

THE TASK-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING (ACTIONABLE PERSPECTIVE) OF FRENCH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA

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French is an official language of the AU, COMESA, UN and other international organization (KIE, 2002). Dewey's educational theory (1902) states that the major flaw in instructional methodology is the inactivity of the learner. The Actionable perspective (TBLT), which is the focus of this study is assumed to be a more effective approach in French language acquisition. TBLT emphasizes learning by accomplishing various tasks by the learner. This learner-centered method will lead to the integration of the learner in the world community and make him/her a social actor (Rosen, 2009). The Engestrom Activity Theory (1987) shows how a wide range of factors work together to impact a task. Understanding the teacher's role as one of these factors is essential in successful learning. Moreover, Hughes (2013) posits that instructional materials development is based on the learner's needs. According to Sam (2014), integrating ICT in instructional methodology increases enrollment in the academic program. The objectives of this research are to find out teacher preparedness in using TBLT. In addition, it will look at other instructional methods used in teaching French, the instructional materials used and the behavior of the learner. The research will be descriptive and will be conducted in seventeen (17) secondary schools offering French in Nairobi County. Teachers in these schools will answer to a questionnaire on their understanding of TBLT. A lesson observation guide will be used to observe form three students in the French class to find out the learner attitude, motivation and success in performing various tasks. Purposive sampling will be used to administer a student written composition to sixty-eight (68) form three students in each of the schools. The three instruments of data collection; questionnaire, lesson observation guide incorporating Flanders interaction matrix and student test will be tested during the pilot study to ascertain validity and reliability. Data will be analyzed using the SPSS computer package and presented in tables and graphs. The research will be of benefit to curriculum developers and teachers, as it will bring out what should be considered as content in the French curriculum.

Key words: Methodology, Task-Based Approach, Learner, Curriculum

Introduction

French is the second international language after English and is used as a medium of communication in the UN and COMESA regions. The language also facilitates access to varied information in areas such as education, tourism, science, trade, technological research and international relations. In the learning/teaching of any language, methodology, which plays a vital role, keeps evolving with time. This is why Dewey posits that if we teach our children today the way we taught them yesterday, we deprive them of tomorrow. Some of these methods of instruction include traditional, direct, audio-visual, problem-based, project-based, communicative language teaching and recently, Task-Based Approach.

The Task-Based Approach originates from Dewey's view about the importance of experience for effective learning (Ellis, 2009). It emphasizes purposeful and functional language by using real-life tasks in the classroom. Moreover, it is learner-centered as it focuses on effective use of the target language by allowing the learner to play the role of carrying out manipulative and communicative tasks. The main objective of the research is to test TBLT in the French classes. Other objectives include; finding out which methods are used

in teaching French, instructional materials, teacher/learner interaction in class and testing performance before and after TBLT instruction.

In Kenya, there are three universities and two diploma colleges that train teachers of French (Keya, 2008). These include; Kenyatta, Maseno and Moi universities and Kagumo and Kibabii teachers' colleges. The Ministry of Education recommends teaching of French at secondary school level, thus a child is expected to begin learning French in form one, at fourteen years of age. This is a disadvantage because language is fast acquired at a younger age. Moreover, only some secondary schools and a few private primary schools offer French as an optional subject. These institutions are few considering that with globalization, there is a high demand for people who can communicate in multiple languages. However, French is also offered at the French Cultural Center in major towns; thus Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu and Eldoret to any person who is willing to learn. On successful completion of the course, 'DELFI' and 'DALF' certificates are offered to the candidates that enable them to compete effectively on the international job market.

In the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) syllabus, French is lumped together with technical subjects such as; Agriculture, Music, Woodwork, Home Science and Art which makes it very challenging to teach the language. Moreover, there is need to change the KICD syllabus which was designed thirteen years ago because the methods proposed in this syllabus have not experienced change over a long period of time.

The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) was established in 1980 and is mandated to prepare and mark examinations and then offer certificates to successful candidates. It is evident that we cannot talk of learning/teaching without evaluation. In French, students are expected to sit for three examination papers that incorporate the four language skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking. According to the reports by KNEC, the performance of French has been minimal. In addition, the total candidature has been very low as this is an optional subject.

The learning/teaching exercise requires instructional resources to be effective. KICD has recommended four titles for use in secondary schools. However, the production of teaching resources has been a big challenge as publishers argue that the French market is small and so this makes it uneconomical for their business. Some schools cannot afford basic instructional aids like a radio that is crucial in teaching listening skills. The French cultural centre has intervened by inaugurating twenty French Resource centers in both universities and schools and encouraging students to visit the Cultural centers near them where they have access to films, French international radio (RFI.89.9 FM), comics, journals and internet.

