

PÉDAGOGICAL PROPOSALS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO CASE OF GOMA SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Cyprien HABASIKIYAKE KAKULE

Université de Goma(UNIGOM)

mukulekam@gmail.com

Abstract: This article looks at providing some guidelines conducive to the improvement of the system of English language teaching and learning in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in general and in Goma secondary schools in particular. These guidelines regard some suggestions that could support the consolidation of the educational system of English language teaching and learning at the secondary level of education. It is obvious that our system of English teaching proves to be inefficient and needs to be improved if we want it to be productive. Its efficiency lies in the introduction of new measures, strategies and management that would bring a positive impulse to its improvement. The real challenge here consists in addressing some deficiencies that hinder the effectiveness and the achievement of the English teaching objectives. Obviously, English national curriculum, teacher teaching capabilities, teaching and learning control, teacher social conditions and teaching material resources should be enhanced at all costs. This overall enhancement might surely contribute to and affect the advancement of the English language teaching and learning process in our schools.

Keywords : Pedagogical proposals, improvement, English teaching and learning, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Goma secondary schools

PROPOSITIONS PEDAGOGIQUES POUR L'AMELIORATION DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT ET APPRENTISSAGE DE L'ANGLAIS EN REPUBLIQUE DEMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO. CAS DES ECOLES SECONDAIRES DE GOMA

Résumé : Cet article a pour but de donner quelques indications pouvant mener à améliorer le système d'enseignement et d'apprentissage de la langue anglaise en République Démocratique du Congo en général et dans les écoles secondaires de Goma en particulier. Ces indications donnent certaines suggestions qui pourraient soutenir la consolidation du système éducationnel de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage de la langue anglaise au niveau secondaire. Il est vrai que notre système d'enseignement de l'anglais s'avère inefficace et devrait être amélioré si nous voulons qu'il soit productif. Son efficacité réside dans l'introduction de nouvelles mesures, stratégies et management qui pourraient apporter une impulsion positive à son amélioration. Le véritable challenge consiste à résoudre certaines déficiences qui empêchent l'efficacité et la réalisation des objectifs de l'enseignement de l'anglais. Assurément, le programme national d'anglais, les capacités pédagogiques de l'enseignant, le contrôle de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage, les conditions sociales de l'enseignant et les ressources matérielles d'enseignement et d'apprentissage devraient être renforcés à tout prix. Tout ce renforcement devrait sûrement contribuer au et impacter le développement du processus de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage de la langue anglaise dans nos écoles.

Mots-clés : Propositions pédagogiques, amélioration, enseignement et apprentissage de l'anglais, République Démocratique du Congo, écoles secondaires de Goma

Introduction

This article attempts to envisage some proposals designed to improve English teaching and learning in Goma secondary schools. These proposals could enhance Goma learners' performances, on the one hand, and provide teachers with operational instruments that should allow them to develop skills in their teaching process, on the other hand. The real problem that basically undermines English teaching and learning in Goma schools lies in communication development efficiency. This challenge requires new guidelines and measures in the educational system in order to attain the objectives assigned to English teaching and learning. Clearly, it requires new educational policies, new pedagogical formulations and strategies that should be envisaged to address deficiencies in English teaching and learning. The system of English teaching in secondary schools needs a reformulation of objectives and management that should improve the educational system. For this, emphasis should be put on the operational aspects of the language that are designed to communicate in it. The English curriculum should be redrafted in order to become an instrument that could meet the goals and the objectives of English teaching and learning. Modification of course contents and teaching methods, investment in material and human resources and adequate formulation of priorities should be envisioned. The aim of this study consists in suggesting some pedagogical issues from a different perspective susceptible to improve language teaching and learning in our educational system. It looks at providing a wide perspective that includes pedagogical, institutional, professional and social dimensions that could operate positive changes in the development of English language teaching and learning in our schools. In the light of the concerns raised above, a number of questions have drawn our attention: do the existing teaching/learning goals allow students to develop communication skills in the Goma secondary school classrooms? Which are the remedial proposals for the Improvement of English teaching and learning in DRC?

1. Methodology of the work

This study is purely descriptive in its elaboration. This method has been coupled with documentary technique which has provided for all textual resources that have contributed to materialize the shape and the content of this article. It has been also enriched by literature from several educationists, researchers, Congolese ministerial decrees and other education experts who have illustrated the work and consolidated the methodology.

