactory (8.57%). Overall, 71.42% expressed a positive assessment, although nearly three in ten learners reported average or unsatisfactory participation.

This finding suggests that the frequency with which institutions offer activities should not be equated with effective participation by every pupil. Some may face difficulties related to scheduling, confidence, comprehension or motivation. It is therefore important to explore their reasons, vary activity formats and ensure that activities are not experienced simply as a burdensome extension of regular classes.

3.5 Perceived initial proficiency

Before the activities, 14 of the 35 learners described their proficiency as low or very low: eight rated it as low (22.9%) and six as very low (17.1%), together representing 40% of the sample. Eleven learners (31.4%) considered their proficiency average and ten (28.6%) good. Supervisory staff were more cautious: half considered initial proficiency low, 30% very low and 20% average or good.

3.6 Perceived changes in language skills

Learners reported improvements in several dimensions of French after participating in the activities. The dissertation reports that most felt their listening comprehension had improved; among teachers and facilitators, 90% reported a clear improvement in this skill and 10% remained neutral. These converging perceptions suggest that the activities provide additional opportunities to listen to and understand French.

Responses also indicated favourable changes in speaking. More than 90% of surveyed learners reported improvements in their ability to express themselves orally. Supervisory staff generally described progress in fluency and willingness to speak, although 40% remained neutral on this statement. This difference suggests that progress is not necessarily uniform and that participants do not always observe the same dimensions.

For reading comprehension, 90% of learners reported improvement. The dissertation also indicates that the activities helped many participants perform better in French assessments: 15 learners (42.9%) answered "a lot", 11 (31.4%) "a great deal", eight (22.9%) "moderately" and one (2.8%) "not at all". Positive responses ("a lot" or "a great deal") therefore represented 74.3% of the sample.

Table 4: Learners' perceptions of support with French assessments

Perceived help with assessments	Count	Percentage
A great deal	11	31.4%
A lot	15	42.9%
Moderately	8	22.9%
Not at all	1	2.8%
Total	35	100%

Source: Survey data, March 2026

The data support the existence of a perceived benefit, but do not by themselves demonstrate a measured improvement in academic performance. Establishing the magnitude of progress would require comparing performance on identical or equivalent tasks before and after the activities, while documenting assessment conditions.

3.7 Overall changes in proficiency

Most learners reported that their French proficiency improved after the activities were introduced. Among staff, 60% considered that average proficiency had become moderate, 30% that it had become good and 10% that it remained low. These assessments suggest a favourable shift in judgements of overall proficiency, while indicating that some needs remain.

The dissertation also reports that most teachers and facilitators considered the activities to contribute to reducing failure in French. In the absence of a complete series of failure rates by cohort, this finding should be understood as a staff assessment rather than a direct measure of a statistically established reduction.

3.8 Perceived effects on teaching practices

The findings indicate that 90% of surveyed teachers and facilitators considered that the activities enabled them to adapt their lessons to learners' needs. A comparable proportion believed that the sessions improved the overall quality of French lessons; 10% remained neutral on this latter point. The dissertation also mentions more frequent use of interactive and communicative approaches.

These findings matter because educational support activities extend beyond learners. They may also provide opportunities for adults to observe and adjust their practices by identifying recurrent errors and misunderstood concepts, testing materials and sharing successful strategies. The programme thus acquires a professional development dimension, particularly useful where pupils' proficiency levels vary.

3.9 Persistent difficulties

Despite reported progress, several difficulties persisted. Verb conjugation and vocabulary were each cited by nine learners (25.71%). Grammar was mentioned by six participants (17.14%), speaking by five (14.28%), reading comprehension by three (8.57%) and composition writing by two (5.71%). Only one learner reported no difficulties.

Table 5: Persistent difficulties reported by learners in French

Reported difficulty	Count	Percentage
Verb conjugation	9	25.71%
Vocabulary	9	25.71%
Grammar	6	17.14%
Speaking	5	14.28%
Reading comprehension	3	8.57%
Composition writing	2	5.71%
No difficulties reported	1	2.85%

Source: Survey data, March 2026

The data show that perceived improvement does not imply that learning needs have disappeared. Verb conjugation, vocabulary and grammar require regular, progressive consolidation activities. Skills should also be developed in an integrated manner: vocabulary can be reused in an oral narrative and then a short written text, while conjugation can be practised in communicative situations rather than exclusively through isolated exercises.

