METHOD OF TEACHING FRENCH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The reason for the introduction of French language in the national curriculum is to produce citizens who are communicatively competent to be able to communicate with the country’s francophone neighbours and other French speakers in the world. To actualize this vision, the method of teaching the language is very important. It is believed that teachers’ method can promote or inhibit learning and students’ interest. Based on this, the paper examines the methods of teaching French in Nigerian classrooms and tries to provide an answer to the question: “What method should be used in the teaching of French language in Nigerian classrooms?” The paper also highlights strategies for using the eclectic approach. The determinant factors for the choice of a language method as well as factors affecting the use of modern methods in the teaching of French language in Nigerian classrooms were also examined. Finally, the paper suggests, among others that teachers should use eclectic and cultural approaches to enable learners practice the language in a meaningful context.

Keywords: Language teaching, Communicative language teaching approach, Eclectic approach, Cultural approach

INTRODUCTION
French language is one of the commonly accepted languages for international communication. One of the factors that determine the selection and use of methods in the teaching of a language is the objectives for learning the language. French language studies in Nigeria have steadily evolved over the years. Generally, the objectives of foreign language learning are closely linked to the motivation for learning the language. Okwudishu (2002) and Broughton et al in Opara (2017) identifies two types of motivation for foreign language learning as instrumental and integrative. The objective of learning a language is said to be integrative when the aim is to be able to communicate with the speakers of the language in every aspect of life. It is instrumental when it is being learnt for specific objectives.
The federal government of Nigeria in recognition of the usefulness of French language in the area of commerce and industry, science and technology, tourism, intercultural and international relationships and human development, made French a compulsory subject from primary four to junior secondary school three and as a vocational elective in senior secondary classes. Based on this, Nigerians adjusted their motivation for learning French to include both instrumental and integrative as this is reflected in the National curriculum for French language (2001) which states that: “the syllabus is designed to provide the learners with sufficient skills and competence required to make the French language a tool of communication by the end of their secondary school education. These skills include aural comprehension, oral expression, written comprehension and written expression” (Federal Ministry of Education, 2001: p.i).

However, the popular method used by many French teachers is still the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). Many linguists have condemned this method because it lays much emphasis on writing and very little on the acquisition of communicative competence. Because GTM is teacher-centred, the classroom is often boring and filled with students who are not motivated to learn the language. Teachers use of traditional method is possibly one of the major factors responsible for low interest rate of students and poor communicative competence in the language as revealed through classroom experience and the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE)’s current results. To meet the communicative needs of Nigerian learners of French, there will be need for teachers to shift from the use of a specific method (GTM) to the adoption of a variety of methods.

What Method Should Be Used in the Teaching of a Second/Foreign Language?

Method in language teaching is essential as it links theory to practice. Every language teacher has his methods of teaching which he uses as a guiding principle. From the teaching methods, the design of teaching plans, learning activities, instructional materials and evaluation techniques are determined. As stated by Deita (2018), method is proportionate to the performance of students and therefore should be tactfully selected. It is now widely accepted that a single best method which could be applied in all contexts is futile, and the value of conceptualizing teaching and teacher education in terms of methods is questioned by some applied linguists such as Kumaravadivelu in Andon and Leung (2014). Nevertheless, a positivist belief that applied linguistics research leads to continued improvements in methodology and ever-increasing effectiveness in language teaching and learning seems to persist in the views of some teachers and teacher educators as remarked by Bax in Andon and Leung (2014).

However, an alternative view according to Howatt (1984) and Kelly in Andon and Leung (2014) is that fashions in pedagogy come and go with new methods often reinventing
aspects of previously extinct ones and it is difficult to prove the superiority of one method over another. Given the problematic status of methods, it would seem wise to make trainee teachers aware that there is more than one way to teach a language and to introduce a variety of methods. This implies also the need to provide information about underlying principles of different approaches and methods and discussion of the contexts they may be useful for, and how they can be adapted and combined to meet the needs of particular groups of learners. In addition, proficiency and standards-based movements have shaped the field of French language teaching with their attempts to define proficiency goals and thus have provided a general sense of direction.

