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Assessing the Use of Learner-Centered Pedagogy (LCP) in the Teaching and Learning of English as a Foreign Language: A Case Study of Selected Public Secondary Schools in Togo

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Abstract

The traditional way of designing courses called Teacher-Centered Pedagogy (TCP) is a conventional teaching methodology in which the teacher remains at the center of instruction in the teaching-learning process. In this approach, the main focus is on inputs and the teacher decides on the content that he/she intends to teach, how to teach this content and assess the content. However, with the wealth of knowledge acquired about learning over the last decades, this traditional approach has been challenged with a modern one—Learner-Centered Pedagogy (LCP)— with a main focus on outputs to facilitate learning so as to achieve learning objectives through a variety of activities with effective interactive relations between learners and teachers. In this regard, Togo, like many countries worldwide, has recently made a transition from the Teacher-Centered to the Learner-Centered Pedagogy even if the concept is still poorly understood, making the new system complex to implement effectively due to different factors and more intricate when it comes to applying it to learning in general and specifically to the teaching-learning of English as a foreign language in Togo's public secondary schools. Through a mixed-method approach comprising a literature review and a structured questionnaire distributed to English teachers across selected public secondary schools in Togo, the research identifies significant challenges impeding the effective adoption of the Learner-Centered Pedagogy (LCP). The findings reveal obstacles such as large class sizes, lack of appropriate teacher training, inadequate learning resources, and constrained teaching time. To address these limitations, the study advocates for a hybrid pedagogical model that combines elements of both Teacher-Centered and Learner-Centered Pedagogies to enhance educational outcomes and English language proficiency among learners.

Keywords: English, Learner-Centered Pedagogy, Teacher, Teacher-Centered Pedagogy, Togo.

Évaluation de l'utilisation de la pédagogie centrée sur l'apprenant (PCA) dans l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de l'anglais langue étrangère : une étude de cas de certaines écoles secondaires publiques au Togo

Résumé

La méthode traditionnelle de conception des cours, appelée Pédagogie Centrée sur l'Enseignant (PCE), est une approche pédagogique conventionnelle dans laquelle l'enseignant occupe une place centrale dans le processus d'enseignement-apprentissage. Dans cette approche, l'accent principal est mis sur les apports puisque l'enseignant(e) décide du contenu qu'il/elle souhaite enseigner, de la manière d'enseigner ce contenu et de l'évaluer. Cependant, grâce aux nombreuses avancées dans la compréhension du processus de l'apprentissage au cours des dernières décennies, cette approche traditionnelle a été remise en question au profit d'une méthode moderne—la Pédagogie Centrée sur l'Apprenant (PCA). Cette dernière met principalement l'accent sur les résultats dans le but de faciliter l'apprentissage et d'atteindre les objectifs pédagogiques par le biais d'activités variées et d'interactions efficaces entre apprenant et enseignant. À cet égard, le Togo, à l'instar de nombreux pays à travers le monde, a récemment amorcé une transition de la PCE vers celle de la PCA. Cependant, ce concept reste encore mal

compris, rendant son implémentation complexe, et ce, pour diverses raisons. Cette complexité s'amplifie lorsqu'il s'agit de son application dans l'apprentissage en général, et plus spécifiquement dans l'enseignement-apprentissage de l'anglais comme langue étrangère dans les écoles publiques secondaires du Togo. À travers une approche méthodologique mixte combinant une revue de littérature et un questionnaire élaboré et distribué aux enseignants d'anglais dans des écoles secondaires sélectionnées au Togo, cette étude met en évidence les défis majeurs qui entravent l'adoption efficace de la Pédagogie Centrée sur l'Apprenant (PCA). Les résultats mettent en évidence des entraves majeures, notamment le surpeuplement des classes, le manque de formation adéquate des enseignants, le déficit en ressources pédagogiques adaptées ainsi que la restriction du temps consacré à l'enseignement. Pour surmonter ces difficultés, l'étude préconise un modèle pédagogique hybride intégrant des éléments des approches centrées sur l'enseignant et sur l'apprenant, afin d'améliorer les résultats éducatifs et la maîtrise de l'anglais chez les élèves.

