

## **Challenges of ICT use in French as a Foreign Language (FFL) Teaching and Learning in Universities in Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

This chapter focuses on the challenges related to the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in French as a Foreign Language (FFL) teaching/learning. It aims at contributing to the development of online teaching methodologies for FFL lecturers and students. It brings together findings from available reviewed literature on studies carried out in the area of ICT pedagogy in the recent past, in relation to integration of ICT in teaching/learning processes. Major challenges teachers and learners of FFL face are lack of appropriate and adequate resources and equipment, lack of technical support, poor or lack of internet connectivity as well as lack of ICT competency among the learners and teachers. The chapter provides information and recommendations for policymakers and other education stakeholders responsible for the integration of ICT in the teaching/ learning processes of FFL.

**Keywords:** FFL, Teaching and Learning processes, ICT Integration, Challenges, Digitalization

## Introduction

The use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) is becoming more and more important in the teaching and learning processes of French as a Foreign Language (FFL), not only because it allows students to operate in the age of information technology but also following the recent outbreak of Covid19. There is an increased need for teachers and learners' exposure to a variety of learning modes for them to be able to cope in the face of unexpected circumstances that may not allow for face-to-face learning. The use of ICT in pedagogy should not be underestimated. ICT has become increasingly important in education systems around the world and has been introduced into university curricula. Studies on the use of ICT have proven it a tool that facilitates formal and informal learning. Its integration should therefore be done systematically with adequate involvement of both learners and teachers to avoid the challenges that may come with it.

The role of the modern school is to prepare learners for life in the information age. This is made possible by the availability of ICT, which has transformed today's society. ICT provides both teachers and students with opportunities to adapt teaching and learning to individual needs and society is pushing learning institutions to respond to this technical innovation. The use of ICT is increasing access and has improved the relevance and quality of education in developing countries. According to World Bank in 2019, Kenya is the second leading ICT innovation hub in Africa after Madagascar, the country could therefore easily digitalize its education sector (International Labor Organization, 2021). However, the uptake of this mode of learning in FFL in Kenya has been slow and has encountered many challenges.

The teaching of French in Kenyan secondary schools began in an organized and official manner after independence, in 1963. This was brought about by the need

to plan for socioeconomic and cultural interactions with the rest of francophone Africa, hitherto closed to any form of exchange (Chokah, 2013). The Kenyan government mandated the Ominde Commission to review the pre-existing education system given making education relevant to the needs of a new emerging politically independent society (Ominde Commission, 1964). Teaching of the subject has since evolved through different teaching methodologies. All this time, teaching mainly took place in a face-to-face mode, at all levels of learning. However, FFL teaching/learning must now embrace modern teaching methodologies for it to survive, particularly in the face of unforeseen circumstances such as the covid19 pandemic where face-to-face learning is rendered impossible.

This chapter delves into the challenges encountered in the digitalization of teaching/learn of French as a foreign language in Kenya. It brings together findings from reviewed literature associated with the integration of ICT in teaching/learning processes.

The Covid19 outbreak in 2020 forced governments to impose lockdowns to control the spread of the disease. The pandemic led to the closure of learning institutions around the world (UNESCO, 2020) and universities were not spared. In mid-march 2020, the Government of Kenya ordered the closure of all educational institutions to contain the spread of the disease leaving about 1.7 million learners at home. The usual face-to-face learning was suspended and learning institutions adopted e-teaching and online learning methods (OTLM) in their place to allow learning to continue. However, this sudden shift from the traditional face-to-face teaching, which was done haphazardly, came with many challenges since both the learners and teachers were not adequately prepared.