2. Remedial proposals for improvement of English teaching and learning in DRC educational system²

2.1. *Defining English educational goals*

'In order to define the learning objectives for a target-group we first have to specify the situation in which they will need the foreign language' (Brumfit and Johnson, 1979: 103). English plays a tremendous role in international matters, business and science. Presumably, in introducing English in the national educational curriculum, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has understood that learning an international language or 'a language of wider communication (LWC)' is a vital need (Dubin and Olshtain 1986: 7). This need is more felt and justified because the Democratic Republic of the Congo pertains to regional and international organizations such as SADEC, AU, CPGL, etc. whose language of communication requires

English knowledge and competence. Thus, the more DRC's contacts and connections are frequent and permanent with other countries the more English is required in different transactions as said earlier. As far as Goma is concerned, its geographical position with English speaking countries such as Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania should urge its English learners to enhance the learning and speaking of English in any case. Learners should be motivated, encouraged and provided with the necessary knowledge and skills that could prompt them to become genuine users of English. If really DRC has understood and adhered to English as a language of communication it has then to define the operational objectives of the language as under : to bring learners to become genuine users of English by using appropriate approaches and methods; to develop learners' knowledge and skills in order to empower them with relevant communication and allow them to use the language in different fields; to urge learners to commit and dedicate themselves to English practices; to enforce the speaking of English at school; to contribute to the promotion of English by the organization of debates, discussions, theatrical and musical performances at school and out of school.

2.2. Innovating the curriculum contents

The attainment of the above goals presupposes a radical change in the English teaching approach and innovative enrichment of the English curriculum and the minute choice of textbooks adapted first to the realities of our country and second selected to respond to the realities of the world. The innovation of the curriculum should break with the manner it is drafted today. Indeed, the items of the programme should be integrative instead of being selective and step-by-step based programme, thus responding to the modern conception of teaching and learning English which is no longer achieved through a step-by-step organization but through an integrative system of the language teaching and learning process. Trim (1978: 9) reinforces this argument in putting it that: "We abandon the aim of leading the learner step-by-step along a path from the beginning to the end of the subject. Instead, we set out to identify a number of coherent but restricted goals relevant to the communicative needs of the learner". This means that the language teaching and learning process should not be geared to some selected structures that cannot develop and promote communicative ability, but it should be globalizing in order to respond to the need of communication. The evidence is that no one can communicate in English by learning for example the verb "BE" itself without utilizing it in a particular context and associate it with other potentialities. For example, teaching the verb "BE" as conceived below in the first form is time-consuming and cannot promote any communicative ability: e.g. I am ; You are ; He is ; etc. If the learner cannot be shown the way this structure can be used in a specific context this teaching proves inefficient and counterproductive. Instead the structure should be introduced in a particular context to enable the learner to use it adequately.

(01)

Good morning, sir.
 Good morning. How are you ?
 Fine thanks. What do you do ?
 I'm a pupil at Faraja. I'm in the third form scientific.
 Very good. I hope you're a good pupil at English.
 Of course I am.
 Did you study English in the second form too ?

No, I didn't. I started learning English from this year.
OK. Goodbye
Goodbye, sir.

This piece of conversation demonstrates that the programme should not constrain teachers to confine their teaching to the verb “BE” only. They should rather go beyond this structure by introducing other structures that should enable the learners to use the language effectively. In the above example, the structure such as “DO” used in the past interrogative form has been introduced in the dialogue and verbs such as “HOPE” in the present simple and “START” in the past have also been employed. This means, in other words, that the English programme should be explicit indicating clearly that the teacher should not limit his teaching to stereotyped structures but he should manage to help the beginner communicate in English even if his limited repertoire of vocabulary and grammatical structures do not allow him to go beyond. The step-by-step language as it is indicated in the programme is not likely to foster communication. The realization of a communicative production depends, to some extent, upon a combination of language aspects expressing appropriate linguistic contexts that can help the learner form meaningful acts of communication. The English programme should be drafted in such a way that it favours the learner to use the language at will. This situation explains why the Goma secondary school learners end a whole cycle of language learning without being able to produce relevant communication. In fact, Goma language teachers stick too much to the step-by-step items contained in the programme, thus preventing their learners from free and spontaneous language learning and reducing their ability to communicate in the language.

