

**GLOBALIZATION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY: PREDICAMENTS AND PARADOXES TYPIFYING FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNING AT JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL IN BOTSWANA**

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**Abstract**

*This study interrogated the effectiveness of the teaching and learning (T&L) of French as a foreign language (FL) at Junior Secondary School (JSS) level in Botswana, a development largely propelled by forces of globalization. Specifically, the study was aimed at examining whether the teachers are pedagogically grounded to consciously and systematically apply appropriate theories and principles of foreign language T&L in order to help develop communicative competence among French language learners in the country's public-school system. Second, this study explored the state of availability and suitability of instructional resources used in FL classrooms. Applying the Socio-Cultural Theory and using the qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations and analysis of official documents from a total of two purposively selected JSSs in Gaborone, Botswana's Capital city. The participants comprised students drawn from French classes and teachers of French in the participating schools. Through descriptive data analysis, the findings pointed to a myriad of administrative and pedagogic bottlenecks hampering prospects for French language communicative proficiency at this level.*

**Keywords:** *foreign language, theory, pedagogy, syntax, communicative proficiency.*

**Introduction**

Foreign Language (FL) teaching and learning under any circumstances can be a daunting, overwhelming and nerve-wrecking task (Hlas, 2018). It is even more arduous if the teacher is a non-native speaker of the target language (TL). More often, learners encounter very traumatic experiences as they strive to attain proficiency in the TL within the stipulated time frame (Hunt, Barnes, Powell & Martin, 2008). In this sense, intense planning and commitment remain highly essential to effectively take learners through such a challenging journey (Sullivan, 2001). As explicitly documented in the extant literature, a successful FL teacher is not only well versed with the structural (phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic) dimensions of the language but also with its psychological and cultural nuances in order to unleash powerful teaching. As teachers venture into crafting FL learning methodologies, some do so somewhat oblivious of the fact that the process is never easy and should not be left to chance. Levy and Stockwell (2006), cited in Kao (2010), rightly point out that “theories ... [of language teaching] provide a position from which to view a problem and to help analyse, interpret and build up a framework” (p.115). As such, if teachers pay attention to

theories, they can effectively address salient pedagogic issues such as the optimum age at which the study of a FL is most effective, the duration of instruction in a FL should last to afford the learners a solid mastery of the language, whether it is ideal to spread out the instruction rather thinly over a number of months or weeks or offer instruction intensively and whether there has to be a selection of learners who have to study the TL (Andersson,1953). All these issues always boggle one's mind during curricular planning and implementation. As Carrol (1964) accentuates, any variation in learners' performance squarely falls on the teachers' ability to promote that learning; that is, the teachers' propensity to "organize the content and present it with due regard for the pupils' ability and the readiness to acquire it" (p.275).

### **Background**

Botswana is a relatively small country located in Southern Africa between South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia. It has a population size estimated around 2 million people (Statistics Botswana, 2011). Formerly a British protectorate, Botswana was subjected to colonial rule for 80 years from 1885 to 1966, the year it attained independence. One of the legacies of colonial occupation of Africa in general, and perhaps elsewhere, was the adoption of colonial masters' languages and cultural expressions by colonies, hence the emergence of generic terms such as Anglophone and Francophone to refer to countries which fell under British and French rule respectively. Like in other colonies, British forms of administration, cultural tastes and language were imposed on Batswana, resulting in the indigenous culture being submerged and thus becoming inferior to the former (Tlou & Campbell, 1984).

Linguistically, Botswana is a multilingual nation albeit perceived monolingual. Over 26 languages are spoken in the country (Nkate, 2005). Setswana, one of the local languages, is used as a national language and English as an official language. About 80% of Botswana's population speaks Setswana as the mother tongue (Adeyemi, 2008) and an additional 10% uses Setswana as a second language (Nyathi-Ramahobo, 1997). Despite Botswana's rich cultural history and language diversity, the schools' curriculum only recognizes the use of Setswana and English as media of instruction (Mooko, 2008).