Ajayi, (2009) defines ICT as a technological way of gathering, collating and transmitting information through

technology. In the context of education, the use of ICT in teaching/learning refers to online teaching/ learning. Singh & Thurman (2019) define online learning as an experience synchronous (where learner(s) and instructor(s) are in the same place, at the same time, for learning to take place) or asynchronous (where learners and instructors are in different places) environments using different devices such as mobile phones and laptops with internet access. Online learning allows students to interact with their teachers and with content from the comfort of their own home, ensuring continuity of teaching/learning. Integration of ICT into education refers to the effective and efficient use of ICT in all areas of the educational process including the required infrastructure, curriculum, and teaching/learning environments (Earle, 2002). It helps develop students' proficiency and facilitates the learning process. ICT poses a whole new set of challenges to teachers, hence the need for them to reevaluate their teaching methods (Otieno et al., 2016). Teachers, whose role is changing fast, must adopt the use of information technology and use available digital information during this digital era to be able to meet the needs of their learners. They must understand how learners learn in a digital environment and implement new pedagogical models, modeling best practices (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

### **ICT as a teaching and learning tool**

Several studies have been carried out on ICT as a teaching/ learning tool. Most have indicated that while ICT is an important classroom tool, teachers and learners also face many challenges related to the integration of ICT in teaching/ learning processes. These challenges have also affected the teaching/learning of FFL at the university level in Kenya.

Ghavifekrs & Rosdy (2015) found out that ICT integration has great effectiveness for both teachers and students. Teachers well equipped with ICT tools and facilities

are one the main factors in the success of technology-based teaching and learning. In a study carried out in Kuwaiti schools, Alharbi (2014) concluded that evidence is mixed as to whether there was indeed a positive or negative impact from ICT use and that there is a significant gap between teachers' possession of ICT skills in schools and their use in the school setting. According to Makanda (2015), a favorable attitude towards ICT use is evident among learners and teachers on the importance of ICT use in instruction. Students are capable and motivated users of new technology and their ICT skills are wide (Obonyo, 2013). Despite the advantages and positive attitude of teachers and learners depicted by these studies, the integration of ICT in teaching/learning in has encountered many challenges in Kenya and other developing countries.

### **Challenges facing the integration of ICT in FFL teaching and learning.**

Schoepp (2005) affirms that the integration of ICT in teaching/learning is a complex process that faces several challenges or constraints Online teaching/learning of FFL encounters many challenges in Kenyan institutions of learning. The French language is taught in Kenya as a foreign language, a fact that is, in itself, a challenge. Learners of French mainly interact with the language within the four walls of the French classroom. As a result, the use of ICT in the learning of the language is indispensable since this is one way of accessing the unavailable teaching/learning resources in the country. The use of devices with internet access could enhance the teaching/learning of FFL, as is evident in a study carried out by Wasike et al (2021). Learning opportunities offered by smartphone could improve learning of FFL at the university in Kenya. Learners use different applications to learn FFL and the smartphone has proved to be an added advantage to the acquisition of both oral and written competencies among FFL learners. However, online teaching/learning of FFL has

been a challenge in Kenya, as it is in other subjects and other countries.

The Ministry of Education (2006) identified some of the major challenges facing the adoption of ICT pedagogy in Kenya as being inadequate connectivity and network infrastructure, lack of telecommunication network in rural areas, poor telephone networks and limited capability for effective use and maintenance of ICT infrastructure in learning institutions. The situation has not changed much since then. Research carried out on the use of ICT in the teaching/learning process has proved that there are serious constraints to the integration of ICT in teaching/learning in learning institutions in Kenya (Muia, 2021; Makanda, 2015; Obonyo, 2013). Some of the challenges include teachers' lack of both pedagogical and technical skills to implement the tools satisfactorily. Lack of specialized training, insufficient equipment to which they have access, difficulty in accessing resources, difficulties in the teaching centers concerning access to computer rooms, lack or poor internet, and lack of technical support among others have been cited. There is also evidence of low ICT literacy among teachers and a poor attitude towards ICT integration. These challenges have hindered the successful implementation of ICT into FFL teaching and learning processes as well.

