Challenges and solutions to use of Task-Based Approach in teaching and learning French composition Writing in Secondary Schools in Nairobi City County (Kenya)

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Résumé :L'enseignement des langues ne doit pas être principalement basé sur une méthode plutôt que sur un ensemble de principes et de procédures qui reposent sur les compétences de l'enseignant. L'expérience pratique, enrichie par la recherche, la théorie et la pratique pertinentes pour l'apprentissage de n'importe quel sujet jouent un role important de l'acquisition des langues. Les méthodes sont conditionnées par la philosophie pédagogique, les approches sur la nature du langage et comment la langue peut être enseignée et apprise ainsi que les interactions en classe. En Inde, Prabhu (1987) a développé le projet de Bangalore qui apporte des contributions pratiques à l'approche basée sur les tâches (TBA en anglais). Le but de cette étude était d'explorer les défis et proposer des solutions possibles à cette approche dans l'enseignement et l'apprentissage du français en tant que langue étrangère au Kenya. L'étude a été réalisée dans le comté de Nairobi, où huit (8) écoles secondaires, 8 enseignants de français de la troisième année et cent vingt-quatre (124) apprenants de la troisième année ont constitué l'échantillon étudié. Un modèle de recherche quasi-expérimental a été utilisé. Des questionnaires, qui ont été affinés grâce à une étude pilote ont été utilisés pour collecter des données. L'étude a révélé que les TBA avaient des difficultés à travailler par paires pour produire un résultat final qui impliquait une forme et un contenu manquant d'authenticité et de pertinence pour les tâches du monde réel et le temps de 40 minutes alloué à l'enseignement était limité. Tous les enseignants ont suggéré que l'approche devrait être utilisée avec d'autres méthodes et plus de temps devrait être alloué à l'enseignement et à l'apprentissage du français en utilisant l'approche par tâches.

Mots-clés : Enseignement du français au Kenya, approche par tâches, problèmes et solutions

Abstract: French is an official language in 29 countries in the world and it is shared by 84 countries for official and teaching purposes. Around 300 million people speak French making it to be ranked the 5th most spoken language globally behind Chinese, English, Spanish and Arabic. Increasing globalization has led to a need for people in the workforce who can communicate in multiple languages in areas such as education, tourism, science, trade, international relations and technology. Approaches of teaching and learning play a major role in the promotion of any language. The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges of and establish possible solutions to Task-Based Approach (TBA) in teaching and learning French as a foreign language. The study was carried out in Nairobi City County where eight (8) secondary school teachers of French in Form three and one hundred and twenty-four (124) Form three students formed the study sample. A quasi-experimental research design was used. Questionnaires, which were refined through

a pilot study were used to collect data. The study found out that TBA had the challenges of working in pairs to produce a final product which involved form and content lacked authenticity and relevance to real world tasks and the 40-minute time allocated to teaching was limited. All the teachers suggested that TBA should be used with other methods and more time should be allocated to the teaching and learning of French.

Keywords: Challenges, solutions, Task-Based approach, teaching, time

1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to establish the challenges of Task-Based Approach (TBA) in the teaching and learning of French composition writing in Kenya secondary schools. The study also looked at the solutions to these challenges that would make TBA and effective method in teaching French. Although TBA is not officially used in Kenya, the sampled teachers of French went through TBA training and were expected to use this approach in teaching students in the third year of study at secondary school. This is the category that formed the experimental group. The research contains background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, methodology and findings of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Task-Based Approach (TBA) was an outcome of the communicative language teaching which creates a free instructional environment in which learners and teachers work together and collaborate in a relaxed atmosphere. Branden (2006) defines TBA as an approach to language education in which learners are given functional tasks that invite them to focus primarily on meaning, exchange and use of language for real-life, non-linguistic purposes.

According to Larson (2001), in TBA, teachers ask learners to perform meaningful tasks that resemble authentic real-life situations using the target language rather than completing simple language questions or vocabulary. Leaver & Kaplan (2004) assessed the benefits of TBA which included : curriculum flexibility, natural correction of error, high proficiency, greater motivation, risk taking and increased student satisfaction.

