

Foreign language learning in Zambia: the French classroom experience

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ABSTRACT

Foreign language learning has been considered to be an added value to education attainment in every society. Despite its obvious advantages at country, institutional and personal levels, the teaching and learning of French in Zambia has not yielded the expected results. This has been so in spite of objectives and strategies put in place for a fruitful teaching/learning process. The scope of this paper does not include the obvious challenges faced at national or institutional level such as policy issues, lack of learning materials and many others, but focuses on overtime observations of students as they interact with the target language within the classroom setup in the acquisition of the four language skills. An analysis of several factors pertaining to the learners' individual and collective features could help us understand the challenges faced in teaching/learning and suggest ways to assist students achieve their goals. This analysis is meant to help the prospective learner to consider foreign language learning as a dynamic process; thus, learners should be proactive if they have to rise above those challenges.

Keywords: Foreign language, teaching and learning challenges, Zambian classroom experience, motivation. attitudes

INTRODUCTION

Over centuries, people have learnt foreign languages for various reasons. If this undertaking was a personal educational achievement to complement education in the beginning, various countries started institutionalizing foreign language learning for reasons such as translation/interpretation services, a vade mecum for secret missions and business, among others. It became part of the language policy, though it has remained solely for the elite in most countries.

Zambia prides itself with a few foreign languages as part of its language policy. Some of these languages have been incorporated in the educational curriculum. The major ones are French and Chinese. French was introduced in 1954 (Chishiba &

Mukuka, 2012) whereas Chinese was introduced a decade ago. Others are Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, and these are mostly taught in international schools.

It would be important to recall that Zambia has 73 languages and dialects, out of which seven (7) are called national official languages with English being the official language. Therefore, the Zambian learner experiences multilingualism on a daily basis, a situation which has an impact on education in general and on foreign language learning in particular as the latter occurs at a later stage in the educational system.

The classroom experience under this study spans a number of years of teaching various types of learners having different aspirations in different institutions. The focus, however, will be on students pursuing the programme of International Relations (IR) at Mulungushi

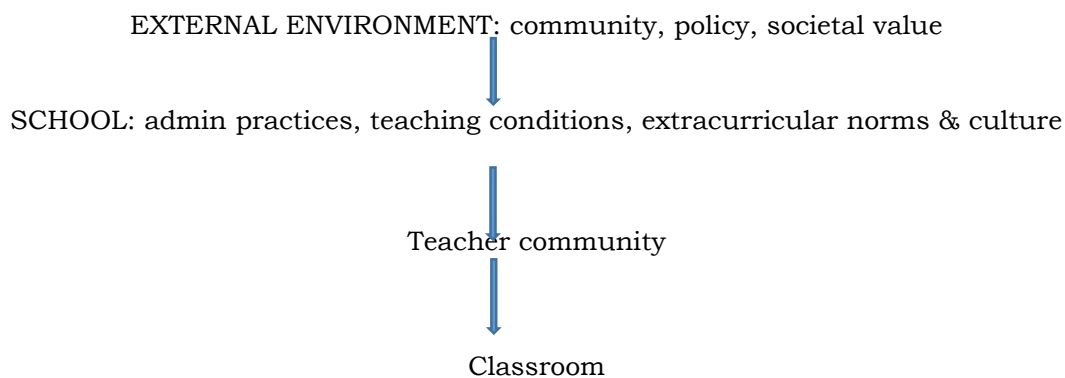
University in Kabwe, Central Province. The foreign language course, though an elective, is mandatory for these students. It starts at second year level and students are at liberty to choose between French and Chinese.

In a bid to analyse the French classroom experience, we will firstly look at the motivational factors in a less conducive environment to foreign language learning. We will then skim through some of the major challenges that the learner is faced with. Lastly, recommendations will be made in

order to not only encourage prospective learners to take up the challenge, but also to propose ways of providing support to the learning process.

THE CLASSROOM IN QUESTION

Any learning does not occur in isolation. It is a result of several interrelated structures or systems. The School Context Model by Bascia (2014, p. 6) displays these structures in a stratified manner as can be seen below:



The School Context theory as developed by Crick (2013) emphasizes ‘sub-systems’ of learners, teachers and leaders who directly or indirectly influence learning outcomes. In terms of the School Context Model or framework, classrooms, as settings for learning and teaching, are “nested” within teacher communities, which are in turn nested within schools. And the schools are nested in the wider community (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1999 cited in Crick et al., 2013). The Model suggests that what occurs beyond the classroom influences and is influenced by what occurs within the classroom. Both the Systems Theory Model and the School Context Model suggest that learners’ surroundings, including their home, school, church, neighborhood, culture and government have an influence on the teaching and learning outcomes (Crick et al., 2013).