Since independence, there have been concerted efforts by the government to promote economic, social and political developments. The education sector is viewed as critical to achieving the government's socio-economic ambitions, something which explains why education remains in the forefront of the country's developmental path. The first ground-breaking developmental transformation was the setting up of a National Commission on Education (NCE) in 1975 which released its report in 1977, Report of the National Commission on Education (RNCE), namely *Education for Kagisano (Social Harmony)* (Republic of Botswana, 1977). The commission's overarching mandate was to "look more broadly at the role of education in society and its potential contribution to social welfare and national development" (Republic of Botswana, 1977, p.9). It was envisaged that education would "reassert national identity, and...build a society which gives expression to the noblest values from the past" (Republic of Botswana, 1977, p.11). While the education system emphasized citizenship education to promote nation-building, it sparingly acknowledged the value of imported ideas, and cultural borrowings towards Botswana's socio-economic growth. The commission perceived language and education as inextricably inseparable, hence its conviction that "a vigorous national

culture can only flourish if the young are fully articulate in the language through which this culture finds expression” (Republic of Botswana, 1977, p.9). Language and education would promote “issues of fundamental human rights, liberty, self-esteem, societal values, and cultural identity of the individual” (Adeyemi, 2008, p.21).

In 1992, another NCE was set up to review the 1977 RNCE and identify possible areas of improvement. The commission released its report in 1993, RNCE (Republic of Botswana, 1993). The government published its response to the Commission’s recommendations in 1994 in the form of Government White Paper No. 2, Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) (Republic of Botswana, 1994). The RNPE re-affirmed Botswana government’s commitment to adopting an education system that would re-look into issues of cultural advancement, language, national unity, economic development, political stability and improvement of the overall quality of life of Botswana (Republic of Botswana, 1994). Coincidentally, in the early 1990s, the process of globalization defined as the interconnectedness of the geographical space (Scholte, 2000) caught up with Botswana just as it did with the rest of the world. Global forces posed a threat to the education system and necessitated the need to pay considerable attention to the dialectic between the local and the global in educational transformation. Botswana’s vision for the future (Vision 2016) which coincided with the process of globalization catapulted the need for future Botswana to adapt to the challenges posed by the global forces while at the same time retaining its cultural values and image (Republic of Botswana, 1997). Botswana’s Vision 2036 also echoes the need for an open language policy to create opportunities for the country as it entered the competitive international economic and political order (Moroka, 2017).

Against the backdrop of its national aspirations and economic susceptibilities emanating from the process of globalization, Botswana took a deliberate effort in line with its open-door policy to seek membership and bilateral relations with regional, continental and international organizations in order to position itself strategically in the global economy that had proven highly competitive. These organizations included, among others, Southern African Development Community (SADC), African Union (AU), European Union (EU), United Nations (UN) and its specialized agencies such as the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) as well as, international financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Furthermore, Botswana signed treaties and declarations such as the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) – 2003–2012, United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) – 2005–2014, ‘Education for All’ (EFA) – 2000 – 2015 and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – 2000–2015 (Adeyemi, 2008). Through policy declarations, French easily navigated its way into the country in 1980 with the setting up of *Alliance Française*, a French linguistic and cultural centre in Gaborone. *Alliance Française* played a phenomenal role in the introduction of French at the University of Botswana around 1986, the latter as the first public teaching institution to offer French in the country. In 2000 and 2010 French was further introduced at Junior and Senior Secondary School (SSS) levels respectively as an optional subject to develop “a broader outlook, an understanding and an appreciation of other cultures and ...raise awareness of the importance of learning a foreign language to facilitate international

relations in the global economy” (Republic of Botswana, n.d., p. i). The 2020 revised Botswana Junior Secondary French Syllabus which is planned for review in 2025 still stresses the view that the “ability to communicate in multiple languages is becoming more and more important in the increasingly integrated global community therefore providing a competitive edge in career choices” (Republic of Botswana, 2020, p.8). Politically, French is an official language in the EU and Botswana government has trade protocols with the EU. SADC, of which Botswana is also a member, officially recognizes the use of French. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Madagascar among SADC member states use French as an official language, making the introduction of French in Botswana’s curriculum indisputably plausible.

