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Competencies and Preparedness in using ICT in the Teaching and Learning of French as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

French is a foreign language taught and learned in many institutions in Kenya. The language forms part of what is examined at the national examinations. The teachers and learners of the language have to put in an extra effort to facilitate the teaching and learning of the language given that the environment in which this is done is far from homogenous. The teachers have to adopt methodologies that will contribute to maximum learning. Technology has its place in the teaching/learning of foreign languages in general and the French language in particular. For this to work effectively, both the teachers and learners need to possess competencies that will enable them to carry out the activity effectively. Learning institutions too need to be well equipped with the necessary Informant on Communication Technology (ICT) tools, equipment and materials for teaching/learning.

Keywords: French as a foreign language, competencies, Information and Communication Technology

Introduction

In the year 2020, education systems in all parts of the world were affected by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing the closure of learning institutions to minimize the spread of the deadly disease. This presented a situation that called for immediate intensified use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching and learning in general and of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in particular.

The sudden change in the mode of teaching and learning from the traditional face-to-face to the digital, online mode completely altered the usual way of delivery and acquisition of knowledge (Chung et al., 2020; McQuirter, 2020; Yudiawan, et al., 2021). Consequently, the teaching professionals were suddenly required to offer virtual learning through online platforms. They had to learn how to prepare and upload teaching and learning material, how to administer examinations, assignments, and other tasks, and eventually evaluate them online. This would enable the teaching professionals to keep in touch with the students through their interaction with the teaching material uploaded onto the virtual learning platforms.

The teaching professionals and the students were thus required to have basic knowledge of the use of ICT to enable teaching and learning to take place effectively. In this chapter, we endeavor to answer these questions: What is the importance of ICT in teaching and learning of French as a foreign language? What are the competencies that the classroom agents require to enable the teaching and learning of FFL? What does the preparation for such an operation entail?

Why Information Communication Technology in teaching/ learning FFL?

The teaching and learning of FFL are based on the acquisition

of four language skills: Speaking, reading, listening, and writing. When well grasped, the skills enable a learner to communicate effectively in FFL in varied contexts. The teacher therefore must create favorable environments that enable learning for effective expression in the language. The environments so created need to reflect as near-native situations as possible to enable learning as would be the case of learning this foreign language in a naturalistic setting.

The greatest challenge is that in Kenya, FFL is learned alongside many other languages. The teacher is thus required to go out of his/her way, to create appropriate learning situations to achieve set objectives. ICT, if well integrated, can aid in the creation of the said enabling environments. Lustyantie & Syaefudin (2017) affirm that ICT can help to solve the puzzle as to how to create such environments that bridge the imbalances of the real situation of FFL language and its culture. The teacher can select recorded materials in form of films, videos and texts that depict near-real life scenarios of the native speakers as aids in teaching listening, speaking and reading skills. The students are then given tasks based on the recorded material, tasks that cause them to finally communicate in the language by use of the four skills. Moreover, interaction in form of the exchange of information is always ongoing between the classroom agents i.e., the teaching professionals and the students. They do so via various modes, one of which is digital and hence ICT. The teacher may want to equip the students with skills in telecommunication and communication via technology and thus propose activities around the use of media. Interactive modes such as the use of TV5 Monde and RFI (a television and radio channel respectively) as well as websites (e.g., www. tv5.org; www.rfi.fr; www.francparler.org) are proposed.

Generally, the World Wide Web, navigable by all, has transformed access to information and brought opportunities for learning Murithi & Yoo (2021). The learners can thus surf

information and meet their learning objectives. As Omwenga et al. (2004) and Redempta, (2012) observe, this not only gives them a chance to get information but also to interact and share ideas with others including and not limited to experts in various fields, researchers, and fellow learners.

As affirmed by Chokah (2013), most teachers of FFL in Kenya are aware of the relevance of ICT in the language class. The author mentions that resource centers have been established in learning institutions. These centers are equipped with reading material, computers with internet connection and television screens to enable access to the French channel TV5. The aim was to enable both learners and teachers to use the internet for learning and research and the TV to give a glimpse of the French-speaking world. This gives access to the "near-native" situations that enable a learner to learn a foreign language fast and effectively. Warschauer (1996) notes that the integrative approaches to Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) based on multimedia computers and the Internet endeavored to create scenarios that were close to the real-life situations of the life of the natives of the language. Such would be possible through technology and would lead to learning.

It has been noted that learners have a keen interest in social media. Chokah argues that Facebook, Twitter and the ability to surf the internet among young people should be seen as an opportunity rather than a hindrance to learning. This gives them a chance to discover ways of navigating the internet and so equips them with skills in surfing and searching for information. They may then use these very skills in searching for relevant information for learning purposes the hen need arises.