Mots-clés : Anglais, Pédagogie Centrée sur l'Apprenant, enseignant, Pédagogie Centrée sur l'Enseignant, Togo.

Introduction

Educational reforms are not new in Togo. Efforts to improve the quality of teaching-learning have been attempted just after independence with Ordinance no. 75-016 of May 6, 1975 on education reform. Since then, the continuous improvement of the quality of education has always been at the heart of the Togolese government's priorities with its commitment to developing effective educational strategies. A case in point is the curricular reform initiated in 2002, which has brought real changes to the Togolese education system. The highlight of these curricular reforms is the Learner-Centered Pedagogy (LCP) which has been adopted to replace the Teacher-Centered Pedagogy due to the global endorsement and campaign for this teaching approach. The paradigm shift from Teacher-Centered to Learner-Centered Pedagogy has a worldwide advocacy for its practice at all levels of education (Michael F. Mascolo, 2009). However, although the LCP has been widely taken for granted as common sense about effective teaching, this notion must be questioned in terms of its practicality for achieving specific objectives in specific contexts, depending on geographical location. In Togo, even though some public secondary schools are gradually deploying a Learner-Centered Pedagogy with new assessment contents, in a general sense, this approach is not without its share of challenges in terms of effectiveness and actual implementation in the classroom. And if, from a general standpoint, this institutional reform is fraught with difficulties, it is all the more so when it comes to implementing it in the teaching-learning of English as a foreign language, because teaching and learning English in Togo is waning in terms of developing all students' mastery of oral and written expressions, enabling them to converse, read with ease and write with accuracy and rigor.

The current study, carried out in 2025 on the basis of experiments in some public schools in Togo, the capital of Togo, has three sections. It takes a critical look at the characteristics of the Learner-Centered approach. Additionally, it explores some factors challenging the implementation of the Learner-Centered Pedagogy, especially when it comes to the teaching-learning of English. Furthermore, it suggests transitional alternatives to education stakeholders and policymakers for a more rewarding education.

1. Problem Statement

The objective of this paper is to assess the use of Learner-Centered Pedagogy in the teaching of English and investigate the major challenges that teachers encounter when applying this pedagogy in the teaching of English in Togolese public secondary schools before suggesting

alternative solutions to make education more conclusive with a focus on a hybrid model that combines both the Learner-Centered and the Teacher-Centered Pedagogies.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The research is sustained by the theory of Constructivism, the Case study design as well as the quantitative methods in order to explore the topic under consideration.

The Constructivism theory posits that humans create knowledge through the interaction between their experiences and ideas. Jean Piaget, one of the first theoreticians of constructivism, plays a key role in the history of Constructivism. Piaget's work on educational psychology focuses on how “humans create meaning when their experiences and ideas interact” (S. P. Chand, 2024, p. 276). This theory proposes that learners should be actively involved in their own learning process, and encourages them to explore, question, and draw their own conclusions. It is worth using this theory because, in principle, constructivists adhere to Learner-Centered Pedagogy.

As part of the study, a Case study design, which is one of the most widely used and accepted means of qualitative research methods in the social sciences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) and the quantitative research approach—the processes of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results of a study—are equally deployed to carry out this study.

1.3. Research Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study is based on both literature review and field survey. The literature review has consisted in collecting data from literary sources, various peer-reviewed journal articles while the field research has consisted in collecting data through a field survey. For this purpose, a questionnaire template containing twenty-one (21) questions was drawn up and distributed at random to seven (07) government secondary school English teachers from five (05) different schools in Togo.

2. Findings and Discussion

The results of the research are presented below to better explain the multifaceted challenges in applying the LCP in regard to teaching English as a foreign language in some government secondary schools in Togo.