### **The problem**

As Botswana is an Anglophone country, the English language is well entrenched in the country’s socio-economic structures. A substantial number of Botswana speak and use English on a daily basis, both formally and informally. School going children easily get exposed to the English language (especially in urban and peri-urban areas) even prior to commencing their elementary education, through interaction with their families and peers. The print and electronic media platforms, too, play a phenomenal role in exposing children to English at a tender age. In the case of French, the opposite is the case. French is neither a community language nor a language of business in Botswana. One hardly hears French spoken in the streets. The few individuals who use or speak French in formal and informal gatherings are mostly visiting foreigners and those on diplomatic and private engagements. In this sense, French is spasmodically spoken in Botswana. Learners doing French hardly speak the language on the school ground nor in their familial environments. Regrettably, such learners experience this language for the first time inside the classroom and are expected to have acquired and mastered its basic tenets and demonstrate preparedness to sit for a final examination which comes within a short period of 3 years. On the other hand, the teaching of French is premised on the Communicative Approach (CA) which emphasises skills acquisition in the four traditional language areas (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Speaking, which is regarded as the most critical component of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), is hitherto not tested as part of Botswana’s French Language Teaching (FLT) due to perceived logistical difficulties in organizing its assessment, thus making it virtually impossible to sustain gains at later stages of the learners’ careers.

### **Purpose of the study**

#### **General aim of the study**

The general aim of the study was to find out the effectiveness of the T& L of French in JSSs in Botswana.

#### **Specific objectives**

To examine:

1. Whether or not the T&L of French as a FL at this level is taught in line with modern pedagogic strategies.

2. Whether teachers of French possess the requisite skills to teach effectively.
3. Whether the instructional resources used in French lessons effectively support teaching for communicative purposes.
4. Generate effective strategies which would allow the T&L of French at this level more effective, exciting and worth spending time on.

In this way, the study will address the concerns raised in the literature that T&L in French lessons in Botswana classrooms still have a number of pedagogic challenges.

## **Research Questions**

### **General question of the study**

Is the T&L of French as a FL at JSSs in Botswana conducted effectively (or otherwise)?

### **Specific questions of the study**

1. What are the exemplars of the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the T&L of French as a foreign language (FFL) in JSSs of Botswana?
2. Are the teachers of French as a FL adequately trained on strategies of teaching effectively?
3. Do Junior Secondary Schools have sufficient instructional resources for effective teaching of French?
4. What measures can be put in place to help make the T&L of FFL more effective?

## **Theoretical framework**

Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) underpins this study. Its emergence and growth are linked to seminal works of a renowned Russian psycho-linguist Lev Vygotsky, born in 1896, a contemporary of great psychologists such as Freud, Skinner and Piaget (Cherry, 2022). Over the years, extensions, elaborations and refinements of the theory emerged in other publications. This theory emerged in the field of psychology during the 1917 Russian revolution. It looked at the contributions of society to individual development. The theory gives answers to how individuals develop in the context of the culture in which they live. Vygotsky believed that parents, caregivers, peers and culture at large were responsible for the child's cognitive development (Cherry, 2022). In his view, every function in the child's development appears twice. First, on the social level and, later, on the individual level. Social level denotes people and Vygotsky termed this level interpsychological and secondly inside the child and termed this level intrapsychological (Cherry, 2022). The concept of 'zone of proximal development', which Vygotsky described as the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under the guidance of more capable peers, underlies this theory (Shabani, Khatib & Ebadi, 2010). Based on its important features, the theory was found quite suitable for various studies on second and foreign language teaching and learning.

In the case of Botswana, the theory has the potential to offer an inimitable dimension to the teaching of French as a FL given the country's geo-political history as a non-Francophone country. As Tharp and Gallimore (1989) point out, this theory offers a wide



range of propositions on assessment, curriculum development and instruction and in this way helps teachers to understand that learning in whatever form is embedded in social events and takes place when a child interacts with the people and objects in the particular environment (Kublin et al, 1998). Teachers of foreign language learning (FLL) are therefore in a position to take into consideration the influence of cultural contexts in the development of communication (Adamson & Chance, 1988). This particular study drew quite extensively on aspects of this theory from a study by Lantolf and Thorne (2006) titled “*Sociocultural Theory and Second Language*” and associated aspects by Wertsch (1991) and (1998).

