# A CRITICAL REVIEW OF STRATEGIES AND METHODS OF LEARNING AND TEACHING FRENCH IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract**

*The study examines the critical concepts of French language teaching and learning in Nigeria, addressing the increasing demand for French proficiency driven by globalization and Nigeria's historical, economic, and cultural ties with Francophone countries. Despite its importance, French language education in Nigeria encounters significant challenges. This study focuses on various language learning strategies and pedagogical methods, particularly communicative and task-based approaches, to enhance language acquisition, proficiency and teaching. Through a qualitative research design involving an extensive literature review, the study analyses the adaptation and implementation of these strategies and methods. The findings underscore the potential of these strategies to improve language learning outcomes, fostering greater autonomy and effectiveness among Nigerian learners. Furthermore, the study explores the evolution of language teaching methodologies, highlighting the communicative and task-based methods' focus on real-life communication and the emphasis on functional language use. The study contributes to the understanding of effective French language education, providing insights for educators and policymakers to address existing challenges and improve teaching practices.*

**Keywords:** French language education; language learning strategies; communicative approach; task-based learning; learner autonomy.

**Résumé**

*L'étude examine les concepts critiques de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage du français au Nigeria, en répondant à la demande croissante de maîtrise du français motivée par la mondialisation et les liens historiques, économiques et culturels du Nigeria avec les pays francophones. Malgré son importance, l'enseignement de la langue française au Nigeria se heurte à des défis importants. Cette étude se concentre sur diverses stratégies d'apprentissage des langues et méthodes pédagogiques, en particulier les approches communicatives et actionnelle, pour améliorer l'acquisition, la maîtrise et l'enseignement des langues. Grâce à une conception de recherche qualitative impliquant une revue approfondie de la littérature, l'étude analyse l'adaptation et la mise en œuvre*

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*de ces stratégies et méthodes. Les résultats soulignent le potentiel de ces stratégies pour améliorer les résultats de l'apprentissage des langues, favorisant ainsi une plus grande autonomie et efficacité parmi les apprenants nigérians. En outre, l'étude explore l'évolution des méthodologies d'enseignement des langues, en soulignant l'accent mis par les méthodes communicatives et basées sur les tâches sur la communication réelle et l'accent mis sur l'utilisation fonctionnelle du langage. L'étude contribue à la compréhension d'un enseignement efficace de la langue française, en fournissant des informations aux éducateurs et aux décideurs politiques pour relever les défis existants et améliorer les pratiques pédagogiques.*

**Mots-clés**: enseignement de la langue française ; stratégies d'apprentissage des langues ; approche communicative, apprentissage par tâches, autonomie de l'apprenant.

## Introduction

The demand for French language proficiency in Nigeria has increased significantly with globalization and the growing importance of French as an international language (Wende, 2014; Terry & Oghogho, 2022). Historical ties, economic partnerships, and cultural exchanges between Nigeria and Francophone countries further underscore its relevance (Owoeye, 2010; Akinpelu & Yegblemenawo, 2023). Despite French language's vital role in national development, its teaching and learning face notable challenges. Thus, a comprehensive review of the foundational concepts in French language education is essential for effective language acquisition and proficiency among Nigerian teachers and learners. This article aims to examine the basic concepts of French language teaching and learning in Nigeria, focusing on language learning strategies and pedagogical methods such as communicative and task-based approaches. The objectives are to analyse the significance of adapting language learning strategies and evaluate the implementation of communicative and task-based teaching methods.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, focusing on a critical review of literature related to the concepts of teaching and learning French in Nigeria. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration and analysis of various dimensions of French language education within the Nigerian context. The study conducted a comprehensive literature search using academic databases, scholarly journals, books, and relevant websites. Keywords and search terms related to French language teaching and learning concepts in Nigeria were used to identify the relevant sources. The literature review encompasses articles, books, and reports published in English and French,

covering a range of topics such as language learning strategies, communicative approaches, and task-based teaching approach. Critical analysis is applied to evaluate the significance of the adaptation and implementation of various teaching and learning approaches within the Nigerian context.

**Language Learning Strategies**

There is an assumption or expectation placed on students to acquire knowledge, skills, or competencies as part of their education. While language teachers focus on delivering content and curriculum, there is often little explicit teaching about effective language learning strategies (LLS). Teng (2023) argues that these strategies play a crucial role in shaping the manner and effectiveness of a learner's acquisition of a second or foreign language. According to Oxford (1990: 8), learning strategies —make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations‖. Consequently, language learning strategies may enhance learners' ability to become more independent in foreign language learning.