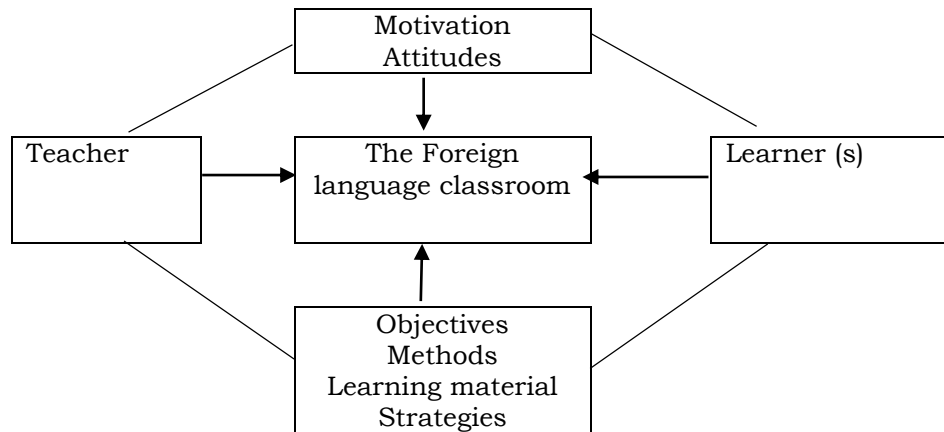
In addition, Huitt (2003) developed a framework from the perspective of the systems theory. The proposed framework is referred to as a transactional framework of the teaching/learning process, which clusters variables in four categories, i.e., [1] **context** (All those factors outside of the classroom that might influence teaching and learning), [2] **input** (Those qualities or

characteristics of teachers and students that they bring with them to the classroom experience), [3] **Classroom Processes** (Teacher and student behaviors in the classroom as well as some other variables such as classroom climate and teacher/student relationships) and, [4] **output** (Measures of student learning taken apart from the normal instructional process). Bascia (2014, p. 11) states the following classroom features which embed the physical and psychosocial characteristics of the classroom interactions:

- (a) Learning is linked to students’ lives*
- (b) A variety of different teaching methods are used*
- (c) Different learning styles are respected*
- (d) High expectations for all students*
- (e) Formative evaluations are used systematically*
- (f) Teachers set clear objectives, monitor progress, and provide feedback*
- (g) Opportunities for classroom participation*
- (h) Diversity and individual differences are respected*
- (i) Social and emotional learning is valued*
- (j) Positive student-teacher and student-student relationships*
- (k) Classroom management strategies are systematic*
- (l) Disciplinary strategies are consistent and non-coercive.”*

Having in mind all the variables of the teaching/learning process, our classroom interactions have been restricted to the

physical and psychosocial variables displayed in the following figure: -



Despite the relative homogeneity of the groups in question, the classroom features usually characterize the general atmosphere. These features include individual differences pertaining to students' learning aptitude, motivation, attitudes, strategies and the classroom set up as well:

(a) Only a few students have foreign language background from public or private institutions, but many do not have because of the unavailability of course offer in many secondary schools, or due to lack of seriousness on their part.¹ (b) Full time (FT) students are generally aged between 18 and 23, but Open Distance Learning (ODL) students are generally older. (c) The choice of the programme of study as well as of an elective under the foreign language course name is done by students themselves, by their parents, guardians in some cases, or is dictated by other circumstances. (d) Most of them have no idea about basic English grammar metalanguage such as subject, verb, object, adjective and pronoun to mention but a few. (e) The average number of students per class varies between 14 and 24. (f) The statutory learning hours are four per week, but can be increased upon agreement between the teacher and learners. (g) Finally, there is no specific classroom dedicated to the teaching/learning of French.

The targeted proficiency level to be attained at the end of the programme is B1, a level also referred to as threshold level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), an international standard for describing language ability on a six-point scale, from A1 for beginners to C2 for those who have mastered the language (Council of Europe, 2001). This entails that learners are expected to perform certain functions verbally or in writing when they are in environments where the target language is used. In simple terms, learners should be able to hold simple conversations to express their needs, be able to understand and read relatively short instructions or messages. In short, they should be able to communicate with native and non-native speakers of the language.

Our assessment practices are anchored on the CEFR evaluation system, which is balanced in terms of weight of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), each having a relative number of exercises, thus offering a fair and consistent evaluation of the learning since learners are differently endowed in terms of language skills.