As hinted earlier, SCT holds that human mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional and historical contexts; hence human participation in social interactions as very important in influencing psychological development. Wertsch (1991) traces the origins of individual development to social sources, the position held by Vygotsky (1986) that effective foreign language teaching and learning cannot be divorced from its socio-cultural environment. Ratner (2002), too, emphasizes that human mental functioning is largely mediated or influenced by cultural forces within one’s social environment. To mediate, in this respect, is to act as a peacemaker between opposing sides (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2007). Human beings, therefore, employ existing cultural artefacts to “regulate their biological and behavioural activity” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p.197). Language use, organization and structure are the basic means of the process of mediation. Developmental processes, therefore, take place when an individual participates in the cultural, linguistic and historical settings such as family, peer group interaction as well as institutional settings like schooling. Tudge and Scrimsher (2003) advise that language development should not be treated solely as an outcome of human interaction. In the case of children, it is important to take cognisance of the fact that it is not the knowledge caregivers and experts bring to the interaction but what children bring to the interaction as well. As such, the process of FLL is determined largely by how cultural and historical settings are shaped. While SCT recognizes the influence of human neurobiology (biological mechanisms by which nervous systems mediate behaviour) for higher order thinking, it does acknowledge that human cognitive activity develops more sharply through interaction within one’s social and material culture. Such interaction makes the understanding of FL concepts more meaningful to the learners. This perspective should be seen as very useful to teachers of FL classes. Also central to SCT are constructs or features such as *mediation, internalization and regulation* (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The ZPD has already been highlighted (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986).

Writing about human mental development and how it facilitates FLL, Vygotsky (1981) observed that the human mind consists of a ‘lower-level neurobiological base’ but emphasizes its unique element of being able to control its biological makeup through its high level cultural tools such as language, literacy, numeracy, categorization, rationality, and logic. These higher-level cultural tools act as a buffer between a person and the physical environment. They mediate between the individual and the material world. In language acquisition, “different tools can mediate the child’s learning and improve the child’s abilities” (p.115). Human beings unlike other species do not act on instincts or in non-mediated fashion. Rather, the human mind is constantly mediated, hence Lantolf and Appel’s (1994) argument that even human consciousness is a mediated mental activity.

Using different tools to perform a task, human beings mediate their task depending on the size, nature or pattern of the tool. In this way, the more human-beings change the material world, the more they change themselves in terms of living, thinking, acting and learning in the material world. Language is therefore a symbolic (psychological) tool of mediation in mental activities. Human beings use these psychological tools for “directing and controlling their physical and mental behaviour” (Vygotsky, 1981, p.116). As an artefact, psychological or symbolic tool, language allows individuals to collaborate with others to shape their world according to their goals (Lantolf & Appel, 1994).

The process of mediation requires exposure to cultural artefacts such as objects and symbols prevalent in the target culture to mediate the acquisition of the language at hand. Teachers of FL classes should therefore be well immersed in the cultural practices and traditions of TLs in order to teach them effectively. The process of mediation is thus divided into two main categories, namely *mediation through regulation* and *mediation through symbolic artefacts* (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Mediation through regulation takes place in three stages, namely (i) *object regulation*, (ii) *other regulation* and (iii) *self-regulation*. Object regulation is when children are easily distracted by objects very close to them especially the very large and colourful ones. Other regulation is when a child acquires communicative assistance from various people at home such as parents, siblings (brothers and sisters), relatives or family members in general, coaches, peers, teachers and many others. This stage of regulation is also known as scaffolding. Self-regulation, on the other hand, is whereby the child has achieved proficiency in the TL and does not need external assistance anymore. The child has internalized the language. However, self-regulation is not a stable condition as the order of these stages can still be negotiated at will (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Internalization re-organizes the relationship between the individual to his or her social environment to influence future performances (Kozulin, 1990). It connects social communication and mental activity to enable humans gain control over their brains (Yaroshevsky, 1989).

### **Review of literature**

Global literature is awash with strategies on FL teaching and learning, something which suggests that externally the area is well explored (See, O'Brien, 2004; Hinkel, 2011; Cook, 2013 and others). Locally, there is still a paucity of studies on FL teaching and learning, which demonstrates that little is known in this context. Besides the teaching of English and Chinese, Kewagamang (2018) and Kewagamang and Kaome (2020), for instance, are among the few researchers who did attempt to shed light on French in Botswana thus paying particular attention to its modalities of teaching such as the communicative and grammar-translation approaches. In the communicative approach, emphasis is on fluency as opposed to accuracy. This approach removes correctness thus accepting errors of grammar as part of the learning process. In grammar-translation approach, learners study grammar and translate words into their own language. Communication is not practiced and there is little focus on speaking. Voicing these aspects here is particularly important to create an understanding of whether or not the prevailing practices of French teaching are congruent with the principles of foreign and second language learning. Kamwendo, Mooko and Moumakwa (2009), too, commented on the teaching of French in Botswana. Their arguments, views and critical observations are highlighted hereinafter. As conspicuously evident in this section, this review of

literature is not exhaustive. Rather, it covers only a portion of global studies which are generally compatible with the overarching tenets of the SCT explored under the theoretical framework.

