



French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in secondary schools in Lesotho

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RÉSUMÉ - ABSTRACT

Le français, en tant que principale langue étrangère après l'anglais, contribue de manière significative au développement socio-économique du Lesotho. La politique du curriculum et de l'évaluation (CAP) de 2009 a réintroduit le français dans les écoles secondaires afin de renforcer la participation régionale et mondiale des Basotho. Cette étude examine l'efficacité de la pédagogie communicative dans l'enseignement du français langue étrangère (FLE) au Lesotho. S'appuyant sur la théorie constructiviste et adoptant un paradigme interprétatif, elle utilise une approche qualitative basée sur la recherche-action participative. Les données ont été recueillies auprès des élèves de S2A d'une école secondaire située à Roma, une localité du Lesotho, par le biais de discussions de groupe et de questionnaires adressés aux enseignants de FLE. Les résultats montrent que la pédagogie communicative favorise l'engagement des élèves et renforce leur compétence linguistique, améliorant ainsi leurs performances en français. L'étude recommande d'intégrer les technologies pour enrichir davantage les environnements d'apprentissage linguistique communicatif.

French, as a major foreign language after English, significantly contributes to Lesotho's socio-economic development. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP) 2009 reintroduced French in secondary schools to strengthen Basotho's regional and global participation. This study examines the effectiveness of communicative pedagogy in teaching French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in Lesotho. Framed by constructivist theory and an interpretivist paradigm, it employs a qualitative, participatory action research design. Data were collected from S2A French learners at a secondary school in Roma, a locality in Lesotho, through focus group discussions and teacher questionnaires. Findings demonstrate that communicative pedagogy enhances student engagement and linguistic competence, improving overall performance in French. The study advocates for the integration of technology to further enrich communicative language learning environments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Lesotho, French can be traced as far as from 1833 after the arrival of the Paris Evangelical Mission Societies (P.E.M.S) (Gill, 1993). French was introduced formally in schools in Lesotho in 1968 by the Missionary called Adolphe Mabille (Gill, 1993). However, it seemed to be neglected by most schools since it was done in private schools and international schools (Manyawu, 2007). The ministry of Education and Training reintroduced French in 2009 in the secondary education (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009b).

The ministry highlights that it re-introduced French in the secondary curriculum in order to promote Basotho to not only participate regionally but also globally. It is evident that the ministry reintroduced for the benefit of the nation at large. In order for Basotho to participate, they need communicative skills in French. Communicative pedagogy is a teaching strategy that is learner centered and task-oriented language teaching practice. It enables interaction between a learner and a teacher. As a result, learners would easily acquire French skills that will enable the learner to communicate effectively. In consistent with the above assertion, Abrejo et al (2019) defines communicative pedagogy as a language teaching method through communication. This language teaching method is widely used as a language teaching method recently in the world. It encompasses of four linguistics skills, reading, writing, listening and mostly in speaking. As the name denotes, it is communicative pedagogy and its fundamental focus is communicative competence "*les compétences communicatives*" (Barasa, 2018).

More, communicative approach promotes student-centered learning by encouraging active participation and collaboration among learners (Chung, 2017). In this approach, students are given opportunities to express themselves creatively in French, leading to increased motivation and confidence in using the language both inside and outside the classroom. Based on this, it can be argued that this pedagogy may augment the performance of learners in French.

Additionally, Wangdai (2019) avers that it is through the communicative approach, students not only learn the language but also gain insights into French culture and society. In other words, by incorporating cultural elements into language lessons, teachers can broaden students' understanding of the Francophone world, fostering intercultural competence and appreciation for diversity.

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Broader research has been done on communicative pedagogy in the teaching and learning of languages. In relation to the studies conducted on the same phenomenon, the identified gaps are that, many studies have a gap on the long term effect. This implies that, they do not delve more on the long-term impact of communicative pedagogy on learner's language proficiency.