According to statistics obtained from Alliance française of Lusaka in 2019, a lot of learners sitting for DELF-DALF exams usually reach B1 level, but few make it beyond this level as shown in the table below:

¹ As a matter of fact, French was offered in 150 centres across the country in its glorious years in the

1980s, but the offer has declined to less than 50 centres nowadays.¹(Chishiba, 2016)

Session	DELFDALF	Tout Examen	Inscrits	Présents	Admis	Inscrits/Présents	Présents/Admis
		A1	1 684	1 569	1 433	93,1%	91,33%
		A2	1 242	1 169	956	94,12%	81,78%
		B1	677	631	422	93,21%	66,88%
		B2	449	426	196	94,88%	46,01%
		C1	158	141	43	89,24%	30,50%
		C2	113	113	46	100%	40,71%
Total			4 323	4 049	3 096	93,66%	76,46%

Examens tout public avec thématique à orientation générale (Alliance française, 2019)

One would ask the question “Why are many learners stuck at proficiency level and cannot attain mastery level? Katongo (1981) cited in Chishiba & Mukuka (2012) asserts that a lot of effort and resources have been invested in the development of French in Zambia since independence. However, even after much language instruction and devotion to learning it, proficiency for many pupils and students remains low. These learners continue to display syntactic errors in French. Several factors relate to language learning such as intelligence, aptitude, age, personality, learning styles, attitudes and motivation. Due to lack of specific testing tools to measure factors such as intelligence, aptitude and personality, only observable factors have been considered.

KEY ISSUES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING (FLL)

From informal encounters with people who missed the opportunity of learning French in their youth days, many people in Zambia have expressed regret for not having taken the learning of French seriously; they allege that they were not told the importance and benefits of learning the language.² Most people realize the importance of FLL after setbacks in life such as trips to French speaking countries, or when they are pursuing careers with international organisations where multilingualism is required. Attempts to offer French and Chinese lessons to Mulungushi University community have failed due to lack of commitment by prospective learners.

² Foreign languages have been considered just like any other subject in the school curriculum and the situation has even worsened as its learning is discontinued at secondary school

The rationale for learning French at country level includes the following factors:

- Geographically, Zambia is at a confluence of the three major colonial languages of Africa, i.e., English, French and Portuguese. Business among African countries is poised to increase with the creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2019. Today, the Democratic Republic of Congo presents a huge market for exports for not only Zambia, but also the entire Southern African region, therefore the knowledge of the French language could enhance these business transactions.
- Zambia adheres to such international bodies as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), United Nations (UN), Southern Africa Development Committee (SADC), the Confederation of African Football (CAF), the Federation of International Football Association (FIFA), the Red Cross where French is a working language. IR students should prepare themselves for international careers.
- Introduced in the country in the 1960s and incorporated in the educational curriculum, French was offered in about 153 centres (public schools) across the country at its peak in the 1980s (Chishiba, 2016). It is also offered in private schools from kindergarten through to secondary school and in selected tertiary institutions of learning, at the Military Training Establishment of Zambia (MILTEZ) in Kabwe, Central Province of Zambia for peace keeping missions, and at the three Alliances françaises (Lusaka, Ndola and Livingstone). Even though the French

to pave way for other crosscutting issues such as entrepreneurship, environmental education, population education, HIV and AIDS, gender, human rights, etc. ZECF (2013).

language offer is in decline, especially in public schools, its importance cannot be overemphasized for institutions such as the Police Service, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Home Affairs (Immigration and Correctional Departments), the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism industry.

Despite the above mentioned reasons for learning the French language, it has been observed over the years that the Zambian classroom is influenced by psychosocial and linguistic challenges.

Psychosocial challenges

Some of the challenges that influence the learning process include beliefs, motivation, attitudes, aptitude, and many more that are not discussed in this study, such as personality, intelligence, learning styles.

2.1.1. Beliefs

Beliefs are facts or opinions that are accepted as true even if we do not have knowledge about them. An undertaking such as the learning of a language is often associated with myths due to its complex nature. Altan, M. X. (2006) states that

“Beliefs are commonly admitted myths about FLL. On the one hand, people all over the world seem to have common and fixed beliefs about how languages are learned. Every month it is possible to see an article or just some news on the best techniques for learning a foreign language, the right age to begin learning a foreign language, and the nature of the FLL process, especially during summer. In some news it is even admitted that language fluency can be obtained with very little effort in as little as three months of free time study! On the other hand, there is another group of people who believe that acquiring another language is a special “gift” that some people have and that most people do not have.”

Students who struggle with the language while others make good progress tend to consider themselves as lacking that special “gift” for languages and get discouraged.

There are also assertions that Latin group languages are ranked the easiest languages to learn for English speakers, the algorithm

being that both English and French are alphabetical languages and share the same sentence structure, a wide range of lexical items due to historical and technological factors. In spite of all this, getting the true and correct facts about foreign language learning is the “magical formula” because FLL is a relatively long process which requires dedication and resilience.

Motivation

Motivation in FLL is a complex phenomenon. It has been defined in terms of two factors: on the one hand, learners’ communicative needs, on the other, their attitudes towards the second language community (Lightbown & Spada. 2013). Dagnija Deimante in Laiveniece (2018, p. 20) asserts that motivation is also about believing one can influence one’s own learning.

Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972) cited in Lightbown & Spada (2013, p.87) were the first to introduce two types of motivation, i.e., **instrumental motivation** (wanting to learn a language because it will be useful for certain “instrumental” goals, such as getting a job, reading a foreign newspaper, passing an examination) and **integrative motivation** (wanting to learn a language in order to communicate with people of another culture who speak it). Ellis, R. (1997) in Wold (2006, 68-69) observed that motivation involves the attitudes and affective states that influence the degree of effort that learners make to learn a second language, and that it may vary dynamically depending on the context or task of the language activity. Thus, Ellis identified two more types of motivation on top of the aforementioned ones: **resultative motivation** (an energy that comes from the experience of success in the language learning process that creates the drive to continue learning) and **intrinsic motivation** which reflects “the arousal and maintenance of curiosity” in learning activities themselves by learners. Intrinsically motivated learners simply enjoy the process of second language learning and thrive in the environment of the second language classroom as well as in the target language learning environment (Wold, 2006, p. 69). There are many other types of motivation that may not be of interest to the current study.

Most learners who have undertaken the language course do not know which language to learn and why they have to learn it. As mentioned earlier, the choice of an elective is made by their parents or themselves.

Sometimes, we hear things like: “My parents are forcing me to learn Chinese because my sister lives and works in China” or “My sister speaks and teaches French and I also want to speak French when I am with her”.

The Zambian educational system remains highly certificate centered with less regard to life-long learning skills. Mwenya (2010) asserts that there is increased pressure from the community on pupils to perform better in academics regardless of their abilities and academic history. He further states that past papers are drilled throughout the year, especially in examination grades. Thus, the culture/practice of past papers inhibits the capacity to learn for long term objectives. The foreign language course at Mulungushi University is a course that students have to pass to get their degree and this mere passing of exams has been more important than integrative motivation for a lot of students. The request by students for past papers at the beginning of the teaching/learning process clearly points to their instrumental motivation rather than integrative motivation. This situation is not in tandem with a 2013 comprehensive policy document which outlines core values of the New Education Policy, National Curriculum Frameworks and the Vision 2030 being “Quality, Life-long Education for all which is accessible, inclusive and relevant to individual, national and global needs and value systems (ZECF, 2013).

Attitudes

Positive or negative attitudes toward a language can stimulate or impede the learning process. Gardner (1985) cited in Addisu (2020, p. 6) claims that attitude is an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual’s beliefs or opinion about the referent. Furthermore, he considers the concept of attitude as component of motivation in language learning. And motivation refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes towards learning the language. However, Wenden (1991) in Addisu (2020, p. 6) proposed a broad definition of the concept of attitudes. He states that the term “attitudes” include three components, namely cognitive, affective and behavioural. A cognitive component is made up of the beliefs and ideas or opinions about the object of the attitude. The affective component refers to the feeling and emotions that one has towards an object, “likes” or “dislikes”, “with” or “against”. And the last

component is the behavioural one which refers to one’s consisting actions or behavioural intentions towards the object.

Our students show excitement at the beginning of the language course. Then, they become less and less enthusiastic about it when they face more challenging concepts. They easily give up on the long-term objective of learning a foreign language and concentrate on passing the course. Final results have shown a declining tendencies from the second to the fourth years of study.

Aptitude

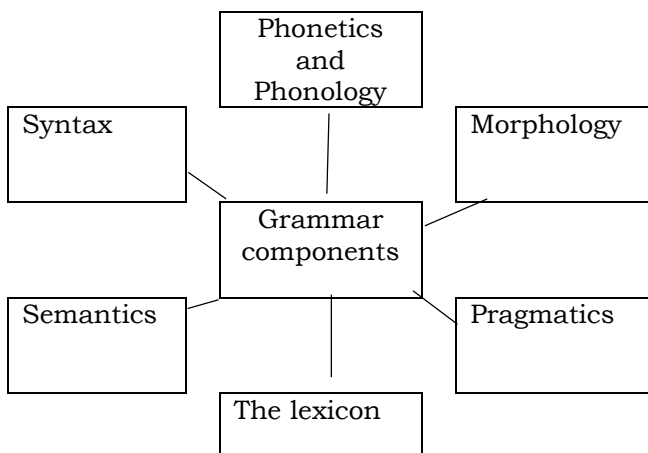
Carroll (1981) in Singleton (2017, p. 90) defines language aptitude as “an individual’s initial state of readiness and capacity for learning a foreign language, and probable facility in doing so given the presence of motivation and opportunity”. Thus, this conception portrays language aptitude as a trait, in the sense of exhibiting stability over long periods of time and being immune or very resistant to training. The trait view of language aptitude tends towards the notion that it is innate. Another researcher, Rosenthal (1996), also cited in Singleton (2017, p. 90), associates language aptitude with the popular notion of a “gift for languages”. However, Singleton (2017) argues that such a view may be at the very least oversimplistic. In his paper, he seeks to demonstrate that our approach to language aptitude needs to make room for acceptance of the proposition that language aptitude is not as “given” as we may have once thought, and that what happens to us post-natally may influence it very considerably.

