

Methodology in Teaching and Learning Writing Skill in French in Kenya

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Abstract:- Choosing the methodology to use in teaching French is a big challenge and therefore requires extra skills for both teachers and learners. Therefore, they seem reluctant to focus on specific methods because this requires special effort. The purpose of this study was to establish the methodology used in the learning and teaching of writing skills in French. The objectives were; to establish the methods used in teaching and to investigate the exercises used in enhancing writing skills. 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 studying French formed the study sample. A quasi-experimental research design was used. The data collection instruments were; questionnaires and a lesson observation guide. The experimental group of learners was taught by teachers who had been trained using Task Based method while learners in the control group were taught using other methods. Teachers' and learners' questionnaires were used to establish the other methods used. The lesson observation guide was used to establish the learning exercises used in teaching and learning writing. The instruments were refined through piloting. Data was analyzed quantitatively using descriptive and presented in frequency tables. The findings were that 8 methods were used for writing and letter writing was the most used exercise. Based on these findings, it was recommended that Ministry of Education organizes in-service training for teachers on methods of teaching. The study was important in helping Quality Assurance and Standards officers to establish, maintain and improve standards in training, assessment and implementation of teaching methods.

Keywords:- *Writing in French, Methodology in Writing, Exercises that Enhance Writing, Task Based Approach, Group-Work in Writing.*

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a dire need for several schools to demand that students acquire more than one international language because of globalisation. In order for many learners to acquire French, there is need to have teaching and learning methods that are appropriate and effective. (Belchamber, 2010). The traditional 3Ps approach (Presentation, Practice and Production) led teachers and learners to be more concerned about the end product neglecting the content and ideas of writing. Consequently, more methods are vital for

the acquisition of writing skills in French as a foreign language in Kenya.

According to Mulama (2008) French teaching methods have evolved from the Traditional method or Grammar – translation where translation of passages from the native language into the target language was the main activity in the classroom. This was done through the presentation of rules in a grammar book and a list of vocabulary to be memorized in learning. From the traditional method, learning and teaching was done through the Direct Method, where all conversations were in the target language and maximum contact was created with the learner. In the Global structure audio visual method, notions of grammar and linguistic competences are taught by hearing and comprehension. In the recent communicative approach, an artificial situation is created and the main activity is communication in the French class where learning is done successfully through communicating real meaning. The main classroom activity is producing meaningful and real communication at all levels. The theory of language assumes that language is a means of achieving real-life goals, involves a variety of different skills and language is primarily a means of making meaning. The Engestrom theory, (1987) of Activity which was developed from individual to inter-organizational learning is visualized in the form of a triangle and has three main elements namely; subject, object and outcome.

The low learner achievement on French writing in secondary schools in Kenya is an issue of concern to many stakeholders in the education system. This has attracted the attention of school administrators, parents, teachers and learners. According to the teachers, learners are writing very little or nothing at all on foolscaps meant for writing tests. Other teachers have observed that learners may write only two sentences in a composition that is marked out of ten or fifteen marks. The objectives of the study were to establish the methodologies used in acquisition of French writing among secondary school learners in Nairobi City County and to investigate the exercises that enhance writing skills. The institutions teaching French will use the research findings to choose the correct methods in teaching writing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Barile (2014), observed that Audio-Visual methods such as use of videos, CDs, DVDs, radio and television bring writing concepts to life helping students to understand how writing in school applies to the real-world. In this

method, students may listen to a sample text before writing their own. This method creates more zeal and accurate concepts are taught.

Cashin(2011) defines group discussion as an activity involving oral or written expression of different points of view in a given situation. Discussions offer collaborative exchange of ideas among learners and teachers which furthers thinking and understanding. Student centered discussions enable learners to be at the center of their learning. According to Tersoo (2018), demonstration is based on demonstrating skills, principles and theory via performance, movie, slide presentation and live display. It should be planned ahead of time in order to make a better explanation of the technical steps to students and help them repeat the activity.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) according to Widdowson (1983) is favored by many because it focuses on the communicative skills of the language; reading, writing, listening and speaking. Hamer (2001) states that the communicative method requires one to know the use of sentences in dialogues and texts. Swan (1985), a critique of communicative approach says that this approach is deemed a success if the teacher understands the student.