Previously, teachers of French in Kenya used to undergo an in-service course in teaching French immediately after leaving college and once they start teaching. The teachers would be sponsored to stay in France (*stage linguistique*) for a month to enable them master French. This was the initiative of the Ministry of Education and the French Embassy as continued teacher training plays an essential role in any learning situation. Nowadays, these courses are very rare and so most of the teachers may not be informed of the new trends in French teaching.

Moreover, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), which is charged with teacher deployment, offers very few slots for French teachers' employment. Some schools employ teachers on the basis of them being Francophone or immediately after secondary school without any formal training. This is detrimental to the delivery of content in French language acquisition. In 2010, the linguistic and Education office through the French Embassy organized a two-week training which was structured in the TBLT perspective. During this training, only around one hundred French teachers were in serviced and received their DALF certificates after sitting for the French examination.

The Engestrom Activity theory (Engestrom, 1987), which considers activity as the main element in language instruction, led scholars to develop the TBA. The proposed research will refer to it as the TBA theory. This theory has three elements; tools, subject and object. In the proposed research, tools are the instructional materials, the learner will be the subject and performing tasks to acquire language fluency and accuracy will be the object.

Statement of the Problem

The Mackay Report of Kenya (Mackay, 1981) reiterated fostering international consciousness among learners and teachers. In the proposed study, the researcher intends to teach form three students using TBLT, which has been recommended by the Common European Framework of References (Rosen, 2009). The Kenyan syllabus has not yet changed from the Communicative language teaching, a more ancient method than TBLT.

Additionally, reports from the national examination council raise several questions on the methods teachers use during French lessons. In the 2013 report, (KNEC report, 2013) it was noted that students had memorized some dialogues. This study on TBLT will help enrich the vocabulary of the learners to avoid presenting memorized dialogues.

Finally, some teachers in Kenya are using TBLT without clear guidelines or follow up. The proposed study will give clear guidelines on how to implement and effectively use this method.

Research Literature

In the United States of America, Ran (2013) in a report on 'Responses from Chinese Teachers of English on TBLT' posits that this method has been proposed by the current English curriculum in the USA since 2001. Although this research is on TBLT, the respondents were Chinese teachers of English. In the proposed research, the respondents are teachers and students of French.

Zhang (2000) in a research on 'The application of TBLT in the Chinese classroom in China proposes that teachers should draw from various methods to adopt more suitable approaches to meet their specific teaching context. Although the above study was carried out in China, the proposed study will be done in Kenya and will consider other methods used in teaching/learning French.

Vogely (1995) in Spain in a research on 'Perceived strategy used during performance on authentic listening comprehension tasks' studied the strategies used and perceived by learners of Spanish on an authentic task. Although the above study was centered on Spanish students, the proposed study will have French students carrying out listening tasks.

Seetha (2004) researching on 'A critical review of the Tamil language and syllabus' posits that grammar teaching is not central in TBA because learners will acquire it as a by-product of carrying out tasks. He suggests introduction of activities such as drama and texts with approaches to oral language. Contrary to the above study, the proposed study will assess French language where teachers will respond to the question on which co-curricular activities their students participate in.

In South Africa, Adendorf (2006) on 'Use of TBLT to acquire Afrikaans' found out that students enjoyed task-based activities. Contrary to the South African study, in the proposed research, TBLT will be used during the lessons to acquire the French language.

Scarato (2014) in an article on Task-Based approach points out the fact that it is only after the task cycle that the learner's attention is directed to language form. In the previous methods, a context for grammar teaching was to be invented while in TBA, it is already provided. Therefore, in the proposed study, the researcher will employ the TBA lesson structure where grammar is taught in context.

In a research on 'Developing Task-Based writing with adolescents EFL students', Cabral (2009) posits that in order for the students to write a letter for example, they have to be able to reactivate the letter structure, vocabulary and think of the problematic situations depending on

their settings. In the proposed study, the researcher will teach and test writing skills where the student will be required to write a narration of a journey he/she had gone for.

Owuondo (2008) in a study on 'Instructional methods for composition writing in French' reiterates that TBLT was advanced to remedy the weaknesses that were found in the earlier methods. However, the research did not show the implementation and effectiveness of TBLT. Therefore, the proposed study seeks to show how TBLT can be used in teaching and its effectiveness through the test that will be administered to the students by the researcher.

According to Long (2004), one of the merits of TBA is that it encourages authenticity and gives provision for feedback and evaluation. Evaluation is a very vital element in any teaching/learning situation. The researcher in the proposed study will seek to evaluate, through a test the students in writing tasks.