3.10 Learners' suggestions

Suggestions included spelling and oral spelling activities (five mentions), drama and role-play (three), and verb conjugation, general knowledge, French as a foreign language, and supplementary instruction or revision (two mentions each). Vocabulary, reading or library activities, and educational games were also suggested. Sixteen learners made no suggestions.

These proposals highlight the value of including learners' voices in activity design. Spelling, reading and drama activities can be linked to needs identified through the questionnaires and incorporated into a realistic programme.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 A plausible contribution requiring cautious interpretation

Overall, the data are consistent with the hypothesis that educational support activities contribute to improving French language teaching and learning in GRYK boarding schools. This interpretation draws on three converging elements: the reported regularity of activities, learners' perceived progress and positive assessments by teachers and facilitators. This convergence strengthens the plausibility of the programme's contribution.

However, the term "impact" should be used cautiously. Responses are largely self-reported and cannot establish a causal relationship that isolates the effects of the activities from other factors, such as regular instruction, learner maturation, length of residence in the boarding school or differences between cohorts. This article therefore favours "contribution" and "perceived improvement", which better reflect the nature of the data.

4.2 Regularity and diversity of activities

The very frequent or weekly participation reported by 85.7% of learners indicates that the activities are embedded in the boarding schools' educational provision. The variety of formats is another favourable feature. Supplementary classes address revision and consolidation needs; remediation targets errors; and play-based workshops and games can encourage engagement and create communicative situations.

This complementarity does not automatically guarantee effectiveness. Each activity requires an identifiable language objective, an appropriate level of difficulty and time for feedback on learners' work. Role-play, for example, benefits from preparatory vocabulary input, enactment and subsequent feedback on message clarity, pronunciation or the structures used. Regularity must therefore be accompanied by coherent planning.

4.3 Oral language skills and the learning environment

Reported improvements in listening comprehension and speaking may be explained by increased opportunities to listen and speak. Where some pupils hesitate to contribute in class, small-group work, role-play or structured collective activities may reduce perceived pressure and increase speaking turns. These approaches allow French to function as a language of action and interaction as well as an object of study.

Staff responses, which were more nuanced about speaking than learners' responses, nevertheless indicate the need to distinguish perceived confidence from observed linguistic performance. Learners may feel more comfortable without yet mastering all expected forms. Simple observation rubrics covering participation, intelligibility, lexical range and coherence would allow these dimensions to be documented more precisely.

4.4 Written language skills and targeted remediation

Learners also reported improvements in reading comprehension and support with assessments. These findings are consistent with the view that supplementary activities allow instructions to be revisited, texts of progressively increasing difficulty to be read and vocabulary to be consolidated. Nevertheless, persistent difficulties with conjugation, vocabulary and grammar indicate substantial continuing foundational needs.

Effective remediation would benefit from regular diagnosis of errors. For verb conjugation, a small number of frequently used tenses could be prioritised and then applied in sentences and narratives. For vocabulary, word families, lexical maps, guided reading and oral production may support retention. For grammar, sentence manipulation and reasoned correction can help learners understand recurring patterns.

4.5 Teacher effects, classroom effects and school effects

Findings concerning lesson adaptation illuminate the notion of teacher effects: staff report that the activities help them adjust their approaches. The quality of support therefore depends on their ability to observe difficulties, formulate precise objectives and select appropriate activities. Continuing professional development and exchanges of practice are essential for consolidating these skills.

Classroom effects are reflected in the emphasis on group activities and interactions. Peers can support one another, rephrase instructions and practise together. However, this dynamic must be structured to prevent more confident pupils from monopolising discussion or errors from recurring without correction.

School effects concern the framework provided by the boarding schools: schedules, organisation of support, availability of supervisory staff and monitoring of pupils. Frequent activities in a structured environment may help offset

inequalities in access to educational resources. This compensatory function requires material resources, pedagogical coordination and progress monitoring.

4.6 Inclusion and the multilingual context

The predominance of girls in the sample (71.42%) underscores the importance of programmes supporting educational continuity for rural girls. Boarding schools can provide a supportive learning environment, but this study cannot establish whether the activities have different effects by gender. Further research could examine participation conditions and specific needs in relation to educational trajectories.

Multilingualism should be treated as a resource. National languages can help clarify concepts or establish connections in meaning, while support activities provide opportunities for the progressive use of French. The aim is to build bridges from learners' first languages to the language of schooling and expand their linguistic repertoires.