Teachers of FFL are thus required to integrate ICT in teaching and learning and by so doing, they may be able to "guide the learners on how to navigate the rapidly moving digital age". Teachers are motivated when they feel that their

objectives are being met. ICT, if well used, can help motivate the learners and stimulate their interest. Khirwadkar (2007) acknowledges that the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in teaching/learning can lead to high motivation for the learners.

Studies have proved that ICT is an enabler in the process of teaching and learning as it aids the learners to grasp concepts that would otherwise have remained abstract (Kozma, 1991). The author supports that the use of technology in education serves to bring different voices and sounds that attract the attention of learners leading to mental processes that create meaning. Aktaruzzaman et al. (2011) further state that, when well used, ICTs in education can cause increased access to education making it more relevant, and thus improving its quality.

Moreover, the use of technology gives a chance for the teacher to vary teaching methods from the traditional teacher-centered approaches to more interactive modes (Mingaine, 2013a). Additionally, learners get the opportunity to be more creative when they manipulate technology (Mwangi & Mutua, 2014) and the attention of learners is also enhanced (Majumdar, 2005). This approach helps curb the monotony of the teacher's voice and teaching methods.

Through ICT, learners of FFL can acquire the necessary aptitudes, knowledge and values that are an asset in today's digital era. The skills so acquired will enable the learners to fit well into the technology globe and compete constructively besides contributing positively. Eze (2020) observes that if properly used, ICT can serve as a powerful tool in the teaching-learning process and this is the reason why issues relating to ICTs are at the core of global educational thoughts and practices. This confirms the fact that ICT cannot be wished away in Education due to the major role it plays in teaching and learning. It forms part and parcel of the process.

According to Kromidha & Toro (2015), ICT serves as an

interesting solution in the didactics of foreign languages. They however argue that ICT should not be used as a manual or language coursebook. The teacher is thus required to be as creative as possible in his/her methodologies, always focusing on the attainment of set objectives. The knowledge environment of learners of FFL needs to be rich, learner-centered and interactive as Eze (2020) proposes. Such an environment ensures a variety of strategies of teaching/ learning which lead to maximum retention of content and skills besides the acquisition of the ability to solve real-life problems.

Generally, globalization and digitalization have not only influenced our lives but also the entire educational system. These trends caused by the changing world necessitate rethinking the teaching/ learning process. In this regard, modern pedagogical modes and standards of teaching/ learning which may be applicable in our regular classroom activity need to be adopted to achieve better learning outcomes and meet the societal demands/expectations. This generally calls for reinvention by the practitioners. Integration of ICT turns out to be one of the modern pedagogical modes that need to be adopted by practitioners for desirable results.

Pellerin (2014) further highlights that "the use of mobile technologies such as iPods and tablets contributes to redesigning language tasks and activities by helping young learners to create their learning environment and meaningful language tasks, as well as self-assess and regulate their language learning process.

Government efforts toward integration of ICT

The country Kenya is not an exception in the efforts made by other governments to integrate ICT into their education systems. UNESCO (2013) reports that governments in all parts of the world are striving to achieve access and good quality education for their citizens and that ICT has been

adopted as a means of increasing access to education done in a pleasurable way.

The Kenyan government, through the Ministry of Education, put in place a National Information, Communication and Technology Strategy for Education and Training in 2006. The framework outlines how ICT will be adopted, utilized and implemented for improved and effective delivery of education services in Kenya. It aims at ensuring that systematic efforts are made towards strengthening the adoption and use of ICT in the education sector with appropriate attention given to education development priorities as outlined in policy documents (MOE 2006).

The Ministry's mission is to facilitate the effective use of ICT to improve access, learning and administration in the delivery of education programs and services. It anticipates seeing improvement in the delivery of education programs and services, generally the integration of ICT in education and training. Additionally, the Ministry reckons that ICT can contribute substantially towards the realization of success in education, a means to shoot down challenges associated with it, thus improving and working towards a better global economy.

The ministry sees ICT as a vehicle that is likely to foster the rapid expansion of knowledge, improved examination outcomes, enhanced communication and technical efficiency, as well as greater decentralization in the delivery of education services. Additionally, ICT has the potential to play a more powerful role in increasing resources and improving the environment for learning, besides preparing students to acquire skills, competencies and socio skills that are fundamental for competing in the emerging global knowledge economy.