2.3. Identifying and determining language priorities and needs

Teaching English in a context like that of the Congolese system of education without determining and identifying priorities assigned to it is counterproductive and time-consuming. Identifying and determining priorities give a certain orientation to the teaching and learning process. It allows the teacher to know exactly what he has to teach and how to orient his teaching. Defined priorities impart to the teacher a selection, impose him certain goals and expectations to achieve, lead his whole line of conduct, avoid him wastage of resources and time, and assign him specific duties to fulfil. They point out needs in language teaching and learning that must cause obvious changes in conception and behaviour. They indicate operational development that excludes all that is superfluous. Therefore, if one wants English teaching to be meaningful and bear fruits in DRC and Goma schools, one must necessarily define what one expects learners to know and do with English. To do this, an inventory of needs, contents and situations in which learners might have to use the language should be made. Dubin and Olshtain (1986: 28) provide indications about the way language priorities should be determined in language teaching and learning. They formulate them as follows:

What the learners are expected to know at the end of the course or the course objectives in operational terms.

What is to be taught or learned during the course, in the form of an inventory of them.

What is to be taught, and at what rate of progress relating the inventory of items to the different levels and stages as well as to the time constraints of the course.

How it is to be taught, suggesting procedures, techniques and materials.

How it is to be evaluated, suggesting testing and evaluating mechanisms.

Not determining language priorities exposes the educational system to weakness and empties it out of its substance. Such kind of educational system is prone to inefficiency, waste of resources and time, contributes to the learners' incompetence and leads them to an aimless instruction. This apparent lack of concern for the elaboration of language priorities may explain the meagre result obtained in the language teaching process in the Congolese system of teaching and learning English. However, as far as Goma is concerned, it is possible to trace out the priorities of learners in English teaching. These priorities should be determined in function of learners' requirements of their environment, of the acquisition of knowledge and skills, of perspective employment, and of investment in material and human resources. Priorities may be sketched in the following terms: Reformulating the English teaching and learning objectives and contents. Adapting the curriculum to the learners' needs and interests and to those of society. Useless structures and theories must be done away, and a new oriented curriculum must be developed. Promoting the learners' development of the four English skills by adequate mechanisms, providing learners with active and conducive methods fostering the English language acquisition. Equipping learners with adequate material resources by providing schools with textbooks, libraries and laboratories. Making English functional and utilitarian by intensive and extensive reading, by creating at school English clubs and interschool competitions, by developing exchanges with neighbouring youth. Stimulating in students the spirit of total commitment and dedication to English by showing them the advantages of communicating with ethnolinguistic groups. Reducing the gap between French and English instruction.

Listing priorities may help teachers in their action. It is true that in DRC in general and in Goma schools in particular English is poorly taught due to lack of identification of priorities. Teachers are actually not aware of the real substance of their teaching. This tendency hinders the active learning process and explains why learners are not equipped with necessary knowledge and skills. Priorities are thus meant to help teachers become more circumspect about the materials they should focus on. In defining priorities, one expects Goma learners to be able to (1) master the speaking skill that can allow them to communicate with other people using English, (2) be prepared for a particular career requiring English knowledge, (3) be prepared for globalization using English media and (4) supplement their language knowledge for self-satisfaction.

2.4. Evaluating the teacher action

The personal responsibility of the teacher in the education system proves crucial in the attainment of its objectives. It is obvious that success in teaching depends in the great part on the teacher's commitment and experience. The assessment of his action should be considered in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, confidence and initiative. In language teaching, this

evaluation can only be made if learners have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills that enable them to use the language effectively. The argument here is that, in all cases, although the subject is taught and the curriculum aspects have been covered, the teacher's contribution to the acquisition of the language can be appreciated if the outcome can be measured in terms of the language transfer. This means, in other words, that it is only when the learners can transform the input into the factual information that the teacher action is accomplished and deemed positive. To develop positive changes in language teaching and learning, Goma teachers should make efforts to become more creative in their endeavours. They should not restrict their learners to the suggestive issues of the curriculum, but they should go beyond and create situations and contexts that might help their learners learn and use the language. Teacher evaluation should then refer to the result from which learners perform in the language. Teachers should be commended when their learners progress in the communicative use of the language. To do this, English inspectors and other educational authorities should regularly test learners' degree of performances to perceive whether learners advance or vegetate. This test should examine the learners' proficiency in different language skills. The outcome of tests would contribute to reveal the capabilities of teachers to carry out their action.