Andersson (1953), for instance, explored the modalities of teaching foreign languages in elementary schools in the United States of America (USA). Aspects such as student age and ability, enrolment criteria, program articulation, teaching techniques and teacher qualifications are examined. The study recommended that prior to introducing a FL in the schools' curriculum, aspects such as the optimum age of teaching the language, modalities of starting the language, the issue of whether all learners should learn the language or only a few selected pupils and who should teach the language should be seriously considered as these have profound implications for learners' performance and achievement in the TL, an argument also accentuated in Carroll's (1965) study. Andersson's recommendation is that FL teaching and learning should be introduced to learners as early as possible preferably at elementary level when their mental abilities are still fresh and active enough to absorb and internalize the language. Andersson's study found that learners who are introduced to FLs at high school and college levels struggle to master and internalize the language as they fail to achieve the objective of understanding, speaking, reading and writing the TL even in the most rudimentary ways. Ankle's (2005) position paper paid attention to the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in FLL and observed that in the globalized economy, learners should be afforded the opportunity to communicate with colleagues and clients in different parts of the world. In Ankle's view, inter-cultural exchange programs are highly essential towards acquisition of foreign and second languages. Similarly, Irimia (2012) explored the intercultural dimension of FLL and teaching and advised that foreign language engagement should not merely be about direct teaching of aspects of linguistics such as phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax. Rather, such learning should involve knowledge of the culture of the language; the position strongly held by proponents of SCT. In Irimia's view, communication that does not involve cultural context often results in humorous incidents such as miscommunication and misunderstanding. Apart from grammatical competence, learners should acquire sociolinguistic competence, pragmatic competence, sociocultural knowledge as well as intercultural awareness (Kramsch, 1993; Byram, 1997; Liddicoat, 2002; Council of Europe, 2011).

Akalin's (2004) study draws a distinction between communicative competence (CC) and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in FL teaching and learning. CC as an aspect of language competence is meant to help learners "convey and interpret messages to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts" (Brown, 1987, p.199). In Akalin's view, CC suggests that learners should communicate in a language, say English, exactly the same way as the native speakers of English speak while ICC acknowledges the uniqueness each a speaker brings to the conversation. According to Alptekin (2002), CC is an impossible target for FL learners, something which Byram (1997) says it often results in loss of cultural identity as learners attempt to speak exactly the same way as the native speakers of the TL.

A study by Cummins (2014), on immersion education programs, offers useful insights into aspects of foreign and second language teaching and learning. The immersion education program was popularized in Canada in the 1960s (Johnson & Swain, 1997).



The program had three variants: early immersion program starting at kindergarten level and occasionally at grade 1; middle immersion starting in grades 4 & 5; and late immersion in grade 7. In all these grades, there was at least 50% instruction through the TL (French) in the early stages. The findings of the immersion program were that in the early stages, learners gained fluency and literacy in French. Students' receptive skills in French were found to be well developed than their expressive skills. By the end of the elementary school (grade 6), learners were found to be very close to the native speakers of French in areas of reading and understanding French even though in areas of spoken and written work, they were found wanting when compared with the French native speakers (Harley, Allen, Cummins & Swain, 1991).

In Africa, Kuupole (2005) paints a gloomy picture when it comes to success in the teaching of French. The methods used in FL classes in Ghana, for example, were found not very effective. While most FL classes in Ghana claimed to be applying the communicative and task-based approaches, in reality, that was not the case. Many teachers of French still clung to grammar-translation (traditional method) which emphasizes structural elements of the language, namely grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. More often, these aspects were taught in isolation and out of context. The basic techniques applied by teachers centred around role-play, repetitions, memorization and did not effectively help learners acquire the desired levels of CCs. The instructional materials, too, were not of the appropriate standard. Kuupole (2005) further reported that many schools in Ghana did not have language laboratories, multi-media equipment, textbooks as well as supplementary readers. In schools where laboratories were available, they were often dysfunctional. The bulk of financial assistance towards the publication of textbooks and learning aids came from the French government. Similar challenges were experienced in countries such as Madagascar, a former French colony. Training of teachers in countries such as Togo, Burkina Faso and Côte d' Voire, too, was not up to the required level (Kuupole's (2005).