O'Malley & Chamot (1990: 1) defined LLS as **"**the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information‖. For Cohen (1998: 4), LLS are —the conscious thoughts and behaviour used by learners with the explicit goal of improving their knowledge and understanding of a target language‖. What is apparent in the definitions above is that LLS are Specific initiatives, actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that learners could employ consciously to improve their own progress in the learning of foreign language. In this context, victory is to succeed in learning to communicate in French, and for the learner, a learning strategy is therefore a technique or method that he uses to learn to communicate in French.

O'Malley & Chamot (1990) categorized LLS into three major types: cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective, while Oxford (1990) on the other hand, divided LLS into six classes, namely, cognitive, mnemonic, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social. While the study argues that the classification of O'Malley & Chamot and Oxford above have striking resemblances, it will attempt to demonstrate how cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective

strategies could be used by French learners in Nigeria. These strategies should help the learners to be more autonomous and independent in their learning.

*Cognitive strategy*

The term ―cognitive‖ is the use of the mind (cognition) to complete an LLS task. Cognitive strategy helps learners regulate thought processes and content to achieve goals or solve problems (Cameron & Jago, 2013). It is the way learners process information, organize, and memorize it. Cognitive strategy is rooted in theories of self-regulation in behaviour. Its objective is to aid learners in organizing and structuring information mentally and providing support like scaffolding (Teng, 2023). French learners in Nigeria can apply cognitive strategy in a reading task. We all know that reading task is complex, a good learner can enhance his comprehension, retention, and overall proficiency in the target language by employing the following:

a. **Observation:** He should actively observe the text, paying attention to details, such as vocabulary usage, sentence structure, and overall meaning.
b. **Repetition**: He should re-read challenging sections of the text to reinforce understanding and aid in memory retention.
c. **Emphasis**: He should highlight or underline key points, important concepts, or unfamiliar words to draw attention to them for further review and understanding.
d. **Taking notes**: He should jot down key ideas, main points, or questions that arise while reading to aid in comprehension and serve as a reference for later review.
e. **Summary**: After reading a section or passage, he should summarize the main ideas or arguments in his own words to solidify understanding and retention.
f. **Creation of mental associations**: He should form connections between new information and existing knowledge or experiences to facilitate understanding and memory recall.
g. **Usage of images and sounds**: He should visualize scenes or concepts described in the text and mentally "hear" dialogue or descriptions to enhance comprehension and engagement.

h. **Comparison with known languages**: If proficient in other languages, compare the structure, vocabulary, or grammar of the target language with those known languages to identify similarities and differences, aiding in understanding and retention.

i. **Usage of the native language**: If permitted and helpful, clarify difficult concepts or unknown words by temporarily switching to the native language for explanation or translation, then return to the target language for continued reading and practice.

To learn more effectively, learners will develop the ability to reflect on their learning by implementing metacognitive strategy

*Metacognitive strategy*:

This involves awareness, analysis, and knowledge of one's cognitive processes (Teng & Yue, 2022). Metacognitive strategy allows the learner to exercise total control over self-management, planning, focusing, and evaluating their own learning process. Here, it is about the ability to reflect on what is happening in the learning process. It's the idea of planning and controlling. By incorporating these metacognitive strategies below into the language learning routine, a learner can enhance his self-regulation, reflection, and overall effectiveness in acquiring and mastering the French language. The study recommends the following activities as a metacognitive strategy:

a. **Setting objectives:** Learners should be encouraged to set clear and achievable language learning goals, such as mastering specific vocabulary, improving pronunciation, or achieving a certain level of proficiency, to guide his learning journey.

b. **Self-awareness**: A learner should reflect on his learning process, identify his strengths and weaknesses, and consider which learning strategies are most effective for him. This self-awareness can help him tailor his approach to language learning to better suit his individual needs and preferences.

c. **Keeping a Personal Learning Journal**: A learner should maintain a journal where he can record his progress, insights, challenges, and reflections related to language learning. This can serve as a valuable tool

for tracking his development, identifying patterns, and planning future learning activities.

d.  **Language Immersion**: A learner should actively seek out opportunities to use the language in real-life settings, such as joining language exchange groups, participating in conversation clubs, watching French films or TV shows, or engaging with native speakers online. Immersion and practice are key components of language acquisition.

e.  **Self-Evaluation**: A learner is advised to regularly assess his language skills and progress by reviewing his performance against his objectives, reflecting on his learning experiences, and identifying areas for improvement. He is expected to adjust his learning strategies and goals as needed based on his self-evaluation to ensure continuous growth and development.

*Socio-affective strategy*:

This involves interaction with another person, working with one or more peers to obtain feedback, pool information, or model a language activity (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Socio-affective learning strategy focuses on the social and emotional aspects of language learning, emphasizing interactions with others and the learner's attitudes, motivation, and emotional responses towards the learning process (Oxford, 1990, 1996, 2003). This strategy aims to create a supportive and engaging learning environment that fosters communication, cultural understanding, and emotional well-being.

