

METHODOLOGY OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA: THE CASE OF FRENCH

Nonye Rose Ikonta¹ and Victoria Ogbonna²

¹Department of Arts Education, Faculty of Education, University of Lagos

²Department of Arts Education, Faculty of Education, University of Jos

vicugogbonna@gmail.com 08034506879

ABSTRACT

The success or failure of language learners is heavily influenced by the effectiveness of the teaching methods and strategies employed. In the Nigerian context, particularly at the Basic Education level, many students show an initial interest in learning French. However, this enthusiasm often diminishes due to a lack of engaging and effective teaching methods. Observations from classroom settings reveal that many French teachers continue to rely on traditional methods, which do little to develop students' communicative competence in the language. This paper explores both the strengths and limitations of traditional and modern teaching approaches in French language instruction. It emphasizes the importance of strategically combining these methodologies to suit the lesson objectives, the learners' age, learning styles, and specific language needs. Rather than treating grammar and vocabulary as isolated elements, they should be taught within meaningful contexts and through communicative activities that encourage active use of the language. The paper advocates for the adoption of the communicative approach, which integrates various teaching methods, strategies, and techniques aimed at developing students' practical language skills. It also calls for sustained professional development through regular training and retraining of French language teachers to ensure they can effectively apply both traditional and modern methodologies in the classroom.

Keywords: Basic Education, Communicative competence, French language teaching, Modern teaching strategies, teaching methodology, Traditional teaching methods

INTRODUCTION

In the context of language education in Nigeria, French occupies a dual role. French is both a foreign and a second language. Although it is not commonly spoken in the immediate Nigerian environment, its strategic importance for regional and international communication elevates its status to that of a second language. As part of the African language policy and Nigeria's National Language Policy, French was introduced into the school curriculum to bridge communication gaps among West African nations. In recognition of its value, the Nigerian federal government made French a compulsory subject at the Basic Education level, underscoring the need for effective teaching methods that can foster students' communicative competence and sustain their interest in the language.

A review of the teaching methods employed by French language instructors in Nigeria reveals several dominant approaches. The grammar-translation method is still the most widely used, focusing primarily on grammatical rules and sentence translation. While this method aids in understanding the structure of the language, it often fails to develop students' oral and communicative abilities (Olagboye, 2017). The audio-visual method, which includes listening and repetition exercises, is practiced in some schools, but its impact is limited by the lack of proper equipment and resources (Adebayo, 2019). The direct method, where teachers use only French in the classroom to create an immersive environment, is occasionally applied by francophone teachers who may not be fluent in English language. However, its effectiveness is constrained when students possess a low proficiency level in French (Adegbite, 2014). Lastly, the communicative approach, which emphasizes real-life communication and interaction, is promoted by the curriculum. Despite its benefits, its

implementation remains limited due to inadequate teacher training and large class sizes (Bamgbose, 2020).

Methodology plays a crucial role in second language acquisition. A deep understanding of various language teaching methods is essential for designing approaches tailored to the learners' needs. Teachers should adopt a reflective attitude, adjusting their strategies to suit specific learning objectives and learner profiles. As there is no universally applicable method, combining multiple approaches within a single lesson is often the most effective strategy (Vin-Mbah, 2012). Given the constantly evolving educational landscape, shaped by technological, scientific, and cultural changes, continuous research and regular reassessment of teaching methods are necessary. This ongoing evaluation ensures that language instruction remains relevant, inclusive, and effective in addressing the shifting needs of learners (Brodowicz, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

Theories are facts that guide the teaching and the learning of a subject. There exist many theories in the teaching of a second/foreign language. In this study, communicative competence theory is one of the appropriate theories for second or foreign language teaching and learning. The theory 'communicative competence' was introduced by the North American linguist and anthropologist, Dell Hymes, in the late 1960s (Lillis, 2006). Hymes believes that the ability to use a language well involves knowing (either explicitly or implicitly) how to use language appropriately in any given context. Hymes's juxtaposition of the word 'communicative' with 'competence' stood in sharp contrast with Noam Chomsky's influential use of the term 'linguistic competence,' which Chomsky used to refer to a native speaker's implicit knowledge of the grammatical rules governing his/her language. While accepting the importance of grammatical knowledge, Hymes argued that in order to communicate effectively, speakers had to know not only what is grammatically correct/incorrect, but what is communicatively appropriate in any given context. For example, knowing when to use formal and informal forms such as *vous* (formal) and *tu* (informal) in French.