Lightbrown & Spada (2013, p.82) mentioned two extremes of the aptitude continuum. Some people whose academic performance is usually very good find themselves frustrated in their attempts to learn a foreign language whereas brilliant language students struggle in the other academic courses. The challenge is to find instructional approaches that meet the needs of learners with a variety of aptitude profiles. There are indeed natural differences among students, but those deemed less gifted for languages make considerable strides given the correct attitude and high motivation.

The above discussed psychosocial challenges impact the whole language learning process as shown by linguistic challenges stated below.

Linguistic challenges

These challenges derive from the most important component part of language called grammar with its various linguistic systems as outlined in the table below by Thompson (2003, p. 40):



Thompson further defines the different components of grammar. Syntax refers to the set of rules which govern how we can combine words in a way which is recognized by first-language speakers to be acceptable or “grammatically correct”. Phonetics refers to the study of pronunciation, while phonology refers to the set of rules which govern how sounds can be combined in particular patterns. Morphology is the study of how parts of words are combined to make whole words. Semantics refers to the way in which systems are established through language. Lastly, lexicon refers to the set of words used in a language-its vocabulary while pragmatics refers to the study of how language forms are actually used in everyday social situations; this closely relates to sociolinguistic factors (Thompson (2003), pp.40-42).

Several factors come into play. For example, the obvious influence of English and indigenous languages makes it hard for them to deal with the various linguistic components of the French language.

Instances of Transferability between French and Indigenous Languages

There are very few instances of this phenomenon between French and Zambian indigenous languages though most students are not aware of this phenomenon as it requires an analytical mind to understand

some aspects of metalanguage. The following are just but a few transferability cases:

- (1) the object pronoun (OP) is generally placed before the verb form.

English	I know you .	S-V- OP
French	Je connais toi . → Je te connais.	S- OP -V
Nyanja	Niziba iwe . → Nikuziba .	S- OP -V
Bemba	Nalishiba → iwe . Nalikuishiba. [Nalikwishiba]	S- OP -V

(2) An adjective is usually placed after the noun in our indigenous languages. The same prevails in French for long adjectives, adjectives of colour, nationality, shape and those derived from past participles, except for short adjectives, ordinal and cardinal numbers which are generally placed before the noun.

(3) Bantu languages derive from oral tradition, hence the formulation of questions based on **intonation** and “**is it that**” expression. These questions exist in the students’ repertoire, though not necessarily used in English as a language of reference. The understanding is usually easy though confusion persists because these question structures are perceived to be broken language.

	FRENCH	BEMBA	NYANJA
Yes/no questions	Tu habites ici? (You live here?)	Wikala kuno?	Unkhala kuno?

	Do you live here?	Est-ce que tu habites ici ? (Is it that you live here?)	Bushe wikala kuno?	Kodi unkhala kuno?
WH-questions	Where do you live?	Tu habites où? (You live where?)	Wikala kwi?	Unkhala kuti?
		Où est-ce que tu habites ? (Where is it that you live?)	Bushe wikala kwi?	Kodi unkhala kuti?

(4) The sociolinguistic aspect of language –

	singular	Plural or respect
English	you (How are you?)	you (How are you?)
French	tu (Comment vas-tu?)	vous (Comment allez-vous?)
Bemba	u (Uli shani?)	mu (Muli shani?)
Nyanja	u (Uli bwanji?)	mu (Muli bwanji?)

A language quote by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (<https://www.british-study.com>) which reads “Those who know no foreign language know nothing of their mother tongue” shades light on the benefits of understanding more about one’s language while learning another language. Therefore, the learner is vividly encouraged to use his/her linguistic repertoire in order to enhance learning opportunities.

Other challenges

[1]Phonological Awareness

Students with reduced phonological awareness have difficulty detecting differences in language sounds. Students with reduced phonemic awareness have difficulty understanding that words consist of individual language sounds and have problems with decoding. Students tend to pronounce the last consonants of words sounds despite regular reminders about pronunciation rules and syllabification rules and families of sounds, they have difficulties remembering them in French. (Banks, 2008, p.29)

As students are gradually introduced to letter, sound, spelling and pronunciation rules, confusion persists for many as outlined in the following instances:

- (a) The tendency to pronounce everything when they are not supposed to do so makes the utterances unintelligible. The general rule is that final consonants in words are not generally pronounced, except for a few words like **avec** (with), **parc** (park), **sud** (south), **est** (east), etc. For words ending with the vowel **e** like **image**, **gare**, **chemise**, **beige**, etc., that final **e** is silent or mute, but the consonant in the syllable will be pronounced. This is characteristic for the general rule for the formation of feminine adjectives such as **petit/ petite**,

grand/grande, **gros/ grosse**, **vert/verte**, etc. The same applies to verbs **il habite/ ils habitent**. The plural verb form, third person in the simple present **-ent** is silent.