Further, the Government has put in place measures for digitalization of the Kenyan society. The National ICT Policy and E-Government Strategy have been developed

to provide guidelines for the said transformation. Through this, the Government recognizes that a workforce that is ICT knowledgeable can contribute greatly to the growth of its economy. In this regard, it takes Education as a platform for equipping the nation with the urgently required ICT skills (MOE 2006).

Moreover, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2019) reemphasizes that ICT is omnipresent and plays an indisputable role in people's daily lives. The organization reckons that technology transforms not only people's work and professional life, but it also alters how people interact, communicate, retrieve and share information, and even how governments provide public services to citizens.

In this same manner, ICT has also impacted education. Through ICT, students can have access to opportunities to learn outside school. It can enable teachers to change pedagogical approaches for better learning experiences and outcomes. The Organization further reckons that education systems are increasingly embedding digital competencies in their curricula. This implies that ICT has eventually become part and parcel of education and training. Individuals have no choice but to embrace the daily emerging changes.

The policymakers highly regard ICT, deeming it a means to enable knowledge transmission and acquisition that will eventually lead to innovation and skill development, to address the challenges faced by the country's education system (Kenya National ICT Policy, 2019).

Furthermore, the Kenyan government has reviewed the education curriculum from the 8-4-4 system to the Competency-based Curriculum (CBC), in response to the demands of Kenya's development blueprint, Vision 2030. With the new curriculum, the government anticipates equipping learners with world-class standards and skills needed for one to thrive in the 21st Century such as digital

literacy (KICD, 2017), an achievable target thanks to the integration of ICT right from the junior levels of schooling.

Technological Competencies

Technological competence, a term coined by, among others, Yücel, & Koçak (2010) is equally referred to as digital competence (Prieto et al., 2020; Hämäläinen et al., 2021), ICT competence (Danner & Pessu, 2013; JiménezHernández et al., 2020; Rubach & Lazarides, 2020) and computer competence (Sieverding, & Koch, 2009). Competence is identified as the ability 'to combine and apply relevant attributes to tasks in particular contexts' (Danner & Pessu, 2013). In the context of this work, the competencies in question are directly linked to teachers' and students' skills, knowledge and aptitudes to use technology in teaching/learning. Al Khateeb (2017) defines Technological Competence (TC) as knowledge in the use of computers and electronic devices.

ICT or TC, therefore, refers to the handling and processing of information through electronic and communication devices like computers, televisions, radios, video cassette recorders, telephones, video compact discs, audio compacts and so on. They have to do with the receiving, recording, processing, transmitting and retrieving of information (Eze 2020). This concept is further defined by Saidu & Sabina (2019) as an umbrella term that includes communication devices or applications encompassing radio, television, cellular phone, computer and network hardware and software and satellite system as well as the various services and applications associated with them such as video conferencing and distance learning.

Competency in ICT/TC is regarded as a prerequisite for the use of technology as affirmed by Yücel & Koçak (2010), in teaching and learning generally and of FFL in particular. Awouters & Jans (2009) affirm that it encompasses the knowledge of the necessary skills in the use of ICT and general

knowledge of the pedagogical-didactical elements of ICT. This, therefore, means that an individual who wishes to teach and/or learn via the digital mode has to be equipped with the requisite aptitudes in ICT for successful teaching and/or learning. They have to be able to operate both hardware and software to achieve the desired results. Consequently, a teaching professional should be able to identify the learning activities that can be taught through ICT use the same way he/she identifies other learning activities that are taught and learned via other modes. This, therefore, calls for special attention to the teaching methodologies adopted by the teaching professionals, those that can accommodate ICT as a tool in the attainment of set objectives.

Additionally, Zwaneveld & Bastiaens (2007) argue that skills in media are important for they complement ICT knowledge and competencies for effective integration of ICT in teaching and learning. These e-professionals require basic knowledge in handling hard and software; skills that enable them to critically select the media in the learning process; skills that give them the awareness of all the new technologies that are developed and can be integrated into the daily teaching and learning practice; supervisory skills to enable to optimize the learning processes of learners and communication skills that enable them to organize communication amongst learners, manage and enhance the learning process. Besides these, they are also required to be able to prepare learning materials for the use of ICT.

In this regard, the teaching professional has to be knowledgeable in its use to be able to prioritize learning activities that are well learned through ICT. In research carried out by Gajek (2015), it was found that the main ICT-related factors influencing regular use of ICT by teachers are the following: access to technology, confidence in own ICT skills, perseverance in dealing with technical problems and willingness to use the Internet as a professional development

tool. This implies that technological competence is undetachable from teaching and learning in the current technological era. The professionals encounter undesirable situations while using ICT but if they have to achieve their set targets, they persevere and solve issues as they come. They do not stop whenever they meet a challenge. They ought to possess skills in ICT and hence be competent in its use.