4.7 Limitations and future research

The scope of the findings is limited by the sample size, purposive recruitment and predominance of self-reported perceptions. Data from three boarding schools in the Zinder region cannot represent all educational contexts in Niger. Moreover, some dissertation findings are presented as charts without all detailed counts being available in the text. This article therefore introduces no figures that were not explicitly reported.

Further research could follow several cohorts using a shared pre-test/post-test protocol. Tasks could assess listening comprehension, speaking, reading comprehension, writing and linguistic knowledge separately. A comparison group, where feasible and ethically acceptable, would help distinguish changes associated with the activities from those associated with regular instruction. Repeated interviews could also explain why certain activities work better for particular learners.

4.8 Practical recommendations

- Schedule weekly supplementary and remedial sessions with precise, progressive language objectives.
- Train teachers and facilitators in communicative approaches, differentiated instruction and error analysis.
- Conduct an initial diagnostic assessment of each learner's skills and monitor progress through comparable periodic assessments.
- Connect oral and written work: oral activities can lead to a written record, while reading can inform discussion or production tasks.
- Develop activities suggested by learners: oral spelling, guided reading, drama, role-play, vocabulary and contextualised conjugation.
- Provide opportunities for teachers and facilitators to collaborate, share materials, examine recurrent difficulties and harmonise assessment criteria.
- Monitor pupil participation and consult those who participate less, without immediately interpreting their behaviour as a lack of motivation.
- Document results anonymously and ethically, especially when participants are minors, and communicate findings to educational teams.

5 CONCLUSION

This study examined how educational support activities contribute to French language teaching and learning in three GRYK boarding schools in the Zinder region of Niger. The findings describe a regular and varied provision of supplementary classes, language remediation, play-based workshops and educational games. Among the 35 surveyed learners, 85.7% reported participating several times a week or weekly, and 71.42% rated participation as satisfactory or very satisfactory. These results indicate that the activities occupy an established place in the boarding schools' educational provision, although their regular availability does not ensure equally sustained engagement by every learner.

The main contribution identified is the expansion of opportunities to practise French and receive support adapted to learning needs. Learners reported progress in listening comprehension, speaking and reading comprehension, while 74.3% considered that the activities helped them with assessments a lot or a great deal. Teachers' and facilitators' responses also suggest greater attention to learners' difficulties and more frequent adaptation of teaching practices. Taken together, these findings are consistent with the study's general hypothesis of a beneficial contribution. They provide descriptive support for the proposed relationships between regular support, pedagogical adaptation and perceived language development, without constituting a causal test of the hypotheses.

The findings nevertheless reveal an uneven process of consolidation. Verb conjugation and vocabulary remained difficulties for nine learners each, while six cited grammar. Moreover, the more cautious staff assessments of speaking suggest that greater willingness to communicate should be distinguished from mastery of linguistic forms. The programme therefore needs to combine opportunities for interaction with explicit, progressive work on language accuracy. Reading, oral storytelling, role-play and short writing tasks could provide connected settings in which learners reuse vocabulary and grammatical structures and receive targeted feedback.

In practical terms, strengthening the programme requires diagnostic assessment, differentiated remediation and coordination between French teachers and educational facilitators. Shared planning should link support sessions to classroom objectives, identify a manageable sequence of priority skills and establish common criteria for monitoring progress. Learners' proposals, including spelling activities, drama and guided reading, offer useful starting points for sustaining participation. In this multilingual setting, support should also build on learners' existing linguistic resources and help them progressively access the French required for schooling. Continuing staff development and the availability of appropriate materials are necessary conditions for implementing these recommendations consistently across the three sites.

The scope of these conclusions remains bounded by the small purposive sample and the predominance of self-reported perceptions. The study cannot isolate the contribution of support activities from regular teaching, maturation or length of residence in the boarding schools, nor establish a measured reduction in failure rates. Future evaluations should follow learners over time through comparable pre- and post-assessments of oral and written skills, complemented by observations and interviews. Where feasible, a suitable comparison group would strengthen interpretation of the changes observed. Such evidence would clarify which activities benefit which learners and under what conditions.

Educational support activities thus emerge as a promising component of French language provision in GRYK boarding schools, with value extending to both learner practice and staff reflection on teaching. Their consolidation should prioritise the quality of pedagogical guidance, attention to persistent difficulties and documented learning progress. The experience offers context-specific lessons for educational support in rural and multilingual environments in Niger; any wider adaptation should be guided by local needs and further evaluation.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding this manuscript

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