- (b) Students have difficulty adjusting to the French phonetic system. As a matter of fact, languages are different from one another and comprise regular and irregular forms in the various linguistic components. To some extent, the French language shows relative regularities in pronunciation patterns compared to English despite a certain amount of exceptions. The combined letters **ou** in **flour**, **tour**, **sour**, **four**, **court**, **pour**, **hour** have three different pronunciation patterns in English in spite of the same graphic environment.

	English	French
tour	[uə]	ou = [u]
Flour, sour, hour	[aʊə]	
Four, pour,	[ɔ:]	

The French pronunciation of the same combined letters **ou** is always [u]. The Bantu languages have a stable pronunciation pattern of the vocalic system (a, e, i, o, u) and students are constantly reminded to follow it when dealing with French, but it does not seem to take root in the mind of many students.

- (c) Consonants like **c** and **g** are dealt with separately and compared with English pronunciation. For example, **c + a, o, u** is pronounced [k] like in **calorie**, **collège**, **cure**; whereas **c + e, i, y** and **ç** are pronounced [s] like in **Céline**, **citation**, **Cyril**, **leçon**. The same applies for **g + a, o, u = [g]** like in **garage**, **gorge**, **Gustave** and

g + e, i, y = [ʒ] like in geste, girafe, gym. No existing sounds like [dʒ] and [tʃ] should also be mentioned as well as the combined letters th = [t] in words such as théorie, Thibault, théâtre and not pronounced [θ].

- (d) Students place accents (signs appearing on vowels) everywhere and anyhow, despite the fact that they are explained through intonation patterns, language evolution, or as distinctive features. Students seem not to perceive different accent/intonation patterns. For example, for words like **hôtel** (hostel), **hôpital** (hospital), **fôret** (forest), **pâte** (paste), **arrêter** (arrest), **maître** (master), **fête** (feast), **bête** (beast), **hâte** (haste), the “accent circonflexe” placed on all vowels (â, ê, î, ô, û) can be explained through the language evolution. The letter s disappeared and paved way to this sign called accent circonflexe. Besides, the accent circonflexe is also used to distinguish two homonyms with different meaning **mûr** (e) meaning ripe from **mur** (wall) and **sûr** (e) meaning sure from **sur** (the preposition **on** for places, rather surfaces). Examples abound, but many continue reading French in English or vice versa.
- (e) Letters that are usually confused or misspelt such as [u] for ou, [Y] for u, [i] for i are dealt with occasionally through phonetic discriminatory exercises.
- (f) Verb conjugation patterns and tenses are undoubtedly difficult to learn, especially at the beginning, due to the complex verb groups and the changes being operated according to personal pronouns. Students often make sentences with infinitives only or wrong conjugation. For example, the conjugation of the verbs **avoir** (to have) and **être** (to be) in the third person singular **Il a** /ila/ and **il est** /ile/ is a source of confusion in continuum; the confusion may stem from a fusion of sound and writing (spelling) because of English interference. Moreover, cases of number (singular/ plural) and gender (masculine / feminine) are not easy to learn either.

[2] Syntax

As mentioned earlier, students find grammar rules confusing and struggle to compose thoughts in a correct sentence format. When it comes to forming complete sentences, they are characterized by grammatical errors,

wrong tenses, poor agreement between subject and verb, wrong word order and the list is endless. Students fail to adjust to specificities of the target language, but rather think in their mother tongue instead of thinking in the target language. This is a source of distortions due direct translation which is not beneficial (Banks, 2008).

Jacobson (1985) in Cruz (2018) notes three kinds of translation: 1. Intralingual translation or rewording as an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language. 2. Interlingual translation or translation proper as an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. 3. Intersemiotic translation or transmutation as an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems such as gestures, pictures.

From experience, students need assistance in understanding correct instructions. To achieve that, translation of words and expressions deemed new or difficult are done in a reference language at the beginning; afterwards, less and less translations are used as students get acquainted with the various exercises with similar instructions. This is also done in teaching new items, asking questions or giving instructions verbally or in writing. In our case, intralingual translation is often used during classes and in assessing the speaking skill. The interlingual translation of instructions, however, is occasionally used in cases of test and examination instructions to avoid frequent queries about perceived difficult words and expressions due to anxiety, especially for Open Distance Learning (ODL) students as they write examinations from their respective centres.

Some students show lack of confidence which compels them to use short cuts such as copying from each other and using google translate when they are tasked to carry out some elaborate activities. Despite it being a valuable online learning tool, Google translate should be used with caution and moderation; it is not endowed with abilities to comprehend contextual use of words when dealing with interlingual translation. Online resources should not be an obstacle to learning.

[3] Lack of Metalinguistic Awareness

The term metalanguage was originally used by linguist Roman Jakobson in the 1960s and other Russian formalists to characterize a language that makes assertions about other languages. Its teaching in schools was, however, contested with the advent of

communicative methods in the 1960s in language teaching because it places more focus on grammatical competencies and not on communicative competence, thus inhibiting fluency (Evans, 2011). This breakaway from traditional methodology has nevertheless been accepted with mixed feelings by language practitioners and researchers alike, especially for foreign language teaching.

