

Problematic Areas in the Didactics of Teaching and Learning French as a Foreign Language in Kenya

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Abstract

Performance in French as a foreign language (FFL) in secondary schools in Kenya had declined since the year 2006. Student teachers entering university to pursue studies in French are finding it more and more challenging to follow lectures delivered in French. Students' performance in the national Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations seemed to have been affected when the examination format was changed to include testing of communicative competence, in all skills. To rescue this situation, the need arose for the teachers of French to use pedagogical approaches that would enhance communicative competence in FFL teaching and learning. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach had been adopted as a method for use in the teaching of FFL in Kenya. It was observed from students' performance that there has been a decline in performance in French since this change. This implies there are problems in the implementation and/or application of this approach. This paper is based on a study conducted to investigate the pedagogical implications of use of the CLT in teaching of French in secondary schools in Kenya. The objectives of the study were to: (a) establish activities that facilitate the application of the CLT, (b) establish teachers' preparedness in using the CLT, (c) find out other methods being used to teach French, (d) identify the challenges faced by teachers and students of French and how these were mitigated, (e) establish availability and use of resources for teaching and learning of FFL. The descriptive survey design was used for the study. Ten schools in 5 Counties of the Central region of Kenya were sampled for the study. Other samples were 10 principals of secondary schools teaching French and 109 students of French. The instruments for data collection were: a classroom observation guide, a teacher's questionnaire, a principal's interview schedule and a students' focus group discussion guide. A pilot study was conducted prior to the main study. Data were collected and analysed qualitatively using basic statistics. Inferential data were analysed using the chi-square. The findings of the study showed there was a marked degree of omission in the teaching and learning of French. The number of contact hours was found to be inadequate since French is a foreign language. Lack of modern equipment and shortage of other resources had negative effects, in relation to use of the CLT. The study also showed there was a difference between teachers' knowledge of theory and practice, with regard to CLT. Conclusions and Recommendations were made to make teaching and learning of French effective in the attainment of communicative competence.

Keywords: Communicative, Competence, Implementation, Teachers

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