As teaching requires more knowledge and skills, Goma teachers would be assessed in function of their "savoir-faire". The output of the different and regular tests should reveal the following : (1) the intellectual value of the teacher, (2) the value of the teaching input, (3) the way learners cope with the input to internalize it, and (4) the output of the teaching process in terms of immediate teaching feed-back and language transfer. Those factors are clear indications to be in a position to assess whether teachers are successful or unsuccessful in their educational action. Their teaching qualities and deficits might appear on the stage if those tests were regularly carried out. At the same time, this performance evaluation of teachers could serve as a yardstick by the state through the Ministry of Education to grant teachers' recognition of their work and the improvement of their social conditions by granting a yearly bonus to the best teachers who have been rated high. These motivators would probably contribute to the achievement of goals and objectives of English teaching not only at the local level but also at the national one. In addition, they would obviously have obsessional and strong motivating effects on teachers to constantly work harder and better.

2.5. Teacher selection

English language teaching is too demanding owing to its complexity. This complexity lies in its various components that make its mechanism. Components such as grammar, lexis, phonetics, phonology, intonation, pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading, writing and the like undoubtedly require competence. In Goma secondary schools, teachers are hired in the educational system without any test of fitness for methodology and language knowledge. In order to see whether a teacher can be effective or not, a test of fitness should always be organized in those various components involving the mechanism of the English system before employing an English teacher. Several classrooms visits we effected in Goma secondary schools witnessed that many teachers were unable to approximate the standard pronunciation, others could not even utter a cohesive sentence, some others were deficient in the application of the principles of discourse in spoken as well as in written practices. Written exercises provided to learners on the

blackboard during reinforcement application exercises were full of mistakes so that the learners copied them down in their copybooks blindly as they had no capacity of discovering those mistakes. For instance, a teacher wrote on the blackboard ‘I would buy a house if I have some money’ and his pupils copied the sentence down in their exercise books without being aware that he made a terrible mistake in the use of conditional sentences. Many more mistakes were observed and recorded. This situation in Goma schools is upsetting and requires aggressive treatment to avoid abuses which cause discredit on language teaching and slow the development of language in our schools. It goes without saying that learners are great imitators of their instructors in any single gesture, action and behaviour they display before them. Any single mistake they make is echoed, parroted and internalized by their learners and correction only occurs possibly later if they have the chance to encounter any other opportunity to correct it. It is also important to note that qualification is one thing and teaching fitness is another. Sometimes they match, sometimes they do not. Qualification should reflect teaching fitness but often there is a great discrepancy between both. This discrepancy stems from the fact that teacher training colleges where teachers of English are trained have not the same views of evaluating students. Some schools appear serious, but others are undermined by the corruptive practices deeply rooted in some higher institutions of education. It is not then surprising to advocate the inconsistency and incompatibility between qualifications and teaching ability which should fundamentally be interwoven but which display contrastive realities. Hence, this inadequacy between qualification and teaching ability can rightly justify the organization of the test of aptitude to teaching because the tendency to employ English teachers without this test undeniably constitutes one of the major failures our system of education faces today.

2.6. Student language acquisition evaluation

If the teacher should be evaluated in his/her action the student’s language learning acquisition should be evaluated as well. The written system of evaluation carried out in our education system is not sufficient to fully assess the learners’ language acquisition. Very often the majority of learners indulge in the line of least resistance and they either cheat at the exams or just copy the other students’ answers. In that way it appears very difficult to assert whether they really succeed or fail in their exams. Presumably, the only way to assess their proficiency in English would consist in submitting them to listening, oral and written evaluation over their learning process, i.e. from the first year of English training to the last year. Inspectors of English should regularly test learners in different components of the language to ensure that they really acquire the right kind of education. This organization of learner testing on a regular basis should obviously result in a firm English culture base that might orient the Goma learners towards a better and holistic perspective. The formative and summative way of assessment carried out by teachers and inspectors would contribute positively to reduce the gap between theoretical input and communicative output of the Goma learners.

