Reintegrating English Language in Benin Primary Schools Curricula: Practicality of an Experimental Approach

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the acquisition of English language experimentation in public primary schools, specifically how English for young learners is applied to Benin as a francophone country. This survey began from the academic year 2017- 2018, involving 36 language instructors, 216 primary schools, 12 language experts and 12 Departments through the assignments, mechanisms, outcomes and mid – evaluation process. Data were collected by means of interviews (learners and instructors), Focus Group Discussions with experts and primary schools' administrators via content analysis curricula, instructors training program, Total Physical Response implementation with feedback. Preliminary findings suggest the importance of clear consistent guidelines for assignments, learner and instructor profile design, processing approach leading to extensive and effective language education from teaching to learning with criteria for evaluation and periodical capacity building programs. It is hoped that assumptions from longitudinal study will be useful to language education program as integral with little success in the present generational integration policy.

Introduction

The main goal of primary education is to favor learners' social integration and the development of personal autonomy. From this statement, learners in such level need to acquire a common cultural background which supports the development of commanding oral expression, reading, writing and speaking a language.

Considering Benin Constitution, French, English and National dialect should be taught at school. However, from 2001-2006 the experimental introduction of English had taken place but the outcomes were not really shared in the community of Researchers. Anyway, the context nowadays is clear and nobody denies the fact that French speaking feel the needs to go through EFL / ESL teaching and learning in primary schools. Benin government has decided through a presidential decree signed on the 2nd August 2017 the reintegration of English in the Public Primary Schools (PPS) curricula: this is the era of a re-experimentation program to be implemented from the academic year 2017-2018.

As we could remember, some of Benin private primary schools had started such adventure for a long time but there was any official background (governmental decision) for a long time but things are going on… Since we also understand that teaching language has to be designed according to the content-based added to language learning approach. For some of them Mathematics, Biology, Arithmetics, Geometry are taught in English but the final results are not measurable and then, the question remains discussable. So, the government decision is favored by the use of English today in social cultural, economic and international contexts as a whole. Ever the educational system recommended by international forum has contributed to such decision-making in BENIN. In perspective, English and French must be manipulated by citizens with easiness so as to boost the integral development in Benin.

Research Investigation

The act of reintegration of English in public primary schools by the government is experimented in the whole country via the selection of experimental schools' zones. The determination of the approach, the identification of the mechanism and all the stakeholders are explored in this research work. This study also aims to identify the ways and means to succeed in the program by designing a model or a label for any further exportation in other remaining French speaking countries. The objectives of this investigation are stated as follows:

a. To observe, record and analyze the mechanism, the methodology of experimentation (new generation) programming in PPS developed by the government.
b. To promote and develop resource bank of teaching strategies applied to primary schools, draw out the knowledge and techniques for Teachers- Training Program (TTP) for use in the implementation process of such courageous decision.
c. To help raise the government and university officials' awareness of the promotion, development and the profitability deriving from such initiative in French speaking countries.

Literature Review

According to Derakshan (2015) teaching a language is a multidimensional process, and teachers should pay enough attention to all skills of students. In other words, language teaching is a complex process where teachers need to spend extra effort to help learners comprehending their skills. And apart from traditional skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) teachers should understand learners' ability and readiness in advance. Language teaching should be understood as a system and requires appropriate teaching methods. For example, the Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method built in order to benefit both speech and action which are included in language learning progress and at the early age (Banks, 2008). Such method for primary school level or higher level, is based on the theory that 'the memory is boosted through association with bodily movement'. It attempts to develop learners' listening skills, make learners to be familiar with new language through visuals, and it involves movement and activity (Brewster, Ellis, & Girad, 2002). Moreover, TPR "demonstrates comprehension by doing the appropriate physical action as a response and once learners are ready to speak, they begin to give each other commands" (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Richards and Rodgers (1987) advocated that "TPR is interrelated to the 'trace theory' of memory, which holds that the more frequently a memory connection is drawn, the tougher the memory link will be". As a result, the role of learners' physical movement exerts an important influence on this method. It is believed that learning using motor activity, learners would be able to learn meaningfully and what have been learned might be easily recalled.

In addition, Bhat (1998) considered Communicative language teaching as a method emphasizes on the significance of language functions because learners need to understand both meaning and functions through communicative and social interactive activities. Communicative approach mostly refers to as activity –based and it usually includes the use of three types of activities: " problem facing such as identifying, matching, sequencing, prioritizing, and classifying; interactive activities, such as making surveys, or carrying out interviews; and creative activities, such as making masks birthday cards, and so on" (Brewster, Ellis, & Girad, 2002). Hence, this method attempts to achieve communicative ability by linking interactive topic and language functions so that learners can get meaningful and contextualized learning.