Researchers have classified these challenges into several categories. Hendren (2000) and Ertmer (2005) categorize the challenges into two: Intrinsic and extrinsic challenges. Ertmer points out those extrinsic challenges are those relative to time, support for ICT integration, available resources and training. Those related to beliefs, practices and resistance are intrinsic. Hendren, on the other hand, refers to challenges brought about by teachers, administrators and individuals as intrinsic while institutional challenges are extrinsic.

Obonyo, (2013) Becta (2004) and Balanskat (2006) have classified these challenges into 3: teacher-level (Micro level), school level (Meso-level) or system level (Macro-level) challenges. These challenges mirror those facing teachers of FFL in Kenya, as studies carried out recently have revealed.

### **Challenges related to teacher/learner competence**

#### *Teacher/learner competence in ICT use*

Teacher /learner competency is necessary for the successful integration of ICT in the teaching of FFL. The Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology (2019) cites lack of competent and skilled human capacity due to inadequate and inappropriate equipment in Universities and tertiary institutions as one of the challenges to the adoption of ICT in teaching/learning processes. Studies have also revealed that majority of teachers lack ICT skills. ICT is not part of the curriculum offered to teacher trainees in Kenya. Students, on the other hand, learn just basic computer skills in their first year of study in most universities in Kenya. Teachers lack training on the implementation of online teaching while the learners also need training to be able to access the content.

Studies carried out in Kenya (Muia, 2021; Mwanda, 2017; Amuko et al., 2015; Makanda, 2015 Obonyo, 2013) have revealed that one of the major challenges to effective implementation of ICT in teaching/learning processes is the lack of technical and pedagogical skills among the teachers. These researchers pointed out that lack of confidence in use of ICT is directly related to their lack of competence. An ill-prepared teacher does not have the confidence to face the learners. Teachers who lack ICT skills fear using it in front of learners who may know more than they do. The fear of failure has made some teachers resort to self-training while others have abandoned online teaching. Teachers and lecturers of FFL in Kenya suffer the same fate as all other teachers in secondary and higher institutions of learning as no special

training is offered to them on ICT pedagogy in their initial training.

*Teacher's attitude toward online teaching*

Teachers' attitude to take up new modes of teaching is a major challenge (Muia, 2021; Makanda, 2015; Obonyo). Current efforts by the government to integrate ICT in teaching/learning in Kenya have been impeded by cultural and attitudinal resistance to adopting ICT in teaching (Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology (2019). The majority of instructors do not understand the benefits of ICT in teaching/learning processes and therefore resist any changes in the teaching modes. A negative attitude and resistance to change were clearly demonstrated by the majority of teaching staff in Kenyan institutions of learning at the onset of the covid19 pandemic. Lecturers of FFL preferred face-to-face teaching and were willing to go to all lengths to continue using this traditional mode of teaching.

Lecturers argued that FFL requires an interactive mode of teaching since learners have very little contact with the speakers of the target language. Interactivity or lack of it depends on the online mode of teaching adopted by the instructor. While the Online and Distant e-learning (Odel) platform may offer very little interactivity since the learners can only interact with the content, online learning through other modes such as zoom or Google meet to allow for interaction between the lecturers and the learners. Learners are more willing to share since there is a shield between them and the lecturer and they do not fear making mistakes as they speak since they are not under the direct glare of the lecturer. The lecturer on the other hand can track the behavior of the learners through the camera. The lecturer can share content online or use the board as learners follow.

The negative attitude and reluctance could also be attributed to lack of motivation among teachers, the feeling



that their efforts are not appreciated and they are not facilitated to implement the new mode of teaching (Habibu et al, 2012). The lack of appropriate equipment is another reason for the unwillingness by lecturers of FFL to adopt ICT in their classes. Universities are characterized by inadequate numbers of computers for use by the staff and students, while some university students do not have the smartphone (Wasike et al.2021)

### **Institutional challenges**

Institutional challenges include time, training, internet accessibility, technical support, funding and provision of equipment. They are a major challenge in developing countries, as recent studies have revealed and have affected the use of ICT in the teaching/learning of FFL.