In a globalized world where intercultural interactions are frequent, communicative competence prepares learners to express themselves not only with grammatical accuracy, but also with sensitivity and contextual adequacy. For teachers, this theory allows them to design pedagogical approaches focused on authentic communication situations, integrating cultural and social elements that influence language use. It thus promotes the development of interactive activities, such as role plays, debates or simulations, which allow students to practice the language in varied and meaningful contexts. In addition, communicative competence encourages a holistic perspective of teaching, which takes into account the sociolinguistic (use of appropriate language registers), discursive (coherence of exchanges) and strategic (ability to overcome communication difficulties) dimensions (Hymes, 1972) as well as diverse methods and techniques.

Traditional and Modern Methodology of Language Teaching: The Pros and Cons

It has been said that there is no best method. Hence, the need to study the characteristics, the strengths and weaknesses of each method or approach for appropriate application to suit the learners' language needs.

Traditional Methods

Under Traditional methods, two methods are discussed in this session. They are the Grammar-Translation Method and the Direct Method.

Grammar-Translation Method

The Grammar-Translation Method is among the oldest approaches to foreign language instruction, having been widely adopted across Europe in the 19th century. It primarily emphasizes the written aspects of language, focusing heavily on grammar and vocabulary development. Instruction typically begins with the presentation of grammatical rules in a logical sequence, progressing from basic to

advanced concepts. These rules are reinforced through translation exercises and text analysis, allowing learners to internalize structures through repeated practice.

Following grammar instruction, learners translate texts from the target language into their native language. These translations, often involving authentic materials enhance reading comprehension, interpretation skills, and vocabulary acquisition. In the final stage, students produce original texts in the target language, which fosters written and, to some extent, oral proficiency, contributing to overall language fluency (Waleska, B., Vaneska, O. C. Fabio, M., 2024).

Despite its long-standing use, the method has been criticized for overemphasizing grammar and translation at the expense of communicative competence. Critics contend that it inadequately develops speaking and listening skills, which are better nurtured through more interactive methods. Nevertheless, its structured and analytical approach can offer a solid grammatical foundation upon which learners may build advanced communication skills. Consequently, the method continues to be used in some educational contexts around the world.

The Grammar-Translation Method continues to generate debate among scholars. While some highlight its limitations, others emphasize its effectiveness. For example, Eliot (1909), as cited in (Waleska, B., Vaneska, O. C. Fabio, M., 2024), regarded it as the most effective approach to foreign language instruction. He believed that grammar constituted the foundation of language learning and that translation was the optimal means of enhancing comprehension and production in the target language.

In contrast, Krashen (1989) challenged this perspective, arguing that the method does not promote authentic communicative competence. He maintained that language is best acquired naturally, through meaningful interactions in real-life contexts, and cautioned that an overreliance on grammar and translation may lead to mechanical and less effective learning experiences. Similarly, Henderson (2016) offered a more balanced viewpoint, suggesting that the Grammar-Translation Method can serve as a valuable supplement to communicative approaches. According to him, it can benefit both learners with prior language knowledge and beginners, particularly those studying French, by reinforcing their understanding through structured grammar and translation activities.

In summary, scholarly opinions on the Grammar-Translation Method remain divided. While some advocate for its strengths in developing grammatical and translation skills, others criticize its limited capacity to foster communicative proficiency. Nevertheless, there is a general agreement that, when integrated with more interactive and communicative methods, it can contribute meaningfully to the language learning process.

Direct Method

The Direct Method is one of the earliest approaches to foreign language instruction and is characterized by its strong emphasis on oral communication. From the onset of instruction, the target language is used exclusively as the medium of teaching, with no reliance on the learner's native language. This method seeks to mirror the natural process of first language acquisition, where listening and speaking precede reading and writing. Its central aim is to develop learners' ability to use the language effectively in everyday, real-life situations, thereby enhancing their communicative competence (Waleska, B., Vaneska, O. C. Fabio, M., 2024).

Language is taught within meaningful and practical contexts, often through familiar scenarios and task-based activities that facilitate intuitive learning. Teachers conduct lessons entirely in the target language, encouraging students to acquire vocabulary and grammatical structures organically, rather than through direct translation. Particular attention is given to pronunciation and intonation, as these are considered essential components of clear and accurate communication.