Consequently, among these teaching methods, neither do researchers nor English teachers decide that there is only one greatest way to teach. There is "no comparative study ha reliably proved the superiority of one certain method over another for all students, all teachers, and all settings "(Banks, 2008). Consequently, these methods can be applied and be adjusted depending on the levels study, the situation and the atmosphere of teaching.

In the framework of the present research work, many authors and writers in the field of English language teaching in primary schools are explored for the benefit of research assumptions and research experiences. Joliffe (2006) for a basic knowledge of phonics teaching and learning in the context of communicative English language teaching has revealed many details. Hayes (2000) who argues that teaching is a purely practical profession which must find out about the latest theories on reading and consider adapting teaching accordingly, if only because a failure to do so might be damaging. Wragg (1977) stated that decisions about how younger learners should learn and how teacher should teach need to reflect both purpose and context.

Ross (1992) suggested that such context should reflect some of the children's experiences outside school and asserted that children are aware of a wide range of environments and places, particularly through television, that they will use these naturally in play. This author suggests some variations on the home corner, each of which may be created with minimum of resources.

Tann (1991) demonstrated the organization of the furniture in a classroom that can affect the possibilities for language development. Tann (1991) maintained that in many classrooms children are seated in groups around a table or cluster of desks. To that end research had shown that 90% of teachers never used collaborative group work. However, this phenomenon may have change since academic years: 2017- 2018 & 2018- 2019 & 2019- 2020 at the rise of the reintegration of English language in the curriculum in public primary schools (PPS) in Benin. According to Medwell et al. 1998), additionally, language teachers may view bigger picture – they make links between a package of lessons, a wider context by including across the curriculum as well as within a subject in classroom.

Opinions fear that young learners might experience detrimental effects from early primary learning, such as psychological, social, linguistic, or cognitive issues. Genesee et al. (2011) dispute this nothing: "There is no significant theoretical reason to believe that learning, knowing, or using two languages should jeopardize children's development, yet this fear is harbored by some people". In fact, given the right environment and support for dual language learning, children can exhibit higher levels of cognitive ability. Cummins's (2000) research shows that "cognitive advantages among bilingual children are usually associated with advanced levels of bilingual proficiency, whereas cognitive disadvantages (or relatively lower levels of cognitive ability relative to monolingual children) are often associated with low levels of bilingual proficiency" (as cited in Genesee et al., 2011). Lower levels of cognitive ability are associated with the learning of one or both languages being cut off, which may be especially true in the case of children being educated in the primary level in EFL settings. Therefore, there is no cognitive disadvantage to dual language learning, especially if both languages are provided the support needed for development. The best –case scenario for English learners in all contexts is strong and continuous support for language and culture in primary schools.

In briefing the studies in the field of English language teaching in primary schools, Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014) investigated the challenges in teaching English to young learners faced by English teachers around the world. As a result, there is a variety of challenges which were identified: teaching speaking, motivation, differentiating learning/teaching, teaching large classes, issue of discipline, developing teachers' English competence. Although these studies focused on teaching English to primary school students, their findings can support my study since the present research does not only focus on the English teaching/learning/evaluating in classroom, but also explores challenges in teaching English as the result of policy, such as teaching facilities and teachers' competence.

Anyway, Fatiloro (2015) has faced the same challenges in Nigeria, in addition, Salahuddin, Khan, and Rahman (2013) attempted to discover challenges faced in implementing English curriculum at primary level schools in rural areas of Bangladesh. The remedy for the challenges involves the roles of teachers, learners, and institution in reforming attitude. Other things that should be done in English teaching in rural or urban areas are recruiting new generation of teachers, improving teaching aids, subject-based training, supply of teachers' guide, teacher-training referential, competence referential and the involvement of the classical teacher advisers or teacher inspectors in primary or kindergarten schools.

Survey Methodology

Selections and target populations

From needs analysis of the whole Benin republic, some experts are committed to identify where should be the needs to integrate English in public primary schools. Such decision with reference to the production of official report analysis. As a second aspect, the identification of teachers of English, the experimentation schools, the teacher trainers and the Department of experimentation zones to implement this new program in Benin curricula. So, a total number of 216 distributed in 12 Departments in 03 communes per Department with a minimum of 03 schools or school complex per Commune are identified by the Ministry of primary education officials.

In practice, 05 Grade1 classrooms/teacher experimenters are assigned for this new reform in Benin. Consequently, a total of 36 teachers for the job for the experimentation in advantage of the English language promotion. A**s** illustration, selected schools in pedagogical region of Alibori Department are subject to our pilot research survey. Primary schools English teachers overview levels are also interpreted during this research work.