#### *Shortage of time*

Becta (2004), Sicilia (2005) and Al-Alwani (2005) support the idea that lack of time interferes with time to plan for, complete tasks, attend to technical problems and practice. Al-Alwani indicates that this affects both teachers and students. Due to poor internet connectivity, both teachers and learners take a long time to connect or are cut off before the end of the class. This was common among lecturers and learners during the period when learning shifted online due to Covid19. Lecturers had also to create time to plan for the online class, prepare or search for content and upload it. This leads to loss of learning time and therefore, learning losses.

#### *Lack of pedagogical and technical training*

Teachers' lack of technical and pedagogical skills in ICT is directly related to lack of specialized training (Muia, 2021; Mwanda, 2015, Obonyo, 2013). In their initial training, teachers and lecturers are trained in basic pedagogical skills but no training is given in the use of ICT tools. There are no

proper programs set up by the Ministry of Education for continued training that involve ICT pedagogy. Lecturers of, therefore, find themselves faced with online teaching, without initial or proper continued training. (Ozden, 2007; Gomes, 2005; Becta, 2004) agree that lack of proper training is a major challenge in the integration of ICT in the learning/teaching processes. The quickly organized training for teaching staff in universities during the COVID-19 pandemic was inadequate and not properly planned. This was the only training offered to lecturers of FFL in most of the universities across the country. No effective training of lecturers of FFL in ICT pedagogy has been done. Training organized by the French Embassy is usually limited to persons in charge of French Resource centers in the universities. It is meant to enable them to run and manage the centers properly. The lack of technical and pedagogical ICT skills is a major challenge for the implementation of online teaching/learning of FFL.

#### *Internet access and ICT infrastructure*

Poor internet connectivity is a general problem in most developing countries and the situation in Kenya is not any different. This has also hindered the online teaching and learning of FFL. Research have revealed that lack of internet access and therefore, lack of access to resources, lack of a sufficient number of computers, lack of appropriate equipment, old or obsolete computers and general lack of funding for integration of ICT in learning have been major challenges (Muia, 2021; Mwanda, 2017; Wasike et al, 2021. Alwani (2005) and Gomes (2005) argue that the lack of appropriate infrastructure and material resources is a challenge Ito CT pedagogy and may lead to teachers' demotivation. However, according to Balanskat et al. (2006), accessibility of appropriate infrastructure and resources does not guarantee the successful integration of ICT in teaching/learning as other factors may play a role.

The challenges mentioned here have affected the online teaching of FFL. In a recent survey carried out in western Kenya, it was evident that there are no sufficient equipment and lack of proper ICT infrastructure for implementation of ICT integration in teaching. Most computers are old, there is poor or no connectivity and inappropriate equipment such as the French keyboard which is not readily available in the country. This makes it difficult to type French words with symbols as learners have to search then insert which takes up a lot of time. Lack of electricity connection and frequent power outages have compounded the problem.

### *Technical support*

Lack of technical support is a major challenge in ICT pedagogy and the integration of ICT in teaching-learning processes (Muia, 2021; Obonyo, 2013; Makanda, 2015). According to Sicilia (2005), lack of technical support makes delivery the and natural flow of the lesson impossible. Technical challenges FFL lecturers and learners face include waiting for websites to open, failure to connect or power /internet outages, lack of printers, computer malfunction or old computers and lack French-speaking technicians to assist the learners. The lack of technicians who are proficient in the language is a problem in most universities. These challenges lead to loss of time and loss of learning in general.