Commenting on foreign language methodologies, Richards and Rogers in Abbas and Ali (2014) noted that while some believe that foreign language instruction has finally come of age, others refer to it as the post-method era, which in other words refers to a variety of communicative language teaching (CLT) methodologies. Such methodologies encompass eclectic ways of teaching that are borrowed from a myriad of methods. According to the later, these methods are rooted not only in one but a range of theories and are motivated by research findings in language acquisition as well as cognitive and educational psychology.

METHODS OF TEACHING FOREIGN/SECOND LANGUAGE

There is need for teachers of a foreign or second language to remind themselves and be reminded of the methods of teaching a language, their characteristics, when and how to use them as the history of language teaching methods has seen many fluctuations. At one point, one particular method or approach dominated. With the passage of time however, it faded as posited by Celce-Murcia in Abbas and Ali (2014). Out of all the methods used in foreign language teaching, the following are widely recognized because of their influential role. They include Grammar-Translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-lingual Method, Audio-Visual Method, Communicative Approach, Task-based language learning approach, Cultural Approach and Eclectic approach.

Grammar-Translation Method: The grammar-translation method for many decades was the predominant method of language instruction. It was used in the nineteenth century to teach modern foreign languages. According to Prator and Celce-Murcia in Abbas and Ali (2014), the key features of the grammar translation method are as follows: (1) Classes are taught in the mother tongue, with little active use of the target language (2) Much vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words (3) Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given (4) Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words (5) Reading of difficult classical texts is begun early (6) Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in
grammatical analysis. (7) Grammar is taught deductively that is by presentation and study of grammar rules which are practiced through translation exercises. (8) Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue. (9) Little or no attention is given to pronunciation.

The grammar-translation method was not without its opponents, and the demand for oral proficiency led to several counter and parallel movements that laid the foundation for the development of new ways of teaching, example of such method was the **Direct Method**. Abbas and Ali (2014) stated that the principles of procedures underlying the direct method as described by Richards and Rodgers (2001, p.12) are as follows: (1) Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language (2) Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught (3) Oral communication skills were built up carefully in a graded progression organized around question-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes (4) Grammar was taught inductively (5) Both speech and listening comprehension were taught (6) Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstrations, objects and pictures; abstract vocabulary was taught by association of ideas (7) Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

The direct method was eventually replaced by **Audio-lingual Method** in the 1950s and 1960s. The primary focus of audio-lingual method was on spoken language. The underlying assumption of this philosophy was that foreign language learning is basically a mechanical process of habit and automatisation. This, in practice meant students were presented with language patterns and dialogues which they had to mimic and memorize. Language practice consisted of repetition of language patterns and drill exercises. Drill types include substitution drills, variation drills, translation drills, and response drills. A tenet of this method is that errors of any kind were to be avoided so that learners do not establish bad habits. For this reason, the native speaker was considered the perfect model. Due to overcorrection of students’ errors by the teacher, anxiety levels were often quite high among students. The audio-lingual method however failed to have the desired effect of helping learners become competent speakers of the target language. Several factors and influences led to the demise of the audio-lingual method and caused a shift in language teaching methodology. This brought in communicative language approaches and a range of other methods.

**Communicative language teaching approach:** From the account of Piccardo in Ogbonna (2017), in grammar-translation method, the notion of method implies rigidity as methods are “turnkey” products that teachers are required to apply in the classroom. In addition to this rigidity, for many years, the focus was on language as an object of learning, not on the learner learning the language. It was not until the 1970’s that the understanding of language teaching
began to change on both sides of the Atlantic. Two concepts helped to bring about this change:
the concept of communicative competence, and the concept of language needs. Communicative
Language Teaching (CLT) also known as the communicative approach, is an approach to
language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of
language study (wikipedia.org/wiki/communicative_language_teaching). According to Chang
(2011), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) advocates teaching practices that develop
learners’ abilities to communicate in a second language. It represents a change of focus in
language teaching from linguistic structure to learners’ need for developing communication
skills.