III. METHODOLOGY

The Quasi-experimental design was used in this study because it was more generalized and had a better external validity than randomized controlled trials or cluster

randomized trials. In this research, it was not possible or practical to control all the key factors like learner and teacher and methods used in teaching and learning writing in French language. The study was carried out in Nairobi City County which is the capital city of Kenya.

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 was assumed that they had mastered sufficient vocabulary to write a composition. 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.

Questionnaires to teachers and students and a lesson observation form were used to collect data.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

➤ *Objective 1: Methods Used in Teaching and Learning Writing.*

The research sought to find out methods used in teaching and learning writing. Each of the eight teachers ticked on the methods they used to teach quality writing. Table 1 shows the results of the findings in frequencies and percentages.

Table 1: Methods Used to Teach Quality Writing.

METHOD	EXPERIMENTAL			CONTROL		
	N	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	N	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Process-Product	4	1	25	4	2	50
Audio-Visual	4	3	75	4	4	100
Group-Work	4	4	100	4	3	75
Demonstration	4	2	50	4	1	25
Grammar-Translation	4	3	75	4	3	75
Problem-Based	4	2	50	4	3	75
Communicative	4	3	75	4	2	50
Task-Based	4	3	75	4	0	0

From table 1, the eight methods used to teach and learn writing were; Product-process, Audio-visual, group-work, demonstration, grammar-translation, problem-based, communicative and task-based approach. The study established that all the four (4) teachers in the experimental group used group-work in teaching writing. This may be attributed to the fact that through group-work, learners learn from one another as they share experiences and so they are motivated, learning becomes active, communication is enhanced and learners are involved in critical thinking and decision making. This finding was in agreement with Abdulbaki (2018) study on group-work where results showed that students agreed that they never felt bored during group-work and they believed that discussion was a time saver. In the control group, all the teachers (100%) used the audio-visual method. Additionally, findings from the lesson observation showed that all teachers (8) used

video clips as instructional resources in the classroom. This might be attributed to the fact that in TBA, watching a video clip is used as an awakening activity which precedes the real writing exercise.

Process – Product (PP) method was the least used by the experimental group where only one teacher out of four used it. This might be attributed to the fact that this was a traditional approach of teaching where teachers and learners were more concerned about the end product neglecting the content and ideas of writing because it was based on input-output hypothesis. According to Clearinghouse (1984), with PP approach, exercises in the class were usually dull and students could not decide the topics they wanted to write on. In the control group, none of the teachers used task-based method. This might be attributed

to the fact that all the teachers in the control group had not been trained at the beginning of the research.

According to Starkey (2017), in a research on using TBA in class, there was lack of collaborative language techniques among students in France. The threats were socio-cultural and contextual in nature where students in this country did not generally appreciate teamwork and preferred to work individually.

The students also responded to the question on methods used in composition writing by ticking on the methods they used to learn composition writing skills. According to the students, group-work recorded the highest number of students at 123 out of 124 (99%) which was in agreement with the results from the teachers. This implied that use of group-work made learning easier for students enabling them to write a quality composition. Students from both the experimental and control group also reported use of discussions as a method of learning quality writing. These results were in agreement with Abdulkaki (2018) which

showed that students agreed that they never felt bored during discussion and they believed that discussion was a time saver. Most of the learners did not use demonstration to learn writing skills, that is only 10 out of 124 (8%). This might be attributed to the fact that demonstration requires a lot of preparation time. According to Tersoo (2018), demonstration needs a large amount of time to prepare in order to make a better explanation because it uses technique and equipment.