2.7. Improving teacher socio-economic conditions

Teaching is a very difficult career and its success depends upon a certain number of variables: physical, social, moral and intellectual. If these variables are not met the teaching process cannot be fulfilled. One of the claims that was persistently echoed during our class visits in different Goma schools was the denunciation of the deplorable and depressing socio-economic conditions which teachers were facing and enduring. These conditions constitute one of the foremost causes that hinders the teachers' educational action. Obviously, many English skills are not taught due to lack of motivation. No teacher indeed would devote his/her time to preparing lessons, correcting thousands of written assignment copies without motivation, and to teaching listening if he/she cannot afford buying a radio set. As Harmer (2007 : 51) points out, 'At its most basic level, motivation is some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something'. Empirical evidence has shown that if the Congolese educational system remains unproductive it is due to the government's failure in its motivational duties and contribution to the deterioration of the educational system. What is true is that the majority of Goma teachers cannot finance their personal research, their supply in books and other equipment. Their excessive poverty constitutes a serious hindrance to thinking and intellectual development. If Goma teachers do not give their best to teaching, it is because they do not find satisfaction in their work and lack commitment and involvement in it. This situation brings out negative attitude, frustration, humiliation, lack of interest and availability, and poor performance on the part of teachers as many educational activities are affected by this dissatisfaction. At this stage, this lack of motivation constitutes an excuse that hides teachers' incapacity, ineffectiveness, corruption, idleness and failure as this state of affairs seems to be attributed to it. It seems to justify learners' non-performance in language learning and teachers' inefficiency in their task. It goes without saying that students' parents in the financial intervention in teachers' motivation has not constituted a guarantee for the future and has not affected the educational system positively. It has not even alleviated the teachers' sufferings and catered for their basic needs. On the contrary, it has been nursing their grievances against the government and has been reinforcing their dissatisfaction. Therefore, the government should invest in human resources in order to be more productive. The desired results in English language teaching and learning could be achieved if educational stakeholders at the local and national level adjust their attitude, are willing to accept responsibility and accommodate changes. Surely, motivation does not consist of improving social conditions only but it also implies providing teachers with necessary working conditions such as laboratories, libraries and opportunities for personal improvement.

2.8. Reinforcing teacher in-service training

In-service training is vital for any English teacher to ensure that he/she maintains his/her knowledge and keep up with update teaching approaches, methods and techniques. Despite his / her knowledge and experience, the teacher's in-service training brings to him/her something new. As language teaching and learning is never static but dynamic there are always innovations in teaching approaches and methods the teacher constantly needs. Goma teachers' situation in this expertise is appalling. The data collection investigation revealed that 100% of English teachers in Goma had never had the opportunity to attend a seminar about English teaching or

benefited from a training organized by the Ministry of Education or any domestic or international organization, or by inspectors of English in Goma or from Kinshasa. Teachers' methodology remains thus monotonous and static, unable to achieve teaching objectives, improve their career and address teaching problems they usually face and encounter. Therefore, the overview of the advocated situation in Goma schools calls for frequent in-service training to reach Goma teachers' self-fulfillment and personal growth. In-service training should help them acquire new acquisition, improvement in performance, knowledge, skills and appropriate way in their teaching methods. In other words, the benefit of their in-service training should be measured qualitatively and quantitatively in terms of production output, that is, the right application of teaching methods, involvement and performance of learners in English language. These in-service sessions should be planned domestically and at the national level. At the local level, a pool of inspectors should rapidly be created and trained in English innovative methods by the government so that they can consistently train teachers in their turn. At the national level, the government should renew with the British and American technical co-operation in such a way that teachers and inspectors could be sent abroad constantly in order to learn English teaching innovations and changes. In so doing, Goma English teachers and inspectors might complete their education and share the profit of their experience. In short, seminars and in-service trainings offer multifold advantages : (1) they provide necessary skills that education and experience cannot offer, (2) they are essential for the achievement of efficient and productive methods, (3) they remain the best way of improving the quality of efficient teaching and (4) they are finally the best way to guarantee professional safety and to open teachers to updated teaching approaches and methods in their field.

Conclusion

The overall aim of this article has been to explore and to point out some paths of solutions that might improve the English teaching and learning process in Goma secondary schools. The pedagogical paths involve definition of English teaching and learning goals and priorities, teacher selection, improvement of teaching material and contents, language teaching and learning evaluation, reinforcing teacher in-service training, and improvement of teacher social conditions. This is followed by a set of some teaching activities and strategies that might enhance communication skills in the Congolese environment in general and in Goma secondary schools in particular. These suggestive paths do not constitute a panacea for overall problems undermining the system but they undeniably underlie much of the discussion in this article. Institutional and classroom environment management problems could inspire other researchers to further their research on English language teaching and learning solutions.

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