In addition, it is not clear on how teacher training institutions prepare student teachers to implement communicative pedagogy in a French classroom in the context of Lesotho. Therefore, it is essential to close a gap and shed light on how best can communicative pedagogy be used to teach French as a Foreign Language in Lesotho secondary education.

Moreover, Akanbi and Ndidi (2020) conducted a study in two secondary schools in Nigeria and data was collected through classroom observations, student's achievement marks and questionnaire for teachers. The study recommends that to teach FFL, communicative approach be used as it enhances learners' communicative competence in French.

To add more, the study further shed light that in using communicative approach, learner's confidence is build which will help students to develop their linguistic skills faster. It is further argued that, communicative approach gives priority to listening and speaking skills over reading and writing

skills. This qualitative study was done in Nigeria, and data was collected using classroom observations and questionnaires, so this study will undergo under qualitative study, but will utilize focus group discussions with learners and questionnaire with teacher of French in order to get in depth information about the usage of communicative pedagogy.

In Lesotho, students learning French have a practice in a classroom whereas it is imperative that the process of skills acquisition in Foreign languages needs one to be in an environment that allows total immersion (Barasa, 2018). That is to say, where learners get opportunities to use French in various situations. However, one may argue that learners are not fully exposed to total linguistic immersion, as a result, communicative approach would be of great didactic help. So that the performances of French learners in Lesotho can be improved in all linguistic skills.

The study is underpinned by constructivism theory developed by John Dewey. This theory believes that knowledge is constructed from passed experiences. Golder (2018) propounds that constructivism is the theory that explicates how knowledge is acquired. He further argues that this theory promotes learner participation in the learning and teaching through learner centred class. Therefore, this theory underpins this study by its principles.

Constructivism advocates for learner centered teaching and learning (Jabeen, 2016). This principle aligns with communicative pedagogy principle that denotes that learners are engaged in the learning process through discussions, activities and hands on experiences (Wambach, 2017) This principle is applicable in this study. It fosters participation and engagement of learners in FFL classroom. I the researcher will scaffold learners to communicate in French. Therefore, it is evident that learners will be interactive and may communicate in French. This aligns with one of the principles of communicative pedagogy that aims and teaching language through communication. Its main focus is on communication skills.

Furthermore, constructivism promotes collaborative work (Matee, 2019). This principle shows that learners work together in groups or in pairs. They exchange ideas and communication skills in French are developed. Therefore, the principles of constructivism underpin this study as they help a research to respond to the research questions.

In conclusion, the studies conducted in communicative approach shows that it enhances the communication skills. However, the participants vary and some studies conducted mixed method approach. Which I believe in this study I will employ qualitative research approach to get the perceptions and in sights of using communicative pedagogy. The study concentrates on the usage of communicative pedagogy in the teaching and learning of French as a Foreign Language in the context of Lesotho.

Additionally, some studies that were conducted on communicative pedagogy were in the context where French is a second language. In line with this, Savignon (2019) confirms that, implementing the communicative approach in teaching French as a second language leads to significant improvements in learners' communicative competence. Therefore, the present study explores the usage of communicative pedagogy to teach French as a Foreign Language in Lesotho context. Seeking to respond to the following research questions;

1. What are the benefits of communicative pedagogy in teaching and learning of French as a Foreign Language in Secondary Schools?
2. How does usage of Communicative pedagogy enhance learner's skills in French?
3. What are the challenges of using communicative pedagogy to teach French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in Secondary Schools in Lesotho?

2. METHOD

This study has adopted qualitative research approach. Qualitative research approach is a research method that seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of a human behaviour, experiences and motivations as well as interaction (Lephooi, 2021). Qualitative research approach is utilized because it allows a researcher to delve deeply into the subject matter. Also using qualitative method enables the researcher to explore how communicative pedagogy is being used in the teaching and learning of French in secondary schools in Lesotho (Cresswell, 2018). Additionally, it is argued that this approach emphasizes the understanding of the phenomena within the natural setting. Therefore, it allows to provide detailed insights, perspectives and contextual nuances. It furnishes with rich and detailed data.