In a study carried out by Vandenhouten et al., (2014), it was concluded that for successful online learning, technological competence is of paramount importance. This is to say that online learning goes hand in hand with competence in ICT use.

Literature has established that technology in education, deemed as the new approach to education worldwide, is a type that requires intensive use of technological platforms and tools (Antonio et al., 2020; De La Rama et al., 2020; Jacinto & Alieto, 2020; Javier, 2020, Naji et al., 2020; Faize & Nawaz, 2020; Stein et al., 2011). What is of emphasis here is the fact that ICT use in teaching and learning is the latest approach and has been adopted worldwide. Of emphasis too is the intensive use of ICT as a determinant of Technological Competence, therefore follows that technology has been embraced widely to the point that an individual who is not techno-savvy may find it difficult to cope with the current technology era. Teaching professionals and students alike cannot be exempted from the group that needs to upgrade their skills in technology use.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) endeavors to achieve its vision of "facilitation of ICT as a universal tool for education and training" by encouraging every educational institution, teacher, learner and the respective community to be equipped with appropriate ICT infrastructure, competencies and policies for usage and progress (MOE 2006). The ministry envisions the country as one that requires ICT, an important component for development. ICT "provides capabilities and skills needed for

a knowledge-based economy" and this "calls for transforming teaching and learning to incorporate new pedagogies that are appropriate for the 21st century" (MOE 2006). It, therefore, follows that the country views education as an asset to the growth of the economy and that education that incorporates ICT produces enlightened citizens.

OECD (2019) recognizes competence in ICT use and digital literacy as important skills that students need to acquire for success in the current digital era. The organization put in place a framework to assess the integration of information and communication technologies in teaching and learning. It reckons that there is, therefore, increasing importance of digital technologies in education systems and the pressing need to equip students with digital competencies.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) generally recognizes that teaching professionals and their learners moved from acquisition of basic computer skills to computer-aided teaching to communications and research, and eventually to the use of computers in teaching/learning every subject (MOE 2006). There are therefore indications that the use of technology can advance to desirable levels soon.

It is however worth noting that research has indicated that there is a limited and uncoordinated approach to imparting appropriate ICT skills and competencies to teachers, a factor that poses a challenge in the integration of ICT in education (Kenya Country Report 2008).

Further, Ukpong (2014) observes that "the alarming situation today is that while students and even pupils are very conversant with the use of ICT gadgets, many teachers are completely naïve". This study points out that teachers are not well-grounded to handle technology in teaching.

Some studies have shown that despite the policy formulation for ICT in education and financial investment by the government, the integration of technology in Kenyan

classrooms remains low (Piper et al., 2015). Abobo (2018) states that two-thirds of the respondents in his study could not integrate technology in the teaching of the Kiswahili language. Further, Omolo et al. (2017) found out that student-teachers successfully practiced the use of technology in teaching after training sessions with their instructors. However, it was noted that the training consisted of basic computer skills, which did not equip them for technology use integration in classrooms (Mwangi & Khatete, 2017; Muinde & Mbataru, 2019; Majumdar, 2005**).**

More research has demonstrated that as much as ICT helps in the creation of opportunities for learners, its integration heavily relies on the teacher's ICT literacy (UNESCO, 2012). Teachers, therefore, have a role to play if ICT has to be successfully integrated into education.

Technological Preparedness

ICT in education is only enabled where there is the availability of technical equipment. As noted by Murithi & Yoo (2021), effective implementation of the policies on ICT in education is enabled where there is adequate infrastructure and facilities**.** Liang et al. (2005) in a study on analyzing the digital classroom environment, advise that some basic facilities such as learner's devices, teacher's devices, shared display projectors, network connectivity as well as other enabling installations are fundamental for ICT integration. Mingaine (2013b) reinforces this and notes that facilities such as power, computer devices, software, and connectivity are essential for effective ICT integration. Computers (desktops, laptops, smartphones, digital cameras, headsets, software applications and platforms (e.g., Zoom, Google meet, WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams) and internet connection (Salvo et al., 2017) form part of the equipment in question.

Due to the high demand for virtual learning, there is need, not only to avail basic technical equipment and materials

but also sophisticated ones to enable meaningful sharing of knowledge. Interactive smart boards have affected teaching and learning at Kenyatta University positively as stressed by Chokah (2013). Teleconferencing facilities can enable sharing of findings from research. In Kenya, the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA) and the Initiative for Research and Development (IRAD) among others have embraced this technology. This means that an individual does not necessarily need to move from one end of the globe to another to share knowledge as this can be done from the comfort of one's office or home. In this manner, meaningful contributions that are likely to affect policy in many areas can be made by many and this would give a chance to those that want to participate to do so.