Here's how socio-affective learning strategies can be applied in language learning, especially French in Nigerian context:

a.  **Engagement in Conversations**: A learner should participate in conversations with native French speakers, language exchange partners, or fellow learners to practice speaking and listening skills, build confidence, and gain exposure to authentic language use.

b.  **Participation in Language Communities**: A learner should become part of language learning communities, such as online forums, social media groups, or local meetups, where he can interact with like-minded individuals, share experiences, and receive support and encouragement.

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c. **Immersion in French Culture**: He should explore French culture through literature, music, films, cuisine, and traditions to deepen his understanding of the language and its cultural context. This can enhance his motivation and connection to the language.

d. **Feedback and Support**: A learner should regularly seek feedback on his language skills from teachers, peers, or native speakers to identify areas for improvement and receive constructive advice. Additionally, he is advised to provide support to others in their language learning journey, fostering a collaborative and encouraging learning environment.

e. **Management of Anxiety and Building Confidence**: A learner should recognize and manage language learning anxiety by adopting relaxation techniques, positive self-talk, and gradual exposure to challenging language tasks. Building confidence in his abilities can enhance motivation and performance in French language learning.

f. **Setting Realistic Goals and Celebrating Progress**: A learner should establish achievable goals for his French language learning, such as mastering specific grammar structures, expanding vocabulary, or holding a conversation on a particular topic. He should celebrate his accomplishments along the way to maintain motivation and momentum.

g. **Reflection on Learning Experiences**: A learner should take time to reflect on his language learning experiences, emotions, and attitudes towards French language learning. He should acknowledge his successes, learn from challenges, and adjust his strategies and goals as needed to foster a positive and adaptive approach to learning.

The three strategies discussed above could be combined to make learning of French language pleasurable. The activities discussed above are not limited to French language learning alone, they could be applied by a learner of any language. Any strategy can be combined with any as far as it works for the learner. According to Oxford (1990:17), there is no complete guide to create a ―scientifically validated hierarchy of strategies‖. This implies that a learner has all the freedom to choose what will ensure success in his language learning journey.

**Methods to Language Teaching**

Language teaching methods have evolved over time, with various methods focusing on different aspects of language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Some of the methods of teaching that could be found in literature include grammar-translation; direct method; audio-lingual method; content-based instruction; total physical response; lexical approach, community language learning approach, communicative approach; and task-based instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, 2001; Zhou & Niu, 2015; Ugwu, 2015). Each of these methods has its own strengths and weaknesses, and many teachers combine elements from multiple methods to create a more balanced and effective teaching methodology. It is also generally believed that there is no one single best method that meets the goals and needs of all learners and programmes (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

According to Littlewood (2007), there is no significant distinction between the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Richard (2005) viewed task-based instruction as an extension of the CLT movement, arguing that both approaches aim for communicative output, despite taking different approaches and thus not being unique in themselves. Nunan (2004:10) describes CLT as a concept, whereas "task-based language teaching represents a realization ... at the levels of syllabus design and methodology." Consequently, a communicative language teaching and task-based method can be introduced together as a personal teaching style. The combination of these two methods may assist a teacher to answer these four critical questions: *Who do I teach? To do what? What to teach? How to teach?*

***Communicative Language Teaching Method***

The communicative method is a methodology that appeared in the 1970s. The approach became famous through a British linguist, D. A. Wilkins (1972). His contribution was an analysis of the communicative meanings that a language learner needs to understand and express rather than describe the core of language through traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary. It opposed previous methods which mainly focused on the form and structure of languages. Its main objective is to learn to communicate in a foreign language (Hymes, 1972; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The communicative approach has thus revolutionized the teaching and learning of foreign languages by the fact that it has considered the communication situation.

The priority of communicative approach is communication between people in a specific context, for example, *acheter une baguette à la boulangerie ou passer une commande au restaurant*. The teacher introduces grammar and lexicon according to the needs and objectives of a communicative situation and not with the aim of learning grammatical rules by heart or reciting lists of words. The approach can be integrated into the classroom using ―*document authentique*. An important place is given to so-called ―authentic‖ documents in communicative approach because they make it possible to bring in a reality of language and culture. An ―authentic document is any document or object not developed for educational purposes. It could be for example, a press article, an extract from a radio programme a photo, or a brochure. These documents help develop curiosity and introduce a dimension of pleasure to learning. In this approach, the teacher's objective is to develop the learner's skills so that he or she can successfully confront communication situations. The idea of bringing a language close to ―real‖ into the classroom arouses in the learner's desire to learn a foreign language and to discover the culture linked to this language. Therefore, motivation is fundamental in the learning of FLE.