Halliday (1985) talks about the three aspects of Children's Language Development which are interrelated: Learning language, Learning through Language and Learning about Language. The third aspect refers to the metalinguistic awareness which embraces various linguistic components such as morphology, syntax, and semantics, and it is not just limited to grammar rules, but it also incorporates underlying cultural wisdom or heritage imbedded in proverbs, riddles, storytelling and songs.

In any formal language teaching/learning situation, the use of some metalanguage is almost unavoidable just like in any other subject including music, geography and mechanics. It is a known fact that driving a car does not require knowledge of mechanics. Nevertheless, is it not important that someone understands something to the functioning of the car he or she is driving or to name a simple defective part that needs replacement?

Evans (2011) states that this process requires an early initiation in life, just as some metalanguage has to be taught early in school. It contributes to the development of pragmatic skills which will be used later in life. M.A.K. Halliday, Angus McIntosh, and Peter Stevens (1964:230) quoted in Evans (2011, p. 285) point out that the best stage to teach some metalanguage is secondary school. They also argue that the locus for a more ample, holistic study of language should be the secondary school. A message or text may contain explicit and implicit information; thus, the knowledge of some metalanguage will help learners communicate easily and appropriately.

According to Jacobson (1985) in Elaine Cruz (2018), metalanguage is the vital factor of any verbal development. The interpretation of one linguistic sign through other signs of the same language is a metalingual operation which plays an essential role in child language learning. When basic grammatical items such as subject, object, verb, adjective, adverb among others have to be explained, students who have knowledge of some metalanguage do not struggle in understanding them because

they belong to the students' repertoire. Hence, metalanguage is usually avoided in class to avert confusion for students who have not been initiated to it.

[4] Anxiety for Grades

Raja and Selvi (2011) state that most students study English from the examination point of view, so they are not able to produce even a single sentence without grammatical error.

This state of affairs stems from instrumental motivation because the foreign language is just a course like any other and is biased towards grades. Students are more concerned about marks than long term learning benefits. In order to get better grades, they often resort to short cuts like Google Translate for written exercises. Consequently, performance is at variance in assignments where students have access to all sorts of resources, and in tests and examinations where the use of learning aids such as phones is prohibited. For example, when students are asked to write short descriptive texts of about 50 words for assignments, they copy and paste long texts regardless of instructions given, but most students fail to write a single correct sentence in tests or examinations.

Moreover, some learners are pressurized by their parents to take subjects they do not like, a fact that reduces their motivation. Learners and teachers have roles to play and they are responsible for their actions in the teaching/learning process. Modern pedagogy places learners at the centre of this process; they have a bigger role to play. Deakin Crick et al. (2013) state that more effective learners know more about their own learning. They like trying out different approaches to learning to see what happens. They are more reflective and better at self-evaluation. The opposite pole of strategic awareness is 'being robotic'.

EVALUATION OF THE LEARNING

Evaluation has been aligned on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This is an international standard tool for describing language ability on a six-point scale, from A1 for beginners to C2 for those who have mastered the language. The learning assessment is based on the four language skills for two objectives: assessing progress made in the acquisition of the language and for grading purposes. The four skills carry equal marks. Unfortunately, students care more about passing the course while neglecting the future use of the language.

Listening and reading comprehension

The material is taken from various sources: text books, magazines and online material. They are carefully selected to suit the various levels of students. Nevertheless, students complain about the accent and fast speech delivery for audio materials. For example, “**les enfants**” will be read as /lezāfā/. This is due to compulsory linking between the two words, which distorts the visual aspect of the words. Nevertheless, non-authentic audio materials are relatively slow to suit educational purposes and students get used to them in the long run. For reading comprehension texts, the major challenge concerns vocabulary and understanding instructions and questions being asked.

In order to help students develop their reading skills, teachers should learn about how students perceive the difficulties they have to deal with. Students are faced with lack of appropriate strategies in terms of listening and reading, extracting meaning from sentences and understanding instructions even when interlingual or intralingual translations are provided. This is mainly due to limited vocabulary and phonetic awareness. Difficult words are marked with *, and a list of those words is provided at the end of each text. Instructions and questions are equally translated to ensure instructional clarity.

Speaking and writing

A lot of patience and cooperation on the part of the teacher is required in order to help students overcome their anxiety as they experience lack of confidence despite the fact that they are allowed some time to prepare themselves for the various exercises. As usual, students translate from English, which becomes a barrier to free speech. During classes they have to be pushed to speak in order to overcome lack of self-confidence and anxiety. Nevertheless, the writing skill remains the most difficult skill to acquire by most students because they also struggle to write in English. Hence, Evans (2013) writes that it is important, often critical, for both those students and the rest of the class to understand that written and spoken language are different forms. Since today’s students communicate regularly through texting and email in “sounds like” language, the boundaries between written and spoken language have become obscured in a new way, so it is important to explain the distinctions.