In an article in the TESOL Quarterly, Richards (2012) writes that understanding the role of the teacher in methodology plays a major role in facilitating successful learning. In the proposed study, the researcher will assess teacher preparedness and role in the TBLT French lesson. The study seeks to find out the teacher's understanding of TBLT.

Chokah (2013) in a study on 'Training of French teachers in Kenya' found out that there has to be a balance between academic and professional training because a 'half-baked' teacher will lead to the beginning of a vicious circle; poorly taught learners who themselves become poor teachers later on. In the proposed study, the researcher will find out the level of both academic and professional training of the French teachers and their effect on the learner.

On 'Availability and use of learning/teaching materials', Kimui (1998) reiterates that resources represent a combination of materials, machines, facilities, environment as well as process and media programs. Although this study was carried out in primary teacher colleges in Kenya, the proposed study seeks to find out the instructional materials available in teaching French in secondary schools.

Comments

From the reviewed literature, it is clear that there is concerted effort by various scholars in quest to address TBLT. However, there is little research on this method in French in secondary schools in Kenya. The research literature, points to the fact that TBLT is a better method of teaching French because it is more learner-centered. It is therefore paramount that the KICD syllabus is revised to move from the communicative teaching approach to the task-based teaching.

Secondly, professional teacher training and in-service courses are very important tools for an effective teacher. A well-trained teacher leads to a well-taught learner who has an added advantage in the world community. All the teachers of French in Kenya need to undergo training in TBLT because this is the method that enables the learner to perform both manipulative and communicative tasks.

Thirdly, for TBLT to be successfully implemented in Kenya, the school administrators and the Ministry of Education have to provide the required resource materials. Having a good teaching method together with the necessary teaching resources will result to higher enrollments and improved performance in the French language.

Finally, because of modern technology, the Task-Based approach has the advantage of easy integration of ICT. Students can easily perform tasks on the computer using the Internet, which will make French learning and teaching more interesting in Kenya.

Methodology

The proposed study will be quasi-experimental. The researcher will use a questionnaire to collect data from the teachers of French. Quasi-Experimental design will be used to collect quantitative data and will be used to test the effectiveness of TBLT by subjecting the students

to a test before and after teaching using TBA. Qualitative data will be sought using the questionnaire and a classroom observation protocol.

The research targets 20 teachers of French, 12 schools offering French and 180 form three French students in Nairobi County. Nairobi has been picked purposively because it has the highest number of schools (58) and the schools are of varied categories; thus mixed/same sex, day/boarding and private/public. The class of form three French students has been sampled purposively because the students have selected the subject and they have mastery of it.

The data collection instruments are; teacher's questionnaire, lesson observation guide incorporating Flanders's interaction analysis matrix and a student test. To assess validity, item inconsistencies and effectiveness will be assessed during pilot study. In addition, reliability will be ensured by triangulation and Spearman's formula for the pre-test and post-test results with a correlation coefficient of 0.8.

The researcher who will guide respondents for clarity then picked immediately to ensure that all the questionnaires are returned will administer the questionnaire. The researcher will make observations and comments using the lesson observation protocol during the French lesson. Prior to this, students will be advised to act normally and minimum time will be used.

Data collected from the respondents will be coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Data analysis will be carried out in two phases. The first phase will involve descriptive statistics where means, percentages and standard deviations will be obtained. In the second phase, inferential statistics (independent t-ratios) will be used to compare differences between means derived from the samples at 0.05-probability level (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999).

Need for the study

The study is important because it will pave way for more research on the Task-Based Learning and Teaching both locally and internationally. In addition, it will help the curriculum designers in Kenya to change the French syllabus from earlier Communicative Learning and Teaching to the modern Task-Based Approach. Finally, from the new syllabus, the authors and producers of resource materials will know which type of content to include in the textbooks.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is clear that teachers who have undergone training in TBLT have students who are more creative and imaginative when it comes to carrying out tasks. Students who participate in co-curricular activities like drama and music have improved language mastery and this makes TBLT more effective.

Teachers of French use varied methods of teaching because they have students from different backgrounds. Some of the schools lack essential resources like Internet connection, radio and television and so teachers rarely use the audio-visual method. This is detrimental to carrying out the listening tasks in the French language task using TBLT.

In classes where there is effective teacher/student interaction, carrying out of tasks will be very successful as the teacher will be the mediator and the student, the social actor. Students will be motivated by the fact that they are the ones who are performing the tasks and not their teacher. The teacher's knowledge of his/her students background, attitude and behavior will enable him/her know how to give each student special attention.

In conclusion, there will be a significant difference in performance of the written test before and after teaching in TBA. This is because, after teaching in TBLT, the learner will be more accurate and fluent in the language because TBLT aims at acquiring both fluency and accuracy.

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