The Roles / Responsibilities of the teachers normally Bachelor of Science in elementary Education with Emphasis in ESL are also submitted to pedagogical appreciations in the procedure of research. From that perspective, many indicators are designed and analyzed such are:

   a. Planning instructions for students and ensuing instructors meets set standards
   b. Finding enriching materials to use for instruction

c. Assessing students on their progress and learning
d. Identifying gaps in learning and creating intervention opportunity
e. Meeting with other teaching professionals to plan support for students with special needs
f. Setting up a classroom management plan
g. Grading papers and tracking grades
h. Keeping caregivers appraised about grades, class activities and behaviors
i. Meeting professional goals that are required by the experimentation

Method and procedures and data collection

For such preliminary research investigation many procedures and action plans are disseminated and characterized in terms of didactics ways and pedagogical strategies for better performance of the reform:

a. Teachers' profile (from files selection period to recruitment).
b. Learners' profile (from the identification of schools, to the determination of the school level grade 1).
c. The experimentation programming itself (administrative procedures, facilities and arrangements).
d. Curricula and syllabi designs
e. Teacher training seminar (teacher - training program content).
f. Possible and practical didactic materials for stakeholders.
g. Experimentation Procedure - monitoring & evaluation.
h. Learners' and teachers' motivation
i. Government policy and perspectives (03 years after for generalization by reviewing secondary school and university English program (necessity for ESP classes).

However, due to the nature and the levels of the survey process, such need analysis has to be effective in Benin Republic.

Date collection

The tools used to collect information were lesson observations, practice time, lesson simulation programs, learners' and teachers' interviews, school administration interviews and field note – taking. Observation session were practical knowledge of how teachers were supplied with language supports (teaching materials) and developing / promoting / inspiring leaners' language skills in PPS with their own ingeneousity in Kandi – Banikoara – Malanville. An audio and visual aids recording of lessons was made during observation. Some questionnaires were designed to provide a focus for lessons observation and help with the development of lessons.

Strategies

The analysis of the types of strategies which is used by each language teachers, for developing learners' motivation in primary schools at Grade1 (From Presentation – Practice – Production: PPP to RANV: Reponses Active Non – Verbal and TPR: Total Physical   Responses).

From the whole school period in the grade 1 curricula, 11 weeks are devoted to TPR or RANV. But the method remains debatable to due to the quality of the new generation of learners admitted in grade 1.

By showing ingeneousity via strategies development, language teachers for such program try to model the teaching situation for effective acquisition of EFL as an additional language in the Curricula in the Alibori pedagogical Region (Benin).

To that end, teachers make learning experiences meaningful and comprehensible for PPS learners to create Benin model of the reintegration (Based on their status as former classical primary school teachers). The school administration interview (official grade1 teachers, the headmaster, the pedagogical region chief) is designed to evaluate the impact of the approach administrative and their personal view on the implementation in their respective school and finally collecting their suggestions and recommendations for performing actions.

Noting that such varieties of tools help to broaden the data collection for better decision making vis-à-vis the program. All the variable in consideration are specified as follows:

Language learning context - training experiences – participants language teaching experience – learning beliefs - the typology of interactions - teachers' language level – teachers / learners profile at the entrance - curricula at work – lesson - model at work … Teachers / Learners profile at the exiting process.

Findings

The early learning of English language has focused on the following principles: acquisition of communicative competence, learning through exposure and it leads to an integrative approach of instructions. As a proof, when studying a mother tongue, or any second or foreign language a given learner in context acquires certain interconnected skills and competencies that are components to their communicative competence (a case study of grade 1 learners in Public Primary Schools during such experimentation.)

Table 1: *The overall types of language used during lessons in Kandi - Banikoara – Malanville*.

N°	DENOMINATION	PERCENTAGE
1	Error correction	0 %
2	Unclassifiable	0 %
3	Think aloud	2 %
4	Eliciting	3 %
5	Pause	3 %
6	prompt	4 %
7	Discipline control	4 %
8	Students answers	20 %
9	Instruction	18 %
10	Open - question	8 %
11	Asking specific questions to students	7 %
12	Praise	5 %
13	Closed – questions	15 %
14	Activity related language	11 %

Source: Research investigation data (2018)

Table 2 *Language teaching strategies / techniques used during the field survey in Kandi – Banikoara – Malanville*

N°	DENOMINATION	PERCENTAGE
1	Modeling of activities	8 %
2	Thinking time	6 %
3	Vocabulary cheeks	21 %
4	Eliciting	20 %
5	Repeat after	0 %
6	Pre –teaching language	0 %
7	Translation	0 %

Source: Research investigation data (2018)