Despite the numerous warnings issued to them, students cannot do away with thinking in English and translating those thoughts into French to the extent of abrogating instructions given to them in terms of context and length of texts to be produced. For instance, when they are asked to write a text of 50 words, they usually produce longer texts extracted from google. The effort for having taken time to research is appreciated, but the learning per se cannot be assessed or measured.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A language quote by Reg Rindley says “A language is difficult in inverse proportion to the strength of motivation for learning it” (<https://mosalingua.com/en/motivational-quotes/>). We cannot deny the fact that language learning is a long arduous enterprise. Nevertheless, demystifying beliefs about the nature and level of difficulties of the target language will enhance confidence and positive attitude in the learning process. Besides, Wold (2006) asserts that the most basic and glaring behavioral factors contributing to this learner’s lack of progress were sporadic classroom attendance and the lack of practice outside the classroom. Lack of seriousness coupled with absenteeism is widespread among students at every level of the education curriculum (see table below). Students should get the fact correctly, i.e., foreign language learning requires dedication and steady work.

A recourse to a reference language is not prohibited per se in contemporary language methodologies, but this should not be abused because a foreign language should be taught through that language to avoid excessive grammar translation. Hence, achieving meaningful communication as the ultimate goal of the language learning requires exercises that stimulate and prioritize language use. Due to multilingualism, the learning and teaching processes require interactions between the teacher and the learner, among learners themselves and between the learner and other media and/or society at large in a less conducive environment like ours.

As we know, the development of teachers’ professional knowledge and practical skills is a lifelong task, which in most cases is self-education (Laiveniece, 2018). Teachers are encouraged to adopt positive attitudes toward

the teaching of foreign languages; they should demonstrate adequate knowledge of the major linguistic components as well as research before delivering anything that can potentially confuse or demotivate students and acknowledge their limits vis-à-vis the object language. This is particularly about grammar rules and the phonetic aspects for difficult sounds like the pronunciation of **u** = [y] and **eu** [œ] or [ø]. They should also be abreast with current trends in foreign language teaching and learning.

Since modern approaches focus on tolerance to mistakes, it would be important, however, to avoid fossilization of certain mistakes, especially those pertaining to phonetics because erroneous pronunciation renders the speech unintelligible and breaks communication. Thus, the teacher should find appropriate exercises to drill challenging sounds. This intervention should not be carried out systematically, but rather intermittently and when necessary.

4.5. The teaching of vocabulary should be done in context to avoid frequent recourse to translation. Teachers are always encouraged to teach in the target language. The use of visual aids remains cardinal, and this requires adequate preparation.

Conjugation, being the backbone of the language, should also be tackled with caution to avoid rote memorization which may discourage students. In so doing, students should be able to see and understand the concept of conjugation step by step. A clear and coherent progression will definitely encourage them to continue learning.

4.6. Students should equally be encouraged to explore the abundant and varied online resources to complement their learning material. Therefore, teachers should be able to advise them on websites offering the best material for comprehensive language skills development such as **le point du fle**, **duolingo**, **français facile.com**, **lingua.com**, **TV5Monde** and many more. The teacher should also contextualize his/her teaching using the local settings (locations, names and activities); this would enhance motivation.

4.7. Finally, teachers should ensure that the teaching/learning process is spread out by having distributed and spaced timetables. For example, a timetable of six hours per week should be arranged like a period of two hours on Monday, another one on Wednesday and the last one on Friday. This kind of timetable leaves space for both the teacher and the

learner to prepare and revise. Students should be advised to do the same as regular and consistent contact with the foreign language is key to success. Moreover, having a classroom dedicated to language learning would be of great value as favourable seating arrangements could enhance interactions among the players in the classroom set up. For example, a semi-circle seating arrangement would provide more interactions than the traditional one where the teacher faces the learners. A classroom dedicated to language learning would be ideal for flexible seating arrangements.

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that English drives the world as lingua franca today, it would be unwise to feel comfortable with it. Once one leaves their comfort zone, the reality is different. There is a popular saying “*A child that does not travel considers his/her mother as the best cook*”. It is appalling to notice that Zambians have missed job opportunities with international organisations partly due to widespread lack of multilingualism. A language quote by Frank Smith (<https://www.theintrepidguide.com>) points to the fact that one language sets you in one corridor for life, but two languages open every door along the way. In view of this, students are encouraged to take up the challenge in order to expand their linguistic horizons which will enable them compete in this ever-changing environment. Teachers are therefore encouraged to adopt active and innovative teaching strategies that will motivate learners despite disparities among them in terms of educational background and motivation. Moreover, prospective learners willing to take up the challenge of learning a foreign language should not be deterred from doing so by such a belief that foreign languages are best learnt at tender age. As a matter of fact, age is a variable but it should not be a limiting factor to the learning process.

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