### **System-level challenges**

System-level challenges are those related to the wider educational framework and include policies as well as political interference. The Kenya Education Sector Support Program (KESSP) was put in place by the Ministry of Education in 2005. ICT was one of the priority areas to integrate it into the teaching and learning process (Farrel, 2007). The Kenyan government then put in place the National ICT policy in 2006. One of the objectives for the launch of this program was to

ensure that ICT played a key role as an empowerment tool and as a literacy tool for the population and potential users (Ministry of Information and Communication, 2006). The policy was revised in 2016 to keep abreast with the changes that had taken place over years, then again in 2019 to ensure availability and accessibility of efficient and affordable ICT services. According to the policy, learners at the primary school level were to be supplied with digital devices for use in school. Teachers were to be trained in ICT pedagogy. The program was meant to equip both teachers and learners with ICT skills. However, the program failed due to challenges which included poor infrastructure, lack of electricity and access to the internet, lack of ICT competency among teachers due to lack of training, high cost of digital devices in Kenya and inequalities due to the digital divide between rural and urban areas. (Nyaundi, 2019). Accord to the Ministry of information and Communication and Technology (2019), there are inadequate policies, legal and institutional frameworks both at the national and county levels of government to support ICT integration in institutions learning. The ministry also indicates that there is an unequal investment and access to ICT in different parts of the country.

The lack of proper institutional policies on the training of teachers has been a challenge to the implementation of ICT pedagogy among Lecturers of French. ICT is not included in the initial training and no proper program for continued training has been put in place by the government or institutions of higher learning in this area. In Kenyan universities, it has been revealed that digital training was done haphazardly during the covid19 pandemic to enable lecturers to continue with classes online. However, this was not sufficient.

ICT integration in higher education learning is currently a major subject of debate in Kenya. The Teaching and learning in institutions of learning need to be reviewed to enable learning to continue in whatever context. For some

time now, universities have had online platforms for online learning. However, it is evident from the covid19 crisis period that universities are not yet prepared to take their teaching fully online.

## Conclusion

This chapter looked at the challenges that teachers and learners face in the use of ICT in teaching/learning processes. It examined related reviewed literature from studies carried out in Kenya and the world. Integration of ICT could enhance the teaching/learning of FFL. However, the literature reviewed here indicates that several challenges hinder its implementation. The major challenges can be categorized into 3: teacher-related challenges, institutional challenges and system-related challenges. It is also evident that these challenges are interrelated, as one leads to another.

Teacher-related challenges include lack of competence due to lack of technical and pedagogical training in ICT, lack of confidence, fear of failure and demotivation. It is important that government puts in place programs for the training teachers in ICT during their initial and continued training. Programs put in place previously have failed mainly due to lack of funding and political interference. Teachers also need to accept the fact that the world is changing and so should their teaching practices. They must move away from the traditional modes of teaching to current trends in pedagogy. Institutional challenges include shortage of time, lack of training, internet inaccessibility, lack of technical support, funding and provision of equipment. The provision of appropriate, adequate equipment and resources for online teaching is paramount if ICT pedagogy has to be realized. Technical support is necessary for the proper integration of ICT in learning institutions. In the case of French, it is important that appropriate, adequate equipment is availed and that there is a technician who is proficient in the French

language to assist learners and lecturers.

Institutional challenges are those tied to policies or programs put in place by institutions, the Ministry of Education, the government and politics. Since 2006, the government of Kenya has tried to put in place programs for the digitalization of teaching/learning (International Labor Organization, 2021). These programs have been revised severally: national ICT policy 2016, National ICT policy 2019. The Teachers Service Commission and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum development have been involved in these programs. However, these have not been successful mainly due to poor ICT infrastructure, lack of electricity in rural areas, lack of teacher competency and lack of funding. The government must follow up on these programs to ensure their success. Stakeholders need to be aware of the challenges that hinder the implementation of ICT pedagogy to be able to find long-lasting solutions to the constraints.

Very few studies have been carried out in Kenya on the integration of ICT in teaching/learning. Most of these studies have focused on the secondary school level. There is, therefore, need for in-depth studies into the integration of ICT in Institutions of higher learning and particularly in the online teaching of FFL Kenya.

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