2.1. Characteristics of the Learner-Centered Pedagogy

Teaching is a process of handing down knowledge from generation to generation. Technically, there are two general approaches to teaching at various educational levels. These are the Teacher-Centered approach and the Learner-Centered approach. For long, the Teacher-Centered approach, also referred to as the traditional teaching model, has been implemented in the training of students. In this approach, the teacher decides on the content of his/her teaching; he/she plans how to teach the said content while the student takes a more passive role, because the responsibility of learning is not forced on him/her. As a matter of fact, he/she has less opportunity to develop his/her crucial-thinking skills. He/she loses control over his/her own learning because the teacher makes all the decisions about the curriculum, and the different forms of evaluation while collaboration, an essential and valuable skill in school and in life, is discouraged. However, over the last decades, this traditional model has been replaced by a modern one, the Learner-Centered approach, thanks to a clear determination on the part of policymakers to break free both with the traditional method and with the continuity with the colonial past through innovations and a rethought of this teaching approach.

However, in the newly promoted approach to teaching, learners actively construct their own knowledge and as a result, the responsibility for learning is put on them. This viewpoint is shared by N. Tzenios (2022, p. 916) who thinks that learners are encouraged to “reflect on their learning and how they learn it. In this approach, teachers use casual conversation to ask students what they are learning and challenge learners' assumptions about learning.” Rather than

imposing content on the students, teachers create the conditions for students to discover and actively construct knowledge and to foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills in the learners. They “provide the most suitable teaching methodologies” for them (R. K. Shah, 2020, p. 45). This approach to learning focuses on “the role of the learner in an active learning process to ensure quality of instruction by encouraging the attitude of inquiry among the learners.” (F. Vavrus, M. Thomas and L. Bartlett, 2011, p. 10).

The Learner-Centered Pedagogy equally demands a different way of assessing the students who should be able to demonstrate their ability to understand concepts and to critically analyze problems by themselves. Within this descriptive model, students are called upon to take on more responsibility for their own learning which becomes a more shared experience between the teacher and the students, and between the students themselves as this approach posits that students can learn from each other while the teacher can also learn from the students. F. Vavrus, M. Thomas and L. Bartlett (2011, p. 12) side with this view and admit that in the Learner-Centered Pedagogy “knowledge can be co-constructed by teachers and students”. Here, it is crystal-clear that the teacher is not the provider of knowledge, but rather a facilitator of learning.

2.2. Factors Challenging the Actual Implementation of the Student-centered Pedagogy in Public Secondary Schools in Togo

It is true that the teaching of English using Learner-Centered techniques is rewarding to learners in the sense that it considers students to be responsible co-creators of their own learning. Through this approach, students learn new things, use new skills and critical thinking and are equipped with problem-solving skills. The Learner-Centered Pedagogy seems especially suited to teaching a foreign language. It “promotes inductive learning, and, consequently, learners are not taught grammatical or other types of rules directly, but are left to discover or induce rules from their experience of using the second language.” (A. S. Calvo, 2007, p. 192). However, despite its widely acknowledged significant benefits on the international stage, there are factors that hinder its effective use in public secondary schools in Togo.

To reach out to this conclusion, a questionnaire template has been sent at random to some English teachers from selected government secondary schools. The questionnaire identified four (04) main factors-inadequate learning resources, inadequate time on the teaching timetable, the large class size, teachers’ lack of competence and capacity building, —as challenges to English language teachers in the implementation of the Learner-Centered Pedagogy in their classrooms.

In fact, the idea behind the questionnaire is to explore the challenges of implementing Learner-Centered Pedagogy when it comes to teaching English in public Junior secondary schools in Togo. The data collected from teachers at Totsi, Legbassito, Sanguera and Collège Protestant, Lomé Tokoin and Amakpapé give us important insights into the challenges.