Recently however, studies have shown that communicative language teaching is not
complete without incorporating task-based learning activities and cultural activities. As
recounted by Rao (2018), the focus of task-based language learning approach is more on a task
than the language. Here the students are given a task and the teacher remains as a facilitator
and provides some help in language study to clear their doubts and solve their problems while
the students are performing the task. The language lessons are purely based on the learners’
learning experiences that have non-linguistic outcomes. The rationale for the employment of
communicative task is based on contemporary theories of language learning and acquisition
which claim that language use is a driving force for language development. For example,
according to Bran (2007), advocates of such theories suggest that “the best way to learn and
teach a language is through social interaction”. The author maintained that social interaction
allows students to work toward a clear goal, share information and opinions, negotiate
meaning, get the interlocutors help in comprehending input, and receive feedback on their
language production. In the process, learners not only use their inter-language but also modify
it, which in turn promotes acquisition. In other words, it is not the text one reads or the grammar
one studies but the tasks that are presented that provide learners a purpose to use the grammar
in a meaningful context. This, Bran (2007) explains, gives task design and its use a pivotal role
in shaping the language learning process. Example of tasks as provided by Long in Bran (2007)
include: filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airtime reservation, borrowing a
library book, taking a driving test, finding a street destination, making a hotel reservation. It
can also include activities such as: describing how to cook, playing the role of a teacher by
creating an imaginary class.

Culture Approach: The definition of culture itself has been a much debated issue among
defines culture as the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behaviour. Culture
thus defined consists of language, ideas, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques,
works of arts, rituals, ceremonies, and other related components; and the development of culture depends upon man’s capacity to learn and transmit knowledge to successive generations. Some other things that teachers need to know about culture are as follows: every human society has its own particular culture or socio-cultural system which overlaps to some extent with other systems; variation among socio-cultural systems is attributable to physical habitats and resources; there is a range of possibilities inherent in various areas of activity such as language, rituals, and customs, and the manufacture and use of tools. The attitudes, values, ideas, and beliefs of an individual are greatly influenced by the culture in which he lives and an individual may, of course, live in or travel among several different cultures (Kovacs, 2017).

Two types of culture are identified in the study of culture. They are: the big ‘C’ culture and the little ‘c’ culture. The big ‘C’ culture refers to that culture which is most visible. It includes holidays, art, popular culture, literature, food and architecture. These are things that can never go away. Little ‘c’, in contrast, is the more invisible type of culture associated with a region, group of people, language, etc. As explained by Erasmusmyway (2017), we cannot live or communicate without the little ‘c’ culture.

According to Kramsch in Kovacs (2017), this little ‘C’ culture focuses mainly on everyday life, social interaction and communication including behaviour, beliefs, values, eating, dwelling, and talking habits. As stated in Common European Framework of References for languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, the language user’s ability to communicate is shaped and influenced by all human competences, and therefore all these may be regarded as aspects of communicative competence. The essence of learning a language is to be communicatively competent. Thus, in choosing a method, the teacher should choose the one(s) that will enable students to be communicatively and culturally competent. As shown by Kovacs (2017), communicative competence includes declarative knowledge (knowledge of the world, socio cultural knowledge, and intercultural awareness), skills and know-how (practical and intercultural skills and know-how), existential competence, and the ability to learn (language and communication awareness, general phonetic awareness and skills, study skills, and heuristic skills). Communicative language competences can also be divided into linguistic competences (lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic, and orthoepic); sociolinguistic competences (linguistic markers of social relations, politeness conventions, expressions of folk wisdom, register differences, dialect, and accent), and pragmatic competences (discourse competence and functional competence) (CEFR in Kovacs, 2017).

Kovasc (2017) further remarked that language teachers and researchers widely believe that there is another competence, the cultural one, which is present in one way or another in all the above mentioned categories. Bardos, as quoted by Kovasc (2017), added culture as a fifth
competence. In his interpretation, culture is present in and is part of all the other competences. Several other statements and viewpoints have been formulated regarding the status, importance, and content of culture in language teaching, showing the complexity of the issue.

According to Rivers (1987), focus must be on both appropriate content and activities that enable students to assimilate that content. Activities should encourage learners to go beyond fact so that they begin to perceive and experience vicariously the deeper levels of the culture of speakers of the language. The author also states that in the design of these activities, teachers should concentrate to choose the best approach and procedures that can lead students to successful cross-cultural encounters. Byram draws attention to the problem of skill-centric language teaching, which tends to neglect cultural elements. Byram believes that the current emphasis on language teaching as skill training is apt. Contributing, Seeyle (1993) confirms that learning language in isolation of its cultural roots prevents one from becoming socialized into its contextual use. Seeyle further maintains that knowledge of linguistic structure alone does not carry with it any special insight into the political, social, religious or economic system, or even insight into when one should talk and when one should not.

