

The Impacts of Teaching Strategies and Skills for Effective Learning of English Language in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Over 247 local dialects, two official languages (French and English), and one lingua franca make up the multilingual nation of Cameroon. Cameroon is considered to be a bilingual nation as a result of the official adoption of both French and English as official languages upon reunification in 1961. Given that the majority of Cameroonians speak French and that it is a more widely used working language, neither Francophones in general nor Francophone students in particular have any intrinsic motivation to be proficient in English; however, the language's increasing importance has made proficiency in it necessary. This is because, despite the fact that English is taught in Cameroonian schools, students' proficiency in the language remains a significant issue. This paper assessed the influence of teaching strategies in enhancing competence in the teaching and learning of English, and further delved into the skills requisite for language learning. Accordingly, one of the ways to address this challenge is the adoption of teaching strategies such as teacher questioning strategy, students' cooperating learning and the time-limited English talk show in class. These methods will help the teacher-dependent students to become self-instructive. Furthermore, these strategies will encourage students to participate in the classroom discussion, give them the opportunity to think about the questions and work out of ways to solve them. Moreover, group work will help students improve their oral communication; promote their self-esteem and improve students' self-confidence.

INTRODUCTION

Cameroon is a culturally diverse nation, boasting a rich tapestry of over 247 local languages, along with two designated official languages, namely French and English, and a widely used lingua franca, (Cameroon Pidgin English) [1]. Historically, Cameroon was divided into two regions, each under the colonial rule of either the French or the British. These colonial powers established their respective languages as the official languages within their respective territories. Following the reunification of these regions in 1961, both French and English were adopted as the official languages, granting Cameroon the status of a bilingual nation. In the predominantly French-speaking part of the country, French serves as the primary language for education, work, and general communication.

Conversely, in the English-speaking regions, English holds this role. Given that the Francophone region encompasses a larger population, there are significantly more Cameroonians who speak French compared to English. This arrangement is commonly referred to as "state bilingualism," with French as the primary official language and English as the secondary one. To promote individual bilingualism, the government's language policy mandates the teaching of both languages at all levels of education. For Francophones, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), while Anglophones learn French as a second language (ESL), and vice versa. In Francophone secondary schools, students typically dedicate three to five hours per week to the study of English, depending on their proficiency level [2]. Tamba and others have observed that some Francophones exhibit resistance towards acquiring a second official language, often citing a lack of perceived practical benefits in learning English as one of the reasons for this reluctance. Given that the majority of Cameroonians speak French, which is also widely used in work settings, there is generally little internal motivation for Francophones, including Francophone students, to excel in the English language. This is mainly because Anglophones constitute a minority group, leading to English having a lower status compared to French. For instance, official decrees and announcements are initially drafted in French and then translated into English. As suggested by [3], the socio-cultural context, including attitudes towards specific languages and their perceived importance, plays a significant role in motivating language learning. This perspective is supported by research conducted in Cameroon by [3]. Furthermore, Francophone students often find learning German and Spanish more practical, as many of them travel to Europe where these languages are useful. Another factor contributing to the lack of motivation is the nature of exams in Francophone schools. The curriculum emphasizes a comprehensive education, requiring students to study all subjects, with an average across all subjects being the minimum requirement for passing. This allows students to pass without necessarily achieving a passing grade in English. Additionally, there is a dearth of oral proficiency assessments, and many tests employ multiple-choice formats.

Another noteworthy factor is the teaching methodology. Many teachers do not incorporate creativity into English Language Teaching (ELT), failing to connect it to real-life experiences. They tend to rely heavily on textbooks, progressing from one unit to the next without integrating experiential learning or global issues to make the learning process engaging. Furthermore, large class sizes hinder the use of diverse teaching activities, individualized attention, and effective evaluation. There is also limited emphasis on oral skills, which can discourage students who are more interested in spoken English. In light of this, it's worth noting that many companies, industries, and non-governmental organizations in Cameroon prefer to hire bilingual workers. Additionally, the global trend underscores the increasing importance of English as an international language with numerous opportunities for proficient speakers. Recognizing the need for Cameroonians to be bilingual, the government has introduced a specialized bilingual education program for secondary schools. Moreover, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) model is applied, with subjects like history and citizenship education being taught in the other official language. As a result of the growing significance of the English language in the country, researchers have reached a consensus on the importance of employing various learning strategies to enhance language learner autonomy. [4] discovered that when these strategies were incorporated into language learning in the classroom, learners achieved better language proficiency. They emphasized that a language teacher's role extends beyond imparting knowledge to teaching learners how to learn. Consequently, this paper examines the impact of teaching strategies on improving competence in the teaching and learning of English, as well as exploring the essential skills required for language acquisition.