A key strength of the Direct Method lies in its immersive and realistic use of the foreign language, which often increases learners' motivation and engagement. It is especially effective for teaching modern spoken languages such as English, French, Spanish, and other globally used languages. Many scholars have explored and commented on the use of the Direct Method in language

education, recognizing both its strengths and limitations in various instructional contexts (Waleska, B., Vaneska, O. C. Fabio, M., 2024).

Despite its advantages, the Direct Method presents several challenges. One major limitation is the difficulty in assessing student progress in a clear, systematic way, as the method emphasizes spontaneous language use over structured testing. It can also be particularly demanding for beginners or learners with minimal proficiency such as those at the Basic Education level who may struggle to follow instructions delivered entirely in the target language. Additionally, some learners may find the delayed introduction of reading and writing skills frustrating, especially if they require the language for academic or professional purposes.

The method also places significant demands on teachers, who must possess a high level of proficiency in the target language. Unlike other methods, they cannot rely on the learners' native language to clarify difficult concepts. Moreover, the Direct Method is often impractical in large classroom settings, making it less suitable for public education systems. It tends to be more effective in small classes or in contexts where learners already have some foundational knowledge of the language (Waleska, B., Vaneska, O. C. Fabio, M., 2024). For example, students in Francophone environments, who are exposed to French from an early age at home, may benefit more from this method. Similarly, it can be well-suited for individuals learning a foreign language for specific purposes, such as travel, professional development, or personal enrichment.

Modern Methods

Modern teaching methods are student-centered, technology integration and personalized learning, and emphasize on cooperative learning and interaction. Students play a leading role in the learning process and teachers are more of a guide. Communicative approach is an umbrella name for modern methods.

Communicative Approach

The Communicative Approach is a widely embraced method of foreign language teaching that prioritizes real and meaningful communication over the exclusive study of grammar and structure. It emerged in the 1970s as a response to the shortcomings of earlier methods such as the audio-lingual and grammar-translation approaches, which focused mainly on the formal aspects of language. The central aim of the communicative approach is to enhance learners' ability to communicate effectively in both spoken and written forms, particularly in everyday, practical contexts. Communicative Language Teaching is generally regarded as an approach because the principles underlying it can be applied in many different ways. Teachers adopting an approach have considerable flexibility in how they apply the principles to their own contexts. Lessons are centered around task-based activities engaging, purposeful projects carried out individually or in groups that promote the use of language in functional and realistic ways. A key feature of this approach is the incorporation of authentic communication scenarios. Teaching materials are drawn from real-life situations, such as casual conversations, workplace interactions, and professional correspondence. Classes are predominantly conducted in the target language, allowing students to be fully immersed and actively use the language throughout the learning process (Waleska, B., Vaneska, O. C. Fabio, M., 2024).

Interaction among students is another cornerstone of the communicative approach. Activities are designed to foster collaboration and dialogue, enabling learners to practice the language, exchange ideas, and benefit from both peer and teacher feedback in a supportive environment. In this method, the teacher acts as a facilitator rather than a traditional instructor. The teacher's role is to guide students, provide constructive feedback, and create opportunities for authentic communication using relevant materials and real-world scenarios. The communicative approach has gained global popularity for its effectiveness in helping students build confidence and competence in real-life communication. It encourages learners to use the language naturally and meaningfully, making

them more comfortable and capable when interacting with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Waleska, B., Vaneska, O. C., Fabio, M., 2024).

Traditional Methods versus Modern Methods

Traditional methods of teaching, like the grammar-translation method, focus on structured learning, rote memorization, and a teacher-centered approach. Modern methods, on the other hand, prioritize student engagement, active learning, and the use of technology. While traditional methods offer structure and clear learning objectives, they may not cater for diverse learning styles or foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Modern methods, while potentially more engaging, can sometimes be costly and may not always require the presence of a teacher, which some students might find challenging. Communicative approach improves communicative competence, enhances motivation, and promotes student-centered learning. Grammar-Translation, on the other hand provides a strong foundation in grammar and vocabulary. The most effective approach often involves a blended strategy that combines the strengths of both traditional and modern methods. A balanced approach can provide structure, facilitate engagement, and cater to diverse learning styles and needs (Chen, 2025).