The study is underpinned by participatory action research. Cornish (2023) defines Participatory Action Research as the type of action research that includes the participation of the people experiencing issues, who take action to make an emancipatory social change by conducting a systematic research to generate new knowledge. In the context of this study, a researcher goes to the classroom to teach FFL using communicative pedagogy. The participatory action research went under three stages namely; 1. define problem, action, observe, reflect 2. Redefine, redesign action, observe and reflect, 3. Redefine problem, redesign action, observe and reflect extracted from (Cornish, 2023).

The study used two data generation tools namely, focus group discussions with learners and questionnaire with teachers of French as a Foreign Language.

2.1. Focus group discussions with learners

Focus group discussion is a data collection method where groups of individuals are assembled for the discussion of the specific topic, from personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of participants through the interactions (Ochieng et al., 2018). S2A class of French as a Foreign language that consist of 35 students, were divided into five (5) groups of seven (7) members. Cresswell (2018) propounds that focus group discussions provide with rich and in-depth insights. Therefore, I am of the view in this study, focus group discussions will give a researcher detailed and rich information since participants have the freedom to express their opinions, emotions and views.

2.2. Questionnaire with teachers of French as Foreign Language

Teachers of French as foreign language were given open ended questions; it was total number of eight (8) teachers of FFL. According to (Fowler, 2014) questionnaire is a set of written or verbal questions used to gather information from respondents. It is designed to systematically collect data on specific variables of interest for research. In this study, it was used to reveal the experiences, opinions and narratives about the usage of communicative pedagogy to teach French as Foreign Language. This will provide with rich data as the respondents have greater confidence because of their anonymity. Similarly, the respondents have an ample time to respond, thus, rich and detailed data may be obtained. The total number of questionnaire to French teachers was eight (8).

Ethics is defined as moral principles of guiding conduct, which are held by a group or by a professional" (Govil, 2016). He further states that ethical considerations form an essential part of the research. As a result, participants have to be aware of the potential harm, also that there is transparency and they are kept anonymous. According to (Dooly et.al, 2017), a researcher must think of the effects of the study that might have a harm on participants. He further argues that, there must be high confidentiality, the participant should be told about the topic or the subject that they

are to be interrogated with. The researcher has to make sure that the participants are aware that they can withdraw at any time they wish to.

For this study, I got a letter from the faculty of Education that I presented to the school head teacher and it was approved. I informed the participants about the study, as well as the duration of the research. In addition, I did shed the light to the participants that there is confidentiality and anonymity. I told participants that they can withdraw at any time that they wish to. Furthermore, their safety will be prioritized. Turnitin was used to check plagiarism and the study used authentic that was collected from the participants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In S2A French as a Foreign Language class in a certain High school at Roma, I employed communicative pedagogy in the teaching and learning for the period of six weeks, I made focus group discussions with learners. I asked learners about the benefits of the teaching method that their teacher is using. Equally so, I asked them about whether the method enhances their participation and engagement in French class or not. They responded and their responses shown in the figures below.

Figure 1. Responses of learners in communicative pedagogy enhance engagement in the teaching and learning of FFL

Does communicative approach promote learners engagement in FFL class?
Participant A: Yes
Participant B: tasks and activities done in a class promote learners engagement with a teacher and with other learners
Participant C: Tasks and activities done in a class promote learners engagement with a teacher and with other learners
Participant B: Yes! It does.
Participant C: Yes, it promotes engagement by making lessons interactive and relevant to real-life contexts.
Participant D: It does because it gives them an autonomy in their own learning and that promote powerful discussions and active participation.