In the case of Botswana, literature on FL teaching and learning is scant. Kewagamang (2018), for example, is one of the few renowned scholars who explored the T& L of French at JSS level. Other researchers include Kewagamang and Kaome (2020) and Kamwendo et al (2009). Besides French, English and Chinese are taught and the preferred modality of teaching include grammar-translation. With regard to French, Kewagamang and Kaome (2020) evaluated its objective(s), type of training received by teachers as well as the correlation between teacher action and learners' performance. Kamwendo et al (2009) found that the teaching of French was not consistent with the principle of FL learning such as the required age bracket for starting a FL. In their view, learners at JC level are already too old to start learning French. The findings in Kewagamang (2018) pointed to the fact that despite the progress achieved in the area of teacher-training and professional development, there was no correlation between the main objective of teaching French and the development of learners' CC. The study recommended discarding of the generalist approach to T&L in favour of a contextualized approach which would reinforce learner achievement and thereby develop globally competitive citizens for Botswana. However, this study's main Achilles' heel is that it was not grounded on any explicit theoretical framework. Furthermore, it did not include the voices of the people concerned which, in this case, were the learners themselves.

### **Research design**

This study applied the qualitative approach to enable the researcher interact with the teachers and learners to learn more about the processes, strategies and experiences of T&L of French in both schools. The qualitative approach was preferred on account of knowledge construction (ontology), researcher's relationship with that being researched (epistemology), rhetoric (language use) and the participants' values and beliefs (axiology). This design guaranteed credibility of the data collection process and dependability of the findings.

### **Population of the study**

As the two schools were coded for purposes of data management, School MJ had two French teachers and a total of 166 learners studying FFL and school PK had 173 FFL learners and three teachers thus constituting a combined population of 339 students and five teachers.

### **Sample size and sampling procedures**

From the population size shown above, a total of 12 students per school were sampled through stratified sampling. All the teachers of French in both schools participated in the study in view of their small population. As literature shows, learners feel more comfortable when data collection process involves small group discussions as they do not get intimidated by the interview atmosphere. Teachers were subjected to face-to-face oral interviews in order to get to the bottom of the matter.

### **Data collection methods**

The data sought from the teachers and students were specifically on pedagogic issues, training of teachers, assessment practices and support systems towards effective achievement of the goals of the programme. To involve students in such issues, proxy questions were asked. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions and analysis of documents such as French syllabi, students' textbooks, exercise books, lesson plans and class reports. Since this was a qualitative case study, semi-structured open-ended questions were prepared and piloted in a comparable school to guarantee suitability of the items. Students participated in focus group discussions while teachers took part in the oral interviews. These methods of data collection were quite comprehensive in terms of accessing the much-needed information to fully meet the demands of the study.

## **Findings**

### **Classroom pedagogy**

As highlighted earlier, the general aim of the study was to find out the effectiveness of the T&L of French in JSSs. Specifically, whether French is taught in line with modern pedagogic strategies. The study found that while some aspects of FLT were adhered to, in most cases, teachers did not apply appropriate methods. Based on classroom observations, the teaching approach applied centred around grammar-translation. The communicative aspect, particularly speaking, was less emphasised during lessons.

Teachers confessed that in their pedagogic approaches, they rarely paid attention to theories of foreign language teaching despite their importance towards mastery learning in FLT. Based on classroom observations, there was persistent alternation or interchange between the use of French and English during lessons, something which compromised achievement of CC in French. Analysis of students' exercise books and performance reports, too, pointed to dismal performance in French across levels in both schools. A teacher in School MJ posited, *"I am very comfortable with grammar-translation approach during my lessons."* Learners in both schools alleged experiencing difficulties mastering the French language. A learner in School PK maintained, *"It is very difficult to master a language if you only learn it in the classroom."* Another learner in School MJ concurred, *"We do not have opportunities outside of the classroom to improve on what we have learnt during French lessons."*