Teaching French Language using a Balanced Approach

Literature has shown that a balanced approach is the best option towards the development of students' communicative competence in a second/foreign language. A balanced approach is a combination of the traditional and the modern methodologies. The next session highlights the steps and strategies for teaching vocabulary and grammar through the balanced approach.

The first step to teaching a foreign/second language is to select a text on a real-life activity or an event, example, "Chez le Tailleur"; "Au Marché"; "Chez le Docteur"; "Chez la Coiffeuse" etc.

This will be followed by Pre-Listening: The teacher gives the students the contextual background of the activity in the text. He asks them questions to ascertain their knowledge of the activity/event. At Basic level, this exercise should be done in English for easy communication with the students. The pre-listening exercise will also help to arouse the students' interest in the lesson.

The next step is the Listening. Here, the teacher allows the students to listen to the audio of the text. If the textbook did not come with an audio, the teacher can use Text-to-Speech app to send the text to a French man or woman to read the text after which he will download it and subsequently play it in the class for the students to listen to. The teacher allows the students to listen twice to the audio and ask them to mention what they heard, for example: how many voices did you hear? Is it a man's or a woman's voice? Etc. This is not the listening comprehension because the students cannot understand the oral text without the understanding of the vocabulary and the grammar in the text. After the mastery of the linguistic aspect, then the teacher plays the audio again. He can play the audio in segments or in a whole, stopping at intervals to ask them question to test their understanding of the text.

To effectively teach language structure in a foreign language, teachers are advised to incorporate a variety of methods. Here is a breakdown of effective vocabulary and grammar teaching methods and strategies to enhance students' communicative competence:

1. Contextualization & Meaning: Introduce words in context by presenting new words within sentences, stories, or real-life situations to help students understand their meaning and usage. Use visuals and realia such as pictures, objects, or real-life examples to make vocabulary more concrete and relatable. Introduce synonyms and antonyms to expand vocabulary and help students understand the nuances of word meaning. While not always necessary, using translation from the students' first language can be helpful for clarifying meaning, especially for beginners. Encourage students to guess the meaning of new words from their context, and then provide the correct meaning.

2. Active Learning & Engagement include: Games and Activities: Incorporate fun and interactive games like Pictionary, Charades, crossword puzzles, or vocabulary bingo to make learning vocabulary engaging; Word Association: Have students connect new words to existing vocabulary or concepts to create meaningful links; Word Sorting/Categories: Encourage students to categorize words based on meaning or usage. Frayer Model can be used to help students define words, provide examples, and create visual representations. Use flashcards for practice and memorization, allowing students to practice pronunciation and spelling. Students can create their own word cards with the new word on one side and its meaning or translation on the other. Encourage students to read widely in the target language to encounter new words in context and reinforce their learning. Provide opportunities for students to use new vocabulary in speaking and writing activities. Download language apps and use them with the students for vocabulary practice and reinforcement.

3. Regularly repeat and review previously learned vocabulary to reinforce memory and ensure retention. Provide multiple opportunities for students to encounter and use new vocabulary in different contexts. Encourage students to reflect on their vocabulary learning journey and identify areas for improvement. Encourage students to research the origins and usage of words.

4. Encourage word play and students in activities that explore the sounds, meanings, and origins of words. Promote a love of language by creating a positive and engaging learning environment where students feel comfortable exploring and experimenting with language.

Finding the best ways to teach and learn vocabulary with the students is one of the most important things a teacher can do, and having a range of techniques and activities aids this process. The teacher is not expected to use all the techniques but should be guided by his objectives, content, the learners' age, their learning style and needs as well as the available resources (Tennant, 2023; Siegel, 2022).

Teaching Grammar through Communicative Approach

Despite the long-standing grammar debate over whether grammar should be taught, language researchers stress the fact that language cannot be used without grammar (American English (2021). The problem is not grammar itself, but the ways grammar has been taught and learned and the way it should be taught. Early methods in foreign language instruction, including the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), often taught grammar separate from the larger contexts in which language is used. While these methods were often effective for developing a receptive (reading) knowledge of a language, they sometimes failed to provide students with the ability to use language communicatively in speaking and writing. As a result, a number of methods of language instruction since Audiolingualism have focused on developing communicative competence. Communicative competence does not mean an absence of grammar instruction but rather grammar instruction that leads to the ability to communicate effectively. A communicative grammar lesson might start in very much the same way as a traditional method with presentation of a grammar item and examples, followed by controlled exercises to practice the grammar item. However, a communicative grammar lesson does not stop there. Following the presentation and practice stages, a communicative grammar lesson gives students the opportunity to practise the target grammar. The beginning stages of a communicative grammar lesson often focus on accuracy while fluency becomes more important during practice stage.