Today, there is a provision for registration for courses and training that can be purely done online. Course content as well as assignments and examinations are availed online. This has enabled distance learning that leads to the building of professional capabilities and award of certificates in the areas of study. This is only done where there is necessary equipment.

Chen (2008) among other researchers emphasizes the issue of teacher preparedness in the technological era that we find ourselves in today. Research has however shown that the teachers' use of ICT has been limited to "emails' and "search engines" (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Tondeur, et al., 2012) despite the existence of a variety of web platforms.

Tezci carried out a study in 2009 in Turkey that sought to analyze the use of ICT in teaching/learning. It was concluded that ICT use among teachers was low and limited to the Internet, email, word processing and some educational CDs.

A study by Adimora et al (2014) in Nigeria showed that teachers lacked access to ICT facilities and were equally not ready to use them in their teaching. This is reinforced by the assertions of Ezekoka et al (2017) that most teachers do not

possess the basic foundation of computer literacy.

Through the vision and mission statements of MoEST, the ministry advocates for the equipment of individuals with the requisite skills of ICT as well as ICT infrastructure in institutions of learning. It, therefore, aims at seeing improvement in transmission and outcomes of education programs and services, generally through the integration of ICT in education and training.

Farrell (2007) acknowledges that currently, Kenya has ongoing ICT Initiatives and Projects which place a lot of emphasis on the importance of ICT in its Education. He, however, notes that the access to ICT is not encouraging and that the ratio is one computer to many students.

Fraillon et al. (2013) among others carried out studies and documented students' access to and use of ICT resources at home and in school in many countries of the world. OECD established that although ICT is present in schools, students are excluded from using it. Only the school management and teaching staff use it to administer and improve overall instruction, identify and monitor students' strengths and weaknesses, or communicate with parents (OECD 2019).

In addition, the organization established that specific ICT-related policies and practices could directly influence access to and use of ICT resources. Issues to do with funding for ICT resources in schools can either foster or hamper the access to ICT whereas the heads of institutions' attitudes toward ICT use as an instructional tool, and guidelines and support for teachers in using ICT in the classroom can either foster or hinder the use of ICT.

Current infrastructure status in Kenyan learning institutions
The African Tertiary Institution Connectivity Survey (ATICS, 2005) revealed that the state of ICT infrastructure in African universities is too little, too expensive, and poorly managed. Another study by the African Virtual University (AVU, 2005)

found that whereas most institutions have developed ICT policies, their implementation is yet to be actualized due to lack of resources. This is corroborated by the findings of Karsenti et al. (2012). It has been however pointed out that Kenya among sub-Saharan countries has made recognizable efforts towards innovation in various fields (Republic of Kenya, 2019). This means that as much as there is still much more to be explored, Kenya is on the global map concerning novelties including the integration of ICT in education.

The Kenya Education Network (KENET) purposes to "establish sustainable communication and networking among educational institutions in Kenya. Its efforts are therefore geared towards the facilitation of extensive use of Internet technology in teaching/learning and research. Kenya's institutions of higher learning have a role in maintaining a reliable and sustainable network for desirable learning outcomes (Kenya Country Report Kenya 2018).

Moreover, OECD established that specific ICT-related policies and practices could have a direct impact on access to and use of ICT resources. Policies related to funding for ICT in institutions as well as attitudes of actors towards ICT use, and guidelines and support for teachers in using ICT in the classroom can either enhance or negatively influence the availability or the use of technology (OECD, 2019).

Conclusion

ICT is a necessary tool in education in today's world. Teaching professionals and students have no choice but to embrace ICT if the learning process has to be a success. Skills in the use of technology are a requirement for use of ICT. There is need for teaching professionals and students to be equipped with technical skills. More specifically, they have to move away from basic computer skills involving the use of Microsoft word and e-mails to more specialized ones that will enable them to use technology for teaching and learning.

Teaching professionals can prioritize upgrading their skills in technology from time to time to meet the ever-rising demand for ICT integration. The teacher should take the lead since he is the determining factor in the use of ICT in teaching and learning. He should be well prepared through adequate training.

Learning institutions need to equip their learning centers with the necessary technical equipment and materials to enable online teaching and learning. Language laboratories equipped with desktop and laptop computers, digital cameras and conferencing facilities among others should be regarded as necessities and not leisure items in any given learning environment.

There is need for more intervention by the government to see to it that ICT is fully integrated into education through regular follow-ups on the training of teachers and provision of the necessary equipment in all learning institutions.

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