Writing in French as foreign language in Kenya is difficult and therefore requires extra skills. On the other hand, although writing is vital in the acquisition of any language, teachers and learners seem reluctant to focus on composition writing because it requires special effort.

The Malaysian communication syllabus (1978) and the Bangalore Project (1987) were the two early applications of the task-based approach. Several theories have been applied to support Task-Based Approach. The Piaget Theory of Cognitive development (Piaget, 1936) involves fluency and accuracy in teaching. The socio-cultural theory concerns the external activities that learners participate in as the main source of mental development (Vygosky, 1987). The Engestrom Theory (1987) on which this study was based has three main elements ; subject, object and outcome.

In Kenya, TBA is recommended for use in the CBC designs but not yet in secondary school. However, half of the sampled teachers of French were trained in TBA and

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were used for the experimental group. The other half was not trained in TBA and were used as the control group. One of the National goals of education is to give learners access to written materials. The question here is if there are enough resource materials available for use with the TBA. There is increasing presence of French language in the Kenyan society. Therefore, it is vital that the kind of methodology used in teaching should prepare learners to access written materials in French. According to the Basic Education Sector Report (2012), the Task-Force on the re-alignment of the Education sector to the constitution was formed in 2011 to realign the education with the constitution 2010 and Vision 2030. The target of education was to improve the quality of education by use of appropriate methods so that measurable learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy, scientific and communication skills are recognized. The seven competencies in the Competency Based Curriculum in Kenya corroborate with the Task-Based Approach.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Learning French gives one the pleasure of learning a beautiful, rich, melodious language that is often called the language of love. Task-Based approach is important in teaching and learning writing in Kenya as the learner is the social actor while the teacher is a facilitator. However, this approach has challenges that need to be addressed for it to be effective. Iveson (2015) in a research on challenges of TBA identified the following challenges ; participation of learner was low, maintaining learner engagement and meaningful contribution was low and focus was mainly on form. Although the above study looked at challenges of TBA, its main focus was on online and blended learning contexts China. The present study investigated challenges of TBA in teaching and learning French in Kenya.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were ;

i) To establish the challenges of TBA in Kenya secondary schools

ii) To identify the solutions to the challenges.

1.4 Research Questions

i) What are the challenges of using TBA in teaching French composition writing ?

ii) How can the challenges identified be solved ?

2 Review of related literature

In Kenya, Ayieko (2021) in a research on Task-Based vocabulary teaching found out that there was a significant difference in the Vat scores of students based on pre-test and post-test on the experimental group taught using TBA unlike the control group which was taught using conventional approaches. Although there was improvement on the scores, it was clear that one of the challenges of TBA was how to organize the task stages by Willis (2011)

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Chokah (2013) in a study in Kenya noted that there is a challenge of balancing between academic and professional training because a half-baked teacher will lead to poorly taught learners who later become poor teachers. Poor mastery of content, lack of confidence and bad communication skills may lead to a negative attitude in both learners and teachers using the task-based approach.

Adendorff (2014) of Stellenbosch University in South Africa carried out an explorative study using questionnaires and interviews on the Task-Based Approach. Results showed that students enjoyed the task-based activities and that the gap between the student's knowledge and the new knowledge was mainly the vocabulary for communication. This study identified that use of Afrikaans as a major challenge in using TBA.

Littlewood (2017), in East Asia (South Korea & Hong Kong), observed that TBA creates problems of classroom management, learners avoid using English as they use other languages, there is minimal demand on language competences, incompatibility with educational assessment demands and conflict with educational values and traditions. In addition, students had difficulties in mother tongue interference, inconsistent use of tenses and methods used by teachers. As a result, East Asia adapted and integrated the new ideas of TBA to suit their own situation as there was need for a context approach. Unlike the above study whose focus was challenges of TBA in East Asia, the present study focused on challenges and teachers suggested ways on how TBA can be improved in order to suit the Kenya context.

Altamirano (2018) in a study on challenges for implementation of TBA in state secondary schools identified the following challenges in the context of Argentina. These were ; definition of tasks in policy guidelines, teacher and learner roles and practical issues. It was observed that learners may not be accustomed to some demands like use of certain linguistic forms they may not be proficient in. Additionally, some contextual factors made application of TBA difficult in a classroom context.

3 Methodology

A Quasi-experimental design was used for the present study. Quasi experiments are studies that aim to evaluate interventions but do not use randomization. This design was appropriate for the research because the aim was to demonstrate causality between an intervention and an outcome. In this study, there were two groups : Experimental and Control. The experimental group was exposed to the treatment which was teaching for 6 weeks using TBA. The control group was taught for 6 weeks using conventional methods. This design was chosen because it was more generalized and had a better external validity than randomized controlled trials or cluster randomized trials.

3.1 Sampling

Stratified sampling was used to select the schools in order to cater for each school type that is ; Boys/Girls/Mixed/Private/Public/National/Extra-County/County/Sub-County.

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Purposive sampling was used to choose the eight schools to include all the categories of schools, that was ; Public, Private, Girls, Boys and Mixed school. For schools that had more than one teacher of French, the form three teacher was used for the study. Form three was chosen purposively because at this level, they have selected French as one of their examinable subjects and it is assumed that they have mastered sufficient vocabulary to write a composition.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments

The questionnaire provided qualitative both and quantitative data. Qualitative data provided by the questionnaire was the descriptive and conceptual findings which included perceptions towards TBA. While quantitative data was data expressing a certain quantity, amount or range

The questionnaire to the teachers was also used to address the fifth objective which was to explore the challenges of TBA. They were required to tick on the nine (9) challenges of TBA. These challenges were given as follows : lack of proper training, lack of French language proficiency, difficulty in assessing learners task-based performance, learners are not used to TBA, content in text books not in line with TBA, limited time, lack of appropriate resources, laziness during group-work and learners who tend to speak their native language. In addition, teachers were asked to suggest possible solutions to these challenges.

3.3 Validity and reliability of instruments

To validate the learners' and teachers' questionnaire, pilot study was used to correct any anomalies or misinterpretation. For face validity, experts and supervisors looked at the items on the questionnaire and agreed that it was a valid measure of the concept which was being measured just on the face of it. That meant that they were evaluating whether each of the measuring items matched any given conceptual domain of the item.

The researcher marked the test to make the results more reliable compared to if each teacher would have marked for his students.

To explore the challenges of TBA in French composition writing, data was analyzed using simple percentage and narration. Data was then presented in frequency tables, bar graphs and pie charts.

4 Discussion and interpretatin of findings

This study was interested in finding out the challenges of the Task- Based approach of teaching and learning in French composition writing. It was also important to know how these challenges could be addressed and therefore render TBA effective in teaching and learning French.

4.1 Challenges of TBA

According to the findings, all the four (4) sampled teachers identified nine major challenges of TBA and these challenges were ranked from number 1 to 9 with number

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one showing the most common challenge encountered by all the teachers. Data were collected, analyzed and presented in Table 1 which shows the challenges of TBA in ranks.

Challenges	Rank
Lack of training in TBA	8
Limited language proficiency	2
Unavailability of resources	4
Difficulty in assessing learners	7
Large class size	9
Lazy students during group-work	6
Learners tend to speak their native language	5
Limited time	1
Content not in line with TBA	3

Tab. 1 : Challenges of using TBA in ranks

Table 1 shows that the challenge number one to the effective use of TBA was limited time. All the 4 teachers (100%) teachers felt that the 40-minute lesson was not enough to effectively teach composition writing using the steps provided. This, according to the teachers was attributed to the fact that each student had to carry out a task at each level. Task based learning being a learner- centered approach, each student had to be involved in tasks that would motivate him to learn the French language in order to improve on his composition writing skills. Moreover, three of the teachers reported that they allowed the students to choose the resource materials as recommended in TBA. This activity according to the teachers consumed a lot of time even before they could embark on real teaching. Teachers were advised to prepare just enough content for the 40 minutes and not to hurry over the content in order to achieve the objective of teaching. This finding corroborates with the study by Boakye (2017) on challenges of newly qualified teachers who found it hard to complete the lesson they had prepared in the scheduled time.

Limited language proficiency was ranked number 2 among the challenges of TBA in the teaching and learning of French composition writing by all the 4 teachers in the experimental group. It was clear that learners were expected to write in French and yet their accuracy and fluency (proficiency) was not yet fully acquired. This finding corroborates with Altamirano (2018) where learners may not be accustomed to some demands like use of certain linguistic forms they may not be proficient in. However, it was necessary for the learner to have proficiency in the topic of the composition as it had been covered in the previous years' syllabus.

All the teachers (4) reported that the content in text books was not in line with TBA, a challenge that was ranked number 3. Although the ministry had recommended four text books : , , and the study showed that only was used by all the 4 teachers. This text book had many tasks that would help in teaching and learning of all the language skills. It was necessary for the content in the other 3 books to be reviewed in line with TBA.

Unavailability of resources on TBA was another challenge that was ranked number 4 by all the teachers. All the teachers felt that evaluation tools and learning and teaching resources were not easily available. Teachers and learners found it hard to

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access material relevant to the Kenyan context in order to use the TBA in French language acquisition. They resorted to improvisation which consumed most of the teaching and learning time. Teachers were encouraged to use improve on the locally available resources and online resources in order to curb this challenge.

Learners tend to speak their native language was ranked number 5 as a challenge in TBA by this study. This challenge, according to the teachers was evidenced during group work where learners reported that they lacked the vocabulary to express themselves during discussions. This finding was in line with Angriani (2014) which states that the main challenge of using TBA is that students resort to communicating in the first language. Teachers were advised to encourage students to aim at using the target language in the classroom during group discussions.

Lazy students who did not want to participate in group-work was another challenge ranked number 6 by all the teachers. It was noted that group discussions were dominated by a few learners who did not give chance to the others to express their view. Two teachers (2) out of four (4) reported that although chance was given to all learners to participate in group activities, some of the learners were shy or lacked what to say. Teachers were encouraged to give the group activities according to the ability of each group to ensure all learners were active in their various groups.

The challenge that was ranked number 7 out of 9 was on the assessment of learners in TBA. All the teachers felt that assessment tools were not easily available and so they had to come up with their own tools of assessment. It was also clear from the teacher that learners were not genuine when doing auto-evaluation. Learners could easily cheat that they were able to carry out certain tasks but when asked a question on how to do them, they could not answer the question. On the other hand, they could easily carry out tasks where they had indicated that they were unable to perform them.

The findings showed that lack of training was ranked number 8 out of 9 as a challenge of teaching using TBA. 3 out of the 4 teachers in the experimental group had already undertaken training in TBA before the training done by the researcher. However, they had only been trained twice in the TBA approach. One of the teachers was attending this training for the first time. According to Keya (200), it was concluded that lack of training for teachers may influence their teaching. The study recommended training of teachers twice a year.

According to the findings, the least challenge faced by teachers when using TBA in teaching writing was large classes which was ranked number 9 out of 9. The highest class according to the findings had thirty-three students while the lowest class had five students. These were very small classes compared to Business studies which had almost two hundred students in some schools. Infact, the low enrollment in French classes was a challenge because they could not engage in effective group-work. All the teachers reported that most students preferred to go for other subjects which are blocked with French like Business studies, computer, Art, Agriculture or Arabic. Three (3) out of four (4) reported that students felt that these other subjects were much easier than French and they could easily score grade 'A'. In addition, one (1)

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teacher out of four (4) reported that students preferred studying French at Alliance Française after sitting for their KCSE because the language needed a lot of time and concentration to comprehend it. Teachers were advised to use more motivating methods like songs, poems, projects and games in order to make learning of French easier so that the number of students opting for the subject could increase. This finding was in line with the KNEC report of 2013 which established that out of the 446,696 candidates who sat KCSE, only 2,827 (0.63 %) were French students.

The students were also required to identify the challenges of TBA. They were supposed to tick on the four challenges provided as ; lack of relevant vocabulary, noise-making in the classroom, use of mother tongue and lack of instructional resources. From the findings, a total of 44 out 60 (73%) students identified lack of relevant vocabulary as a major challenge. This is because, at the last stage of language focus in Willis (2011) structure of TBA lesson plan, they were expected to write an accurate and fluent report on how they had carried out tasks. This study found out that report writing as a method of teaching was least used in the teaching and learning of composition writing. Teachers were encouraged to teach students how to write reports with proficiency in order to combat this challenge when using TBA.

The study revealed that 10 learners out of 60 (16%) reported that lack of vocabulary was a challenge when using TBA. They reported that they did not have sufficient vocabulary in French to write the report on the tasks they had performed. Learners are encouraged to use the simple words they have learnt in class to write simple reports.

Four (4) out of 60 students identified noise making as another challenge of TBA. This might have been as a result of group activities that make the classes noisy. According to the learners, when they are engaged in group activities, it becomes hard for the teacher to manage the class. However, teachers had been trained on class management and so they needed to improve on their management skills.

The least challenge according to the students was use of mother tongue. Only two (2) students out of 60 (3%) felt that use of mother tongue was a challenge of TBA. This finding was contrary to Littlewood (2017) who identified mother tongue as a main challenge in TBA. This might be because in Kenya, there are 43 dialects and Nairobi being the capital city may not have only one ethnic group. Student may use the national language, Kiswahili or English, which is the language of instruction but not mother tongue. Teachers were encouraged to embrace other languages as this is a major component of TBA.

4.2 Teachers' Suggestions on improvement of TBA.

The sampled teachers were asked to suggest solutions to the challenges of using TBA in teaching French quality composition writing. This information was important because finding solutions to

the challenges would mean that TBA would be improved to make it an effective method of teaching and learning quality writing in Kenya secondary schools. The

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findings are shown in Figure 1 which shows the suggestions given by teachers on how TBA can be improved.

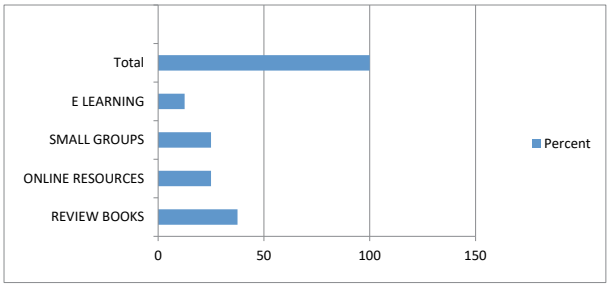


FIG. 1 : Suggestions on how TBA can be improved.

Figure 1 shows that all the teachers (4) suggested review of books to suit TBA. This may be attributed to the fact that although 4 books have been recommended for use by KICD, only Entre Copains 3 is structured towards TBA. Three (3) teachers out of 4 (75%) suggested that the existing resources be reviewed to suit TBA teaching and learning. Teachers were advised to use on-line resources as most of them have been updated to incorporate Task-Based teaching and learning. According to Ortiz (2006), TBA resources have to be multidimensional, that is, be presented in the form of a table with the following categories : linguistic skills, communicative objectives which are both cultural and intercultural, activities and modalities of executing them, support materials and topics. A minority, 1 out of 4 teachers (25%) suggested introduction of e-learning while another 2 out of 4 teachers (50%) suggested the use of small groups and on-line resources.

5 Conclusion

The research found all the four sampled teachers (100%) identified that limited time was a major challenge in using TBA. All the four sampled teachers also stated that lack of sufficient training, limited language proficiency and difficulty in assessment were major challenges of TBA in teaching quality writing skills. As concerns suggestions on how to improve Task-Based Learning and Teaching, the teachers reported that there was need to review text books. This was true because although as a text book had content which could be taught using TBA, most of the text books' content was not oriented towards TBA.

5.1 Recommendations

In order to curb the challenge of time constraint, the study recommended that French learning and teaching should be allocated five hours instead of three hours per week. This will ensure that all the steps of a TBA lesson structure (Willis, 2011) are followed when preparing and teaching writing in French lessons.

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The syllabus of teachers of French at the university/college should be structured towards the principles and procedures of TBA so that when teachers start teaching, they can effectively use TBA in teaching quality writing in French.

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