### Task-Based Language Teaching Method

Since the 1980s, the task-based method has gained increasing traction in the field of teaching foreign languages (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011). Being a learner-cantered approach, it sees language as a means of communication. The goal of the task-based approach is to give students the chance to master language in both speaking and writing by using instructional activities that encourage natural, functional, and practical language use for important purposes (Ellis, 2009). Task-based language learning method aligns with a learner-cantered educational philosophy (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) and prioritizes content-oriented activities above linguistic forms (Nunan, 2004). It includes specified goals, procedures, and outcomes (Littlewood, 2004). Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu (2011) stressed that language teachers have an active part in selecting, customizing, and designing projects that align with learners' requirements, expectations, interests, and ability levels. The teacher must therefore consider the learner as a person who will act in personal,

public, academic or professional reality.

The TBL takes up the principles of the communicative approach, but it emphasizes the notion of task (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Nunan, 2004). In this approach, the learner will have to mobilize skills that allow him to act to accomplish tasks that are not only language related but also culturally inclined. The task therefore puts the learner into ―action‖. The notion of task can be better explained and understood as in this example:

You need to organize a dinner for your friends. Here, we have an action verb ―organize‖ and the action objective is to succeed in organizing a meal for your friends. To accomplish this task, the learners will certainly need to:

> ➢ discuter avec les amis pour savoir ce qu'ils aiment ou ce qu'ils n'aiment pas (chat with their friends to find out what they like or don't like)

> ➢ lire et choisir des recettes (read and choose recipes).

> ➢ faire une liste de courses (make a shopping list).

> ➢ envoyer un message à leurs amis (par mèl ou par sms) pour donner des informations (leur adresse, l'heure du repas, etc.) (- send a message to their friends (by email or SMS) to give information (their address, meal, etc.

In this example, the learner must make choices based on certain constraints (their budget or the fact that some of their friends are vegetarians for example). What is important at this stage is not only the ability to communicate, but the ability to mobilize linguistic knowledge and language abilities (know-how) to carry out the task. With this approach, a teacher will be able to offer learners concrete tasks in which they will be required to resolve problem situations, and by which teaching-learning activities will therefore be contextualized.

### Strategies of Integrating CLT and TBLT

Combining Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can be highly effective for fostering language proficiency. The following steps could be considered for effective integration of the two teaching methods in a language class:

- Ensure that lesson plans include both communicative activities and task-based activities. For example, start with a communicative activity to introduce vocabulary and grammar in context, followed by a task that requires using these elements. Alternate between CLT activities (role-plays, discussions) and TBLT activities (projects, problem-solving tasks) within the same lesson or over a sequence of lessons.

- Select materials that are relevant to the students' lives and interests to ensure engagement and practical application. Use newspapers, videos, podcasts, and other real-world materials to create tasks that require communication.

- Before introducing a task, engage students in pre-task activities that build necessary language skills and knowledge. This can include brainstorming, discussing key vocabulary, or reviewing relevant grammar.

- Provide guidance and feedback during the task to help students stay on track and use the language effectively.

- Conduct post-task activities where students reflect on their performance, discuss difficulties, and consolidate their learning.

- Encourage students to work in pairs or small groups to complete tasks, promoting interaction and collaboration.

- Use role-plays and simulations that mimic real-life scenarios, requiring students to use the language authentically and spontaneously. Also include activities that prioritize fluent communication without immediate correction, allowing students to practice speaking freely.

- Foster an environment where students feel comfortable making mistakes and taking risks with the language.

- Offer constructive and positive feedback that helps students improve without discouraging them.

- Conduct a class discussion where students share their task outcomes and reflect on their language use.

**Conclusion**

This study on Language Learning Strategies (LLS) underscores their crucial role in enhancing the efficiency and autonomy of French language learners, particularly in contexts like Nigeria. By drawing on Oxford's (1990 assertion that effective strategies can make language learning easier, faster, and

more enjoyable, the study emphasizes the potential for students to achieve better outcomes more quickly. The structured approach to LLS, categorized by O'Malley & Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) into cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies, provides learners with a clear framework to tackle various aspects of language acquisition. It also explores the evolution and integration of language teaching methods, particularly focusing on the synergy between Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). While traditional methods like grammar-translation and audio-lingual approaches have their merits, modern strategies emphasize real-world communication and practical language use. CLT, introduced in the 1970s, prioritizes communicative competence through authentic materials, while TBLT, emerging in the 1980s, focuses on task completion to enhance language skills. Combining these methods involves designing lessons that alternate between communicative activities and task-based tasks, selecting relevant materials, and fostering a collaborative, feedback-rich environment. This integrated approach aims to address the diverse needs of learners, enhancing their motivation and proficiency in using the language in real-life contexts.

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