### **Training of teachers**

To understand where the challenges in the teaching of French emanated, the study interrogated the training of teachers. On this particular aspect, the study found that teachers of French in both schools were fully qualified to teach French as they were degree holders in the French language, a qualification obtained from the University of Botswana. Some teachers also had additional qualifications in French language. Despite their qualifications, the teachers alleged being limited in the language as they did not have regular refresher courses and exchange programs to enhance and sustain the competencies they achieved earlier during training. Their concern was that with the migration from the traditional grammar-translation oriented approach to communicative and task-based approach, they experienced difficulties of fully meeting this demand. Also, the curricular requirement that the TL culture be incorporated into T&L as per the demand of the 2010 syllabus remains a challenge. The teachers noted the objective of producing not only multilingual but multicultural learners for intercultural competency, a challenge that remains a limitation on their part as professional FLTs.

### **Assessment practices**

Assessment, in this context, refers to the procedures and processes teachers undertook to determine achievement in French classes. The process involves selecting, designing, collecting, administering, analysing and interpreting the learners' performance results purposely to increase communicative competency. The study analysed diagnostic, formative and summative assessments in the participating schools. While the curriculum calls for CC which includes reading, writing, listening and speaking, the latter which is key to the development and achievement of language proficiency was not assessed. In the analysis of the classroom tests and examinations administered in both schools, it emerged that teachers generally paid attention to the extent to which learners were able to recall factual information presented in class. Grammar-translation, as hinted earlier, dominated class activities. Classroom observations and analysis of documents revealed that learners' performance in general was average even though there were notable instances of exceptional performance.

### **Support systems**

The teachers highlighted that French as a subject was not accorded the attention it deserved. Their argument was that, in some schools, it was dropped because it lowered the pass rates. In view of inadequate support for the language, both schools decried lack of appropriate resources such as language laboratories, multimedia equipment and support systems to effectively teach French. There were no locally published supplementary materials on French teaching and learning. The situation in both schools seemed further aggravated by the fact that the system did not provide for the position of HoD-French, the result of which French was placed under Physical Education headed by an officer who did not have an idea of French as a foreign language and its needs. As a result of poor support systems, management in both schools attributed dismal performance in the JC results to French and wished it could be scrapped.

### **Discussion**

The approach relied upon to help analyse the data for the study is the descriptive analysis. In doing so, an attempt was made, first and foremost, to weave together the key components of the study such as the research problem, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, literature review, methodology and the findings. In the analysis of the findings, it was evident that a number of curricular discrepancies characterize the T&L of French at JSS level in Botswana, a development that has grave repercussions for learner performance and achievement of the desired CCs (Republic of Botswana, 2005; Kewagamang, 2011). Undoubtedly, the implementation of French at this level, in the first place, was bound to be problematic as learners never experienced French as a FL in their early stages of development. As demonstrated in the introductory part of this study and further stressed in the review of literature, appropriate modalities of FL teaching and learning, in the first place, need to be strictly adhered to if positive results are to be attained. However, in the case of the two schools studied herein, such modalities or principles are not wholly adhered to such as consideration of the optimum age at which French should be introduced, duration instruction in this language should last in order to afford the learners a solid mastery of the language and how teaching in French classrooms should be organized. This is the first mistake in the implementation process and does not come as a surprise that learners struggle to achieve the expected competences. In short, this finding suggests that chances of learners performing dismally at this level should be expected. Actually, Kamwendo et al. (2009) view lack of proper adherence to the principles of FL teaching during implementation as not only far-fetched but defeating logic as well. In their view, learners at JC level in Botswana are already fourteen- year olds which, by cognitive levels, have already surpassed the suitable minimum age at which a FL such as French can be easily learnt. At the age of fourteen, the minds of these learners are no longer fresh enough to easily absorb the language, something which is compounded by the fact that they also do not have access to the language outside of the classroom.

The education immersion programs in Canada, as highlighted in the review of literature, demonstrate beyond doubt that FL programs need thorough planning at all times.

Teachers' lamentation that learners exhibit lack of interest in French might be a consequence of a number of curricular factors including the manner in which it is packaged as well as lack of exchange programmes that can stimulate learners' interest. For instance, Ogden (1981) emphasizes the need to always look for ways of cultivating learners' interest in the language as they (learners) may want to know what the teaching of French holds for them on completion of the JC programme. Kuupole (2005) adds that as part of cultivating such interest, it is of necessity that teachers underscore the potential of the language in opening doors for international jobs. Furthermore, teachers should clearly pronounce the potential of the language as a tool for international communication, social mobility and recognition.