Consequently, Peterson and Coltrane in Kovasc (2017) explain that cultures cannot be considered monolithic and students need to be aware of this. In any culture, different behaviours may be acceptable for any kind of interaction. Students must therefore be given the opportunity to explore and observe such interactions, reflect on them, and try to discover their own voices in the speech community of the target language. Moeller and Nugent (2014) on their part, emphasize that intercultural competence should be an integral part of foreign language curricula. According to them:

> When intercultural competence is an integral part of the language classroom, learners experience how to appropriately use language to build relationships and understandings with members of other cultures. They can examine their own beliefs and practices through a different lens, negotiate points of view different from their own, and gain an insider’s perspective of another culture. (Moeller & Nugent, 2014:p.14)

**WHAT IS THE BEST FOREIGN/SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODOLOGY?**

Over the years, one of the key questions that applied linguists have been concerned with is “How can we teach languages better?” (Davies & Elder in Andon (n.d.)). The search for answers to this question has led to the development of a succession of methods and approaches to language teaching. Answering the question, Demyen (2019) remarks that changes in language teaching and in method developed through various causes inherent with political, philosophical and social expectations of a community towards education frequently overwhelmed teachers with the expectations and constant shifts of teaching methodologies. In
view of this, linguists recognized that it is better to combine several elements from all teaching methods to provide a more student-centred classroom thereby enhancing the learning experience of the students. It is difficult to determine which method is universally beneficial for teaching. Educators however, adopt several methods into their lessons depending on the circumstances (Demyen, 2019). Concurring with Demyen, Bran (2007) states that what has emerged from the post-method era is a variety of communicative language teaching (CLT) methodologies and that such methodologies encompass eclectic ways of teaching that are borrowed from a myriad of methods. It is therefore generally believed that there is no one single best method that meets the goals and needs of all learners and programs.

Eclectic approach in language teaching

The eclectic method of learning was advocated in the beginning of the 1990’s and became fashionably popular (Kumar, 2013) though not yet popular in Nigerian French classrooms as many teachers of the language are still using grammar-translation method which is a single method. Eclecticism was seen as a solution to language teaching. Linguists such as Demyen (2019) realized that no one teaching method could be used in a classroom where students had different learning styles. Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Mellow in Kumar (2013) have used the term “principled eclecticism” to describe a desirable, coherent, pluralistic approach to language teaching. Eclecticism is defined as a type of methodology that makes use of the different language approaches instead of sticking to one standard approach. It involves the use of a variety of language learning activities, each of which may have very different characteristics and may be motivated by different underlying assumptions.

The use of eclecticism is due to the fact that there are strengths as well as weaknesses of single theory based methods. Reliance upon a single theory of teaching has been criticized because the use of a limited number of techniques can become mechanic. Eclectic approach is a useful method of teaching languages in a comprehensive way because it integrates all methods, approaches and techniques and applies a certain method, approach or technique as it applies to a given classroom environment. Though it is considered the best approach in second or foreign language teaching, eclectic approach has disadvantages too. However, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. Rao (2018) underlines the fact that the approach is widely accepted and used by teachers to create a dynamic environment in the classroom. According to Richards (2019), it is a problem-based approach to teaching that is based on the following principles: (i) What particular problem do my learners encounter in mastering this aspect of language or language use? (ii) What procedures can I make use of from available methods and approaches that could be used to address this problem?
THE USE OF ECLECTIC APPROACH IN THE TEACHING OF A FOREIGN OR SECOND LANGUAGE

Through the eclectic approach, teachers can integrate all methods, approaches and techniques suitable to a given classroom environment. For example, grammar can be taught in the context of eclecticism. A language can be spoken or written accurately by using grammatical rules properly. Grammar is nothing but a set of rules used in making sentences and arranging phrases and clauses in order for framing sentences reasonably and meaningfully. Eclectic approach can be used in teaching grammar, particularly in combining sentences, separating sentences, identifying pronouns and their antecedents, words and their synonyms and prepositional phrases, focusing on specific features of the language pertinent to learners’ contextual needs. Audio-lingual method can be employed in the teaching of grammar through mimicking, memorization, drill exercises and repetition. Rao (2018) discloses that the grammar lessons used in the eclectic approach must be entertaining and educative. While teaching grammar, the approach revolves around a communicative and interactive methodology. In the teaching of grammar, the eclectic approach focuses on the four language skills, viz, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Eclectic approach is a useful approach in teaching grammar in French language by employing identified techniques and methods.