Table 3 *Characterization of the Teacher of English in primary schools below are the skills noted during the survey according to their importance on the scale of 1- 5 (1 being lowest and 5 being highest) and competency level on a scale of 1 – 7 (1 being lowest and 7 being highest).*

SKILL NAME	IMPORTANCE	COMPETENCE
Speaking	4.25	3.62
Instructing	4.25	3.5
Learning Strategies	4.12	4.38
Active listening	4	3.75
Active learning	3.8	3.5

Source: Research investigation data (2018)

Table 4 *Teachers' ability noted during the survey*

Below is the ability experimented according to their importance on the scale of 1 to 5 (1 being lowest and 5 being highest) and competency level on a scale of 1 – 7 (1 being lowest and 7 being highest).

ABILITY NAME	IMPORTANCE	COMPETENCE
Oral expression	4.5	4.25
Oral comprehension	4.38	4.12
Speech recognition	4.12	3.88
Speech clarity	412	3.88
Problem sensitivity	4	3.88

Source: Research investigation data (2018)

Table 5 *Teachers' knowledge noted during survey*
Below are the knowledge areas noted according to their importance on the scale of 1 to 5 (1 being lowest and 5 being highest) and competency level on a scale of 1 to 7 (being lowest and 7 being highest)

KNOWLEDGE AREA	IMPORTANCE	COMPETENCE
Education and Training	4.4	4.67
English language	4.4	4.47
Psychology	4	3.71
Sociology	3.48	3.61

Source: Research investigation data (2018)

Table 6 *Teachers' work activities*
Below are the work activities involved during the survey according to their importance on the scale of 1 to 5 (being lowest and 5 being highest) and competency level on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 being lowest and 7 being highest)

WORK ACTIVITY	IMPORTANCE	COMPETENCE
Training and teaching others	4.37	5.03
Thinking creatively	4.29	5.09
Organizing, planning & prioritizing work	4.28	5.44
Coaching & Developing others	4.21	5.06
Documenting / Recording information	4.17	4.26

Source: Research investigation data (2018)

Table 7 *Teachers' work styles*
Below are the work styles involved and noted according to their importance on the scale of 1 to 5 (being lowest and 5 being highest)

KNOWLEDGE AREA	IMPORTANCE
Self-control	4.73
Cooperation	4.72
Concern for others	4.67
dependability	4.63
Stress tolerance	4.6

Source: Research investigation data (2018)

Recommendations and Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations and suggestions are given:
   a. Advanced teacher development program in TEFL
   b. Teacher development program on modern strategies in teaching English in primary schools
   c. Necessity to design visual aids related to the elaborated teaching guide
   d. Organizing contextualization session to clarify the mission goals of the new English teachers.
   e. Training session for schools' headmasters, pedagogical advisors for every experimentation zones.
   f. Designing specific training program for modelling BENIN strategies to the teaching / learning English in primary schools.
   g. Organizing national forum for validating teaching / learning tools in accordance to the experimentation program.

    h.   Organizing forum for designing professional training curricula for teachers of English as former classical teachers of primary school.

    i.   Determination and dissemination of primary school teacher profile (Entrance & Exiting)

    j.   Determination and dissemination of primary school learners profile (Entrance & Exiting)

Conclusion

Teaching English in public primary schools in Benin has become a challenge. The high demand for classical primary – level teachers majoring in English studies called for the establishment of new resources of teachers of English. Many teachers have found themselves teaching in primary schools, even though they have not been trained professionally for this level. The option of In-Service teachers and in – service training can be reviewed and strengthen by long-term training added to the exceptional opening program of Bachelor or Master Degree of Didactics in elementary education with an emphasis in ESL by the medium of Benin English departments since we all are aware of lecturers researchers responsibility in this field of study. In this study I have investigated the originality of this innovative approach of teaching and learning English in public primary schools decided by Benin Government. So, the results obtained by means of questionnaires, classroom observations, and analysis of the experimentation process demonstrate that curricula / syllabi of young learners of English are approximately appropriate (for grade 1) and that the curricula would make the teaching and learning more effective and then the results in better performance in production (RANV/TPR) skills could be reinforced, provided that the teacher development and their language were increased. The typical syllabi requirements seem essentially realistic for Benin reintegration of such program. However, there exists a gap between the present classroom method of teaching (PPP) and the study findings obtained on the field (Kandi – Banikoara – Malanville). Such outcome confirms the need to strengthen the professionalization at every level of the implementation to the program of reintegration of English in primary schools. Although this study was carried out in on designated pedagogical region (Alibori). I believe the findings illustrate a nationwide trend. However much remains to be investigated. Future research should be directed toward increasing the number of pedagogical regions under investigation to ensure representative results.

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