➤ *Objective 2: Exercises Used to Enhance Quality Writing*

Teaching methods in TBA cannot work alone without teaching and learning exercises. The following exercises were used by students to enhance writing in French language: filling in blank spaces, writing based on a picture/photo, writing using a template, writing in a group, writing based on jumbled words, writing cards, dictation, topical writing, copying teachers' composition, writing on blogs and writing using language games. Table 2 shows the exercises used in teaching and learning quality writing in frequencies and percentages.

Table 2: Tasks Used to Enhance Writing for Control and Experimental Groups.

TASKS	EXPERIMENTAL			CONTROL		
	N	Freq	percent	N	Freq	Percent
Filling in blank spaces	60	54	90	64	56	87.5
Writing using pictures/photos	60	32	53	64	40	62.5
Writing based on a template	60	12	20	64	10	16
Collaborative writing	60	46	77	64	51	80
Writing out jumbled words/sentences	60	57	95	64	59	92
Writing cards	60	39	65	64	47	73
Writing down dictation	60	58	97	64	62	97
Writing based on a topic	60	60	100	64	63	98
Writing on internet blogs	60	6	10	64	8	13
Language writing games	60	18	30	64	23	36
Copying teachers' composition	60	25	42	64	32	50

Table 2 shows that the most frequently used exercise was writing based on a topic which was used by all the students 124 (100%) in the experimental group while in the control group, 98% of the students used it compared to writing on blogs on the internet which was used by only 6 students, (10%) in the experimental and 8 students (13%) used it in the control group. This might be attributed to the fact that it was easier to come up with a topic to write on basing on the topics given in the KICD syllabus and what the teachers had taught them in class. However, this technique limits the creativity and imagination of the learner. The least used exercise was writing on blogs on the internet where only 14 students (11%) used it. This might be attributed to most of the schools lacking internet connectivity. This finding was in opposition to the study by Manganot, (1998) who argued that writing on blogs on the internet brought a sense of creativity on the part of the learner because tasks on the internet cannot be ignored in a world inhabited by technology. Teachers and learners were advised to use technology and the internet in order to improve writing skills.

Only 42% of learners in the experimental and 50% in the control group reported copying the teachers' composition as an exercise in improving their writing. In this technique, teachers write sample compositions then give too learners who copy then as they are. This may be attributed to the fact that most teachers may not be writing compositions and giving students to copy as they may consider it time consuming. Teachers are supposed to write compositions and give to students so that students can be mentored well. Cabral (2009) observed that in order for students to write a letter, they have to be exposed to similar letters that are examples of that same genre. On the contrary, this finding did not support Cabral (2009) findings as majority of students did not copy teachers' compositions. Additionally, students need to feel constantly supported and encouraged by older people in their environments to feel self-confident in trying out certain challenging exercises (Nunan, 2013).

Writing down dictation was used by 58 and 62 (97%) of students in both the experimental and control groups. This might have been because teachers used it as one way of preparing learners for dictation in the French national examination KCSE in paper 501/1. This finding was in

agreement with Graham (1997) which stated that dictation enables learners to model the speech, write it down and read it.

V. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was to establish methodologies used in the acquisition of writing skills in French as a foreign language. It was guided by two (2) research objectives which were to establish the methodologies used in acquisition of writing skills and to investigate the exercises that enhance writing. Findings from the study showed that 8 methods were used in teaching and learning writing. Results of the study showed that the methodologies used were: process-product approach, audio-visual, group-work, demonstration, grammar-translation, problem-based, communicative and task-based. The exercises used to enhance writing were; filling in blank spaces, writing based on pictures/photos, using a template, collaborative writing, writing out jumbled words, writing on cards, dictation, topical writing, internet blogs, writing games and copying the teachers' composition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ministry of Education should organize in-service training for teachers in methods of teaching and learning French as a foreign language in Kenya. Parents and teachers need to encourage learners to complete exercises in and out of class in order to write better.

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