Communicative tasks are important because they allow learners to practise the target grammar feature under real operating conditions. Communicative grammar practice has often focused on speaking activities; however, writing activities are also an important and valid way to practice using grammar communicatively. Some of the activities that often takes place in the communicative stage of a grammar lesson are games, role-plays, and discussion activities. Games are excellent methods of communicative grammar practice because they allow students the opportunity to practice and develop language skills in an enjoyable and low-stress manner (Dekeyser, 1998 in Ogbonna, 2021). In summary, this paper identified teachers' use of traditional methods arbitrarily as one of the causes of students' demotivation in the French language in Nigeria. The paper further disclosed that French

language is a foreign language with the status of a second language because of its importance in regional and international communication. Based on this fact, French should be taught with effective communicative methods. The paper advocated for the training and the retraining of teachers in the use of communicative approach. In addition, the paper suggested the use of both traditional and modern methodologies with vocabulary and grammar to be taught with communicative approach. In conclusion, the teacher' trainers and school administrators should ensure they provide the teachers with the training and the resources needed for effective use of the communicative approach to enhance students' communicative competence and interest in French language.

REFERENCES

- Adebayo, K. O. (2019). *The Role of audio-oral techniques in teaching French: Challenges and opportunities in Nigerian Schools*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Adegbite, W. A. (2014). *Immersion techniques in French language education: Theory and practice in Nigeria*. Ilorin: Fountain Publications.
- American English (2021). Teacher's Corner: Teaching grammar for communicative competence <https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/teachers-corner-teaching-grammar-communicative-competence>.
- Bamgbose, A. (2020). *Communicative language teaching in Nigeria: A Study of secondary school French programs*. Jos: University of Jos Press.
- Brodowicz, M. (2024). *The benefits and challenges of using different teaching methods in education*. <https://aithor.com/essay-examples/the-benefits-and-challenges-of-using-different-teaching-methods-in-education>
- Chen, X. (2025). A comparative study on the effectiveness of traditional and modern teaching methods. *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Social Psychology and Humanity Studies*, 85(1). 13-18.
- Dekeyser, R. (1998). *Beyond focus on form: Cognitive perspectives on learning and practicing second language grammar*. In C. Doughty and J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on Form in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press.
- Eliot, C.W. (1909). *The teaching of modern foreign languages in the United States*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- EuroSchool (2023). What are the advantages and disadvantages of traditional teaching methods? <https://www.euroschoolindia.com/blogs/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-traditional-teaching-methods/>
- Fer, E. (2025). Characteristics of a language teaching method: Question and Richards C. Jack. Responds : <https://www.professorjackrichards.com/characteristics-of-a-language-teaching-method/>
- Henderson, I. (2016). The grammar translation method: Not as bad as you think. *The Language Teacher*, 40(5), 33-36.

- Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative compétence. In Bride J.B, Holmes, J. (eds) *Sociolinguistics: Selected Readings*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 269-293.
- Krashen, S. (1989). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. New York:Prentice Hall.
- Lillis, T. (2006). *Communicative competence*. in K. Brown (ed) *Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics*. Oxford: Elsevier. ISBN: 13: 978-0-08-044299-0. 666-673.
- Magdy. M. (2017). Differences between methodology, approach, technique, and framework.
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/differences-between-methodology-approach-technique-framework-magdy>
- Meylani, R. (2024). A comparative analysis of traditional and modern approaches to assessment and evaluation in education. *Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences*,15(1), 520-555. 22 April 2024.
- Siegel, L. (2022). How to teach ESL vocabulary: Top Methods for introducing new words.
<https://bridge.edu/tefl/blog/teach-esl-vocabulary/>
- Stephenperse.com (2017). Teaching methods: Traditional versus modern.
<https://www.stephenperse.com/blog/>
- Tenant, A. (2023). *Vocabulary matters: Techniques for teaching and learning*. Onestopenglish
- Vin-Mbah, F.I. (2021). Learning and teaching methodology. *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 2(4), January 2021.
- Waleska, B., Vaneska, O. C. & Fabio, M. (2024). Foreign language teaching.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379004957_Foreign_language_teaching_methods, March 2024.