In the eclectic approach, the French language teacher pays attention to vocabulary and makes the students learn the vocabulary in a systematic way and understand the contextual meaning. In teaching vocabulary, the French teacher follows three important guidelines as suggested by Rao (2018). Firstly, he tries to make the students understand the vocabulary in context. Secondly, he tries to manage the translating technique and thirdly, he develops a strategy among the students to guess or extract the meaning of words. Methods of teaching vocabulary through eclectic communicative language teaching methodologies approach abound. Among them are images, real objects, demonstration, drawings, translation, words and their opposites, web technology such as Pinterest and video, etc.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE CHOICE OF A METHOD IN THE TEACHING OF A SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE

The determining factors in the choice of a method include: the learner, objectives, class size, time allotment, teacher, school equipment and facilities according to Mangliwan (2013) and Sabadisto (2019). The learner is the first to consider when choosing a method. The characteristics and nature of the learner such as age, language level (in French: niveau débutant, intermédiaire et avancée), learning style, aptitude, objective for learning (instrumental or integrative), socio-cultural background and the learning style should therefore be put into consideration always. The expected outcome of the lesson also dictates the strategy to be used. It must be one that will ensure full achievement of set objectives. Furthermore, the size of the
class will help the teacher to know the quantity of materials to bring to the class. Usually, the
teaching and the control of a large class is a problem. Time allotment is also very crucial in the
choice of a method. The teaching of French as a second or foreign language in an environment
where it is not spoken requires a lot of time, at least four periods a week. Another factor is the
school equipment and facilities. The availability of instructional materials, devices and
technologies needed should be considered for the lack of them will hamper the achievement of
the target. In addition, the teacher’s style, academic preparation, skills, interest and abilities are
also points of consideration. It is important that the teacher effectively executes the
method/strategy of his/her choice to ensure success of learning.

For Ansin in Gunduz (2016), it is not possible to speak of the existence of one ideal
single method. The most distinctive criterion in selecting a method is the issue of the purpose
of teaching the language. For example, there are differences in the methods that are used to
teach languages in primary schools and secondary schools. The use of “body language” is
emphasized in primary schools. Mimics, gestures, pictures, repetitions etc. i.e. “the actual”
factor comes to the forefront at this point. In secondary schools, on the other hand,
“understanding” and “explaining” are carried out by sticking to one single resource, and
generally sample dialogues are made use of in recordings. For this reason, “functionality” is
the basic principle in foreign language teaching. After the teacher has an understanding of the
premises on which he/she should select and use the methods, he proceeds to the study of the
language acquisition.

Despite the enormous research and emphasis on the use of communicative language
teaching methodologies, many Nigerian teachers are yet to implement the approach in their
lessons. Classroom experience and observation show the following as factors affecting the
teacher’s method in the teaching of French language. They include: Teachers’ training; short
falls in recommended textbooks; teaching for examination; large classes; congested classrooms
with no space to practice eclectic communicative and cultural activities; lack of the use of
authentic materials such as audio-visual and multimedia materials; teachers’ continuous use of
the traditional method.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Teachers of French should be trained in the use of eclectic and modern methods.
2. French teachers should move away from the use of traditional method to the eclectic
   approach.
3. To keep abreast with the modern methods of teaching French language, teachers should
give themselves to reading widely and should be provided with opportunities for
   constant research on the teaching of the language.
4. While audio-visual materials should be provided for the teachers by the school, teachers should be creative and improvise teaching materials.

5. Finally, the use of communicative language approaches requires time and the employment of more French teachers in order to reduce school workload and therefore enable the teachers devote enough time to prepare to teach the students.

CONCLUSION

Many methods of language teaching abound, none of which is totally effective or totally ineffective. Because of the dynamism of foreign/second language teaching, eclecticism or the eclectic approach to language teaching is advocated. Drawing from various literature, the eclectic approach subsumes all the other approaches, applying specific methods or approaches to specific area(s) of language teaching as found suitable.

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