The tables above highlights that communicative pedagogy augments the participation and engagement of learners with a teacher and other learners. Among others response, it is stated in table 1 that it makes lessons interactives and relevant to real life contexts. Equally so, it is evident that communicative approach foster learners' engagement and participation in the teaching and learning of FFL

Additionally, from the responses of the questionnaire with teachers of FFL, it is argued by teachers that there are various benefits of communicative pedagogy in the teaching and learning of French as a Foreign Language in a secondary school classroom. Among others, "it encourages student communication as it uses group activities". In support, (Savignon,2018) explains that communicative pedagogy promotes activities that include real communication and meaningful tasks.

More, this helps to address the second research question "How does usage of communicative pedagogy enhance learners' French skills?" Among others, it is stated from the figure that, tasks and activities in a French class promote learners' engagement with a teacher and other learners. Equally so,

a French teacher stated on the figure that communicative approach encapsulates using practical language scenarios instead of using grammar.

Figure 2. The advantages and benefits of the communicative approach, from focus group discussions with learners and a questionnaire with teachers of FFL

In your view, what are the advantages of communicative approach in the teaching and learning of French as a Foreign Language ?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To render learner's effective communicators of the French language.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced Communication Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This approach encourages active participation from students through group activities, role-plays, discussions, and interactive tasks. Such engagement fosters a deeper understanding of the language and culture, making learning more enjoyable and effective. Students not only learn the language but also gain insights into French-speaking cultures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced Communication Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This approach encourages active participation from students through group activities, role-plays, discussions, and interactive tasks. Such engagement fosters a deeper understanding of the language and culture, making learning more enjoyable and effective. Students not only learn the language but also gain insights into French-speaking cultures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicative approach serves the interests of all learners in the classroom.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Real-life communication skills. Increased student interaction. Focus on fluency over accuracy. Encourages active participation. Builds confidence in speaking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It provides a platform for one to practice speaking skills since it consists of speaking activities

The table above shows the responses that demonstrates that communicative pedagogy is beneficial in the teaching and learning of French as a Foreign language in secondary schools in Lesotho. Among others, participants stated that "there is real-life communication skills, increased student interaction, focus on fluency over accuracy" therefore, I conclude that communicative approach is essential.

Figure 3. Challenges of communicative pedagogy

What are the challenges of using a communicative approach in the teaching and learning of French as a Foreign Language?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited Time and Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large Class Sizes: Secondary school classes tend to be larger compared to primary or language learning-specific classes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementing communicative pedagogy effectively requires specialized training and ongoing support for teachers. In many cases, educators may not have received adequate training in this approach or may lack access to professional development opportunities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners are able to be fluent with FFL, but not with the accuracy of grammar.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires skilled teachers. Hard to manage in large classes. It can be difficult for beginners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It consumes a lot of time, especially when attending to every learner's special needs.

Table 3 demonstrate the responses of learners and teachers of FFL, a questionnaire with teachers and focus group discussions with learners. It is evident that there are some challenges in using

communicative pedagogy such as large classes. In Lesotho, most classrooms are largely populated as a result, usage of communicative approach becomes difficult. Again, one participant, stated that it consumes a lot of time because a teacher has to attend every learner.

3.1. Detailed data presentation per research question

3.1.1. *What are the benefits of communicative pedagogy in teaching and learning of French as a Foreign Language in Secondary Schools?*

This research question is answered using focus group discussions with learners and questionnaire with teachers of French as a Foreign Language. firstly, it was discovered that communicative pedagogy has various benefits for learners. From focus group discussions, learners indicated that the method enhances their communicative skills in French. This is in line with (Akanbi & Ndidi, 2020) in their study that was carried in two secondary schools. This study's findings show that communicative pedagogy develops the communicative competence of learners. The study was carried out in two secondary schools. Whereas in the present study it was carried out in one secondary school. Both studies yield the same findings.