On the side of pedagogy, application of appropriate learning strategies becomes key as well. A number of scholars including Rubin (1987), as highlighted in the review of literature, for example, acknowledge that learning strategies have a huge role of influencing learners' CC. Tarone (1983), cited in Lessard-Clouston (1997), concurs that such strategies are "an attempt to develop [learners] linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language" (p.67). Other scholars also illuminate the value of learning strategies as to improve learners' communicative skills since such strategies are grounded on cognitive science (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) opine that learning strategies assist learners to comprehend, learn, or retain new information easily. The whole process of investing more in French foreign language learning is aimed at enabling learners to communicate at a basic level, both orally and in writing and be able to use functional communicative skills. This enterprise, therefore, requires teachers who are well-trained, immersed in the culture of the TL and well attuned to theories of foreign language learning and eager to embrace emerging modalities of foreign language learning. Related to training of teachers is the provision of resources and associated support services; aspects that present a pedagogic paradox in the teaching of French as the government like other governments across the world has since the early 1990s been more parsimonious in character and therefore less committed to spending more on education consistently with the pervading principle of neoliberal ideology which emphasizes a lean economy.

### **Conclusions**

The study concludes that the T&L of French at JSS level in Botswana under the prevailing circumstances does not accord learners the opportunity to learn French as envisaged in the programme to achieve the required linguistic ability and competency levels. This discrepancy or anomaly is partly attributed to the teaching strategies or communicative and grammar-translation approaches (traditional methods) which emphasize structural elements of the language, namely grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation at the expense of the oral communicative skills which are deemed critical to the attainment of foreign language competence. Coulmas (1992), cited in Kamwendo, et al (2009), argues that these learners lose out on beneficitation of 'linguistic capital (values associated with different language resources available to a person) 'which is the route to economic empowerment. Given Botswana's political history as an Anglophone country, it will always be a mammoth task for learners to acquire and sustain CC in



French as a FL, largely as a result of, among others, the fact that the language is not widely spoken in towns and villages of Botswana. Teachers' inadequate linguistic abilities are also a contributing factor to this discrepancy since they use English language most of the time and less French in their daily formal and informal communication.

### **Recommendations**

As stressed in the opening sections of the study, the main objective of French teaching and learning in Botswana is, among others, to promote CC in the language to increase the country's economic competitiveness internationally. This is envisaged to enhance trade relations with the French speaking countries and create opportunities for Botswana locally and abroad. In view of the limitations of the French programme in schools, as evident in the conclusions, the study calls for the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) as the supervisory authority to ensure that the implementation of French across the educational spectrum is consistent with the principles, requirements and standards of foreign language teaching and learning. This will facilitate achievement of the objective of the programme. In particular, there has to be emphasis of the communicative aspect of the language, which is speaking. As noted in the findings, speaking as a communicative competence is not accorded the attention it deserves despite its importance. This recommendation will further ensure a smooth transition of French learning across levels. Immersion programs should, therefore, be incepted / promoted as a priority to enhance the development of French foreign language communicative skills at all levels of learning. In line with the movement towards outcome-based approach which emphasizes action-oriented strategies, classroom teaching should give due attention to developing learners' communicative competence and, in particular, their speaking skills. Adherence to the principles of foreign language teaching should be the norm if positive results are to be attained. Implementing these recommendations therefore requires a strong '*political will*' and mind-set change, not only by teachers in the classrooms but also those in positions of authority or key decision-makers such as, directors and permanent secretaries in the relevant ministries. '*Political will*' ensures that issues relating to the training of teachers, appropriate resourcing of French foreign language classrooms and laboratories are addressed in order to effectively achieve the goals and objectives of the programme. Also, that, conditions necessary for assessment and, more importantly, recognition of French foreign language learning as a priority area are accorded due attention. Certainly, investing more in the programme will, in the long run, positively position Botswana in the international markets and possibly open new windows of opportunity for the country. Lastly, tracer studies should be conducted to give a clear picture of what happens to all learners completing their studies in the French language programme and advise accordingly.

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