Categories of Teaching Strategies **Teacher's Questioning Strategy**

The communicative language teaching theory emphasizes that communication and interaction in the classroom play a vital role in language learning and are the main goals of language acquisition [5]. When teachers engage in dialogue and pose questions in class, it encourages language learners to think critically about the learning materials. The teacher's questioning strategy helps learners develop critical thinking skills during the learning process and guides them toward a deeper understanding of the study materials. [6] further points out that through appropriate question formulation and presentation, teachers can assist students in comprehending and applying content, ideas, concepts, relationships, and principles. According to [6], the elements of a teacher's questioning strategy encompass various question types, waiting time, and feedback. [7] adds that these question types can be categorized into five groups: knowledge, comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Students' Cooperative Learning

Numerous studies have highlighted the positive impact of cooperative learning. Research conducted by [3], [1], and [8] has shown that group work leads to better language production compared to individual learning. This suggests that group work provides more opportunities for language production and peer learning. Additionally, [9] demonstrated that interactions between teachers and individual students, as well as among students themselves, have a significant influence on learning.

Free Talk Show in Class

Self-confidence is widely recognized as a critical factor in a learner's success. Self-confident language learners tend to have a positive attitude towards learning and actively seek opportunities to engage with the target language, participating in various language activities. Preparing for a free talk show allows students to build self-confidence by practicing and rehearsing with their group members, enabling them to deliver confident presentations in class.

Skills for Effective Language Learning

A student's language learning journey starts with lesson planning, preparation, and execution. [10] highlights that effective teaching and learning begin with thorough lesson planning. This involves designing, implementing, and assessing lessons to enhance language skills. The goal is to improve all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Factors such as timing, lesson planning, progress monitoring, and assessment contribute to successful language learning.

Timing

Time management in education can be divided into several categories, including officially allocated time (school, classroom, and instructional time) and engaged time (the portion of time students spend working on tasks at an appropriate level of difficulty) [11]. Timing is crucial for enhancing language skills, and the quality of learning time is a key predictor of skill development [12]. Increasing the time allocated for language practice, especially writing, positively affects skill development [13]. Learning time is essentially the time students spend actively engaged in language-related tasks [14].

Promoting Active Learning

Promoting active learning in the English Language classroom involves engaging students in the learning process through deep thinking about the subject matter. It also includes effective classroom management, varying learning activities, optimizing student engagement, and fostering higher-order thinking skills like application, analysis, and synthesis. Active learning aligns with constructivist views on education, where students learn by doing and actively participate in the learning process [15, 16]. Encouraging active learning supports skill development as children learn by engaging with learning materials and activities.

Monitoring Language Development

Regularly monitoring and assessing learners' progress positively impacts their performance and the quality of lessons [15]. Effective instructors should continuously evaluate their students' progress and make necessary adjustments as needed. To achieve effective monitoring, instructors should ask questions such as "What has been learned?" and "What went well or wrong?" and use the feedback gained to enhance the quality of their teaching [6, 10].

Planning of the English Lesson

Lesson planning serves as a blueprint for effective teaching of the English language. According to [3], lesson planning is a strategy for tutoring a particular lesson, attempting to save time, energy and give the best output in no time. Lesson plans should outline specific objectives, content, sub-skills, and teaching activities. A well-structured lesson plan should consider previous coursework, subject matter, resources, strategies, evaluation methods, and future applications. Key aspects include formulating clear aims, a sound approach, effective summaries, individualized student focus, essential illustrations, reviews, content, and leadership [10].

Preparing the Lesson

Effective lesson preparation is essential to meet the lesson's objectives efficiently [10]. This phase, known as the implementation phase, involves assembling and analyzing data gathered during the planning stage [4]. Selecting the appropriate teaching techniques for specific language aspects requires thorough analysis at different stages.

Lesson Presentation

Effective teachers are skilled communicators who adapt their content and style to engage and captivate their students [2]. Sharing lesson objectives at the beginning of a lesson guides students on what to focus on. Teachers should employ various teaching styles to match their objectives and language skills effectively.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Learners' Progress

Monitoring and evaluation are crucial for tracking learner progress and improving the quality of lessons [6]. These processes involve systematic data collection through various means such as daily learning logs, class records, progress charts, and checklists. The goal is to identify areas that need improvement and make necessary adjustments.

Conducting Practice Sessions

Practice sessions provide learners with opportunities to apply new skills both individually and in groups, which accelerates the learning process [5]. These strategies collectively contribute to effective language teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

It is common knowledge that students are hardly taught with the required methods and skills that will help them develop language competencies. Despite the teaching of English language in Cameroonian schools, the mastery of

the English language is still a major problem. One of the ways to address this challenge is the adoption of teaching strategies such as teacher questioning strategy, students' cooperating learning and the time-limited English talk show in class. These methods will help the teacher-dependent students to become self-instructive. Furthermore, these strategies will encourage students to participate in the classroom discussion, give them the opportunity to think about the questions and work out of ways to solve them. Moreover, group work will help students improve their oral communication; promote their self-esteem and improve students' self-confidence.

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