Table 1: Assessment of Teacher Selection and Training Resources in Various Schools

Name of the School	Number of Teachers Selected	Teachers’ Training	Form	Class Size	Training Equipment
Totsi	2	Lack of training and capacity building	Form 2 ; Form 3	88 ; 116	Inadequate teaching-learning resources, outdated textbooks, lack of interactive materials

Legbassito	2	Lack of training and capacity building	Form 1 ; Form 2 ; Form 3 ; Form 4	120 ; 92 ; 76 ; 75	Outdated textbooks and lack of interactive materials
Sanguera	1	Lack of training and capacity building	Form 1 ; Form 3 ; Form 4	280 ; 110 ; 172	Inadequate teaching-learning resources
Collège Protestant, Lomé Tokoin	1	Lack of training and capacity building	Form 2 ; Form 4	40 ; 46	Limited teaching-learning resources
Amakpapé	1	Lack of training and capacity building	Form 3 ; Form 4	70 ; 86	Insufficient training resources

Source: Field Data from School Assessments (2025)

The findings from the questionnaire filled out reveal that the use of Learner-Centered Pedagogy is not really implemented in the classrooms and that the Teacher-Centered Pedagogy still dominates the average classroom. This finding is corroborated by Susan J. Lea et al., (2003, p.322) who maintain that “many institutions or educators claim to be putting student-centred learning into practice, but in reality, they are not.” It can be inferred from here that although there have been many attempts to switch away from the traditional teaching method—Teacher-Centered Pedagogy—across many sub-Saharan African countries, these attempts have been fruitless.

The respondents explained that the large class sizes observed in most of the government secondary schools in Togo can seriously affect the effective implementation of the Learner-Centered Pedagogy to teaching English as a foreign language. The following are excerpts from them.

An English teacher 1 from Totsi secondary school thinks that a large class is not conducive to cater to individual differences and for better teaching outcomes. According to him/her, it is a barrier to Learner-Centered Pedagogies in classrooms, especially to learning English because the learning of a foreign language must be based on the needs of individual students. F. Shamim & H. Coleman (2018, p 8) side with this reality and write that “it seems reasonable to assume that teaching will become less effective as the number of learners in a class increases.”

An English teacher from Amakpapé secondary school also raised the issue of overcrowded classrooms and argues that effective teaching-learning of a foreign language becomes difficult in an overcrowded classroom. Based on his/her experience, he/she explained that the large class size is an obstacle to organizing learners into small groups for a positive learning outcome. Large class size does not allow the teacher to give one-on-one or small-group instruction on a regular basis and it can limit the flexibility required for Learner-Centered activities such as listening, speaking (conversation), reading, group work, etc.

An English teacher 1 from Légbassito secondary school was also of the view that large class sizes hamper the effective implementation of Learner-Centered Pedagogy in the classroom, especially when teaching English. He/she explained, on the basis of the size of the classes he/she teaches,— Form 1 : 120; Form 2 : 92 and Form 3 : 76—that the large class sizes prevent them from walking through the rows of classrooms and consequently, some students use it as an opportunity to have fun and carry out other extracurricular activities.

The same goes for English teacher 2 from Totsi secondary school who informs that the large number of students in his/her classroom has prevented him/her from adopting a Learner-Centered Pedagogy during his/her English class even though this approach has been

institutionalized in Togo. Consequently, he/she, as well as many of his/her colleagues, have kept their classrooms Teacher-Centered.

Another important factor affecting the effective implementation of the Learner-Centered Pedagogy is the teacher's lack of training. The findings from the questionnaire showed that teachers' lack of competence and capacity building also inhibits them from adopting an effective Learner-Centered Pedagogy in their classrooms. In fact, teachers, especially teachers of English need to be competent in applying LCP so they can select effective teaching strategies that create a positive environment for their learners. Their "professional development is a key factor to successful integration of student-centered teaching approach into classroom teaching." (K. K. Jabbour, 2013, p. 93). Similar observation emerged in S. Enock M. and C. E. Msonde (2019, p. 142). For these scholars, "In many cases, teachers are left alone to experience top-down initiatives without having clear ideas on how best to practice LCI [LCP], particularly, in overcrowded classrooms which dominate many of the public schools in developing countries".

The data collected in the framework of the study show that five (05) over seven (07) teachers of English declare that they are not equipped enough to use the Learner-Centered Pedagogy in the classrooms while the remaining ones think that they do not simply know anything about the approach. The analysis of the answers indicates that this approach is fraught with challenges. The lack of sufficient training on the subject matter in Togo as well as other countries is reported by UNESCO. The report reads:

Although some countries, including Botswana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia, reported that two thirds or more of their teachers have had two years of initial training, there are others, such as Mauritania and Togo, where more than half of the teachers have had less than one year on initial training (UNESCO, 2010).

Togo, as well as another country has been singled out in the above report which states that the majority of the teachers in Togo never had any consistent professional development training on how to integrate the Learner-Centered teaching approach into their classroom activities. The few of them who have undergone some sort of training only have initial training and are not sufficiently equipped.

The following are some evidences from the various teachers who filled out the survey questionnaire. As to whether teachers are sufficiently equipped to adopt the Learner-Centered Pedagogy in the teaching of English, respondents from Totsi (01), Collège Protestant Lomé Tokoin (01) and Legbassito (02) and Sanguera (01) secondary schools simply wrote no. For them an effective Learner-Centered Pedagogy requires a consistent and ongoing training and support, which many of them do not receive, while the second respondent from Totsi (01) and the one from Amakpapé (01) think that they do not simply know.

The results displayed above are symptomatic of the teachers' inability to practice and to be actively involved in the Learner-Centered teaching for the benefit of the students. Without proper training, teachers cannot effectively implement the Learner-Centered Pedagogy because the "teacher professional development is significant in enhancing teacher performance and learning outcomes. It [...] updates teachers' subject content knowledge in the light of recent advances. It also enables teachers [...] to develop and apply new strategies in implementing the school curriculum and other aspects of teaching practice" (A. Rugambwa, W. A. L. Anangisye, M. J. Mwaikokesya, 2022, p. 128).

Another contributing factor preventing teachers from applying an effective Learner-Centered Pedagogy in English classrooms is the unavailability of adequate teaching-learning resources.

In fact, resources play a vital role in the teaching-learning process and these resources can be viewed as textbooks, digital tools, activities and other instructional materials that support active learning, collaboration, personalized instruction and interactive environment to assist learners to meet their expectations. In fact, the essence of Learner-Centered education lies in

providing engaging learning experiences. However, without adequate resources, it is like trying to build a house without the proper tools. Tamakloe, Amedahe and Atta (2005) in I. M. Inusah (2020, p. 96) seem to concur with this assertion when they write that “teaching learning resources is a material which the teacher uses to facilitate the learning, understanding and acquisition of knowledge, concept, principles or skills by his learners”.

In this regard, English teacher 1 from Totsi secondary school reports that the lack of adequate teaching-learning resources equally constitutes one of the main challenges in implementing Learner-Centered Pedagogy in teaching English as a foreign language. According to him/her, “the existing resources are inadequate and encourage teaching approaches that do not rely consistently on teaching-learning resources.”

English teacher 1 from Legbassito and English teacher 2 from Totsi secondary school were also supportive of the view that inadequate teaching-learning resources impede the implementation of Learner-Centered Pedagogy. They were highly critical of the unavailability of the resources in the following terms: “We are often left with outdated textbooks and a lack of interactive materials. These are crucial for creating an environment where students can explore, inquire, and collaborate. We cannot continue to train our students this way because teaching English is very demanding in terms of resources”

A further consideration that thwarts the effective use of the Learner-Centered Pedagogy is inadequate time on the teaching timetable. The results of our survey showed that no English teacher has more than an hour—55 minutes to be specific—to teach his/her subject per session. This proves that despite the institutionalization of this new teaching approach, which requires extended periods for learning, group discussions, and activities that may not fit into rigid schedule blocks, the traditional timetables, which often allocate fixed and short periods for each subject, are still maintained.

The survey also revealed that most teachers of English who were questioned through the online form were of the opinion that short class periods do not allow students to fully engage with the material, ask questions, have conversation and explore topics in depth. In a real sense, all English teachers that filled out the online form elaborated that insufficient time in the teaching schedule hinders