More, to illustrate, a question asked to learners *"does the teaching method used by your teacher help you?"* most of learners in the focus group discussions said yes, out of 7 learners in a group, 0 said no. *"yes it allows us to gain French speaking skills due to the activities done in class by our teacher".* In essence, this shows that learners under this teaching approach benefit. It boosts their communication skills in French. This aligns with constructivism theory principle that states that; teaching and learning is centered on learners (Gold, 2018). That is to say, learners are active participants in the teaching and learning of French. They interact with other learners and a teacher using French (Jabeen, 2016).

Similarly, on the questionnaire with teachers of French as a Foreign Language, to a question *"what are the benefits of communicative pedagogy in the teaching and learning of FFL?"* Most responses demonstrated the various benefits of communicative pedagogy in the teaching and learning of French. Among others, one teacher said *"I think it is the instruction that encapsulate using practical language scenarios instead of using grammar to learn French language, so it allows for all language competencies."*

More so, the above assertion affirms that communicative pedagogy enhances learners' linguistic skills. (Jabeen, 2016) attest that in his findings, that communicative pedagogy augments learners' skills in a language.

3.1.2. *How does usage of Communicative pedagogy enhance learner's skills in French?*

With data from focus group discussions with learners and questionnaire with teachers of FFL. It became evident that learners who are taught using communicative pedagogy are active participants in the teaching and learning of French. To illustrate, in one group *"Does a teaching method used by your teacher enhance your participation and engagement in class?"* Most of the responses of learners indicated that this approach promotes participation in a French class.

Additionally, a learner's response was as follows, *"yes it enhances my participation. Now my level of communication has increased since our teacher used the current teaching method."* This demonstrates that communicative pedagogy enhances learner's participation in a French class. In line with this, Chung (2017) affirms that communicative pedagogy encourages active participation and collaboration among learners. Similarly, the prolific scholar and developer of communicative competence theory, Dell Hymes, confirms that communicative pedagogy builds

the communication skills of learners (Hymes, 1979). Therefore, it can be concluded that, the usage of communicative pedagogy in the teaching and learning of FFL promotes learners' participation and engagement.

3.1.3. What are the challenges of using communicative pedagogy to teach French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in Secondary Schools in Lesotho?

Data obtained from the focus group discussions and questionnaire with teachers of French depict that there are some challenges in using communicative pedagogy in the teaching and learning. Among others, teachers indicated that learners in classes are large. This implies that, the class will not be manageable. For instance, if they are doing tasks in pairs lot of time will be wasted in doing the presentations. Similarly, another teacher said *"it is difficult to ensure participation of all students, balancing accuracy with fluency and limited resources"*

The above transcription of some responses of teachers clearly illustrate that all students in a large class to participate may waste time for teaching and learning. Equally so, it seems like there is scarcity of French textbooks in secondary schools. As a result, this hinders the effective usage of communicative pedagogy.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the aim of the study was to explore the usage of communicative pedagogy to teach French as a Foreign language in secondary schools in secondary schools in Lesotho. The implementation of communicative pedagogy to teach French as a foreign language in secondary schools has shown significant benefits. By focusing on communication and interaction rather than rote memorization, students are better able to develop practical language skills and cultural understanding. This approach fosters a more engaging and dynamic learning environment, leading to increased motivation and proficiency in the target language. Through communicative pedagogy, students not only learn how to speak French but also how to use it effectively in real-life situations, preparing them for meaningful interactions in French-speaking contexts.

While communicative pedagogy is highly effective, its implementation may face challenges such as time constraints, curriculum alignment, teacher training, and assessment methods. Addressing these challenges requires careful planning, ongoing professional development for educators, collaboration among stakeholders, and continuous evaluation of student progress. Additionally, adapting communicative approaches to diverse learner needs and educational settings is essential for successful implementation

Overcrowded classrooms, teacher workload and lack of infrastructure in secondary schools in Lesotho may influence how communicative pedagogy is implemented and perceived by learners and teachers. That is, large class sizes might limit the opportunities of individual language practice and feedback, which are essential aspects of communicative language teaching. Similarly, another limitation relates to the availability and quality of resources necessary to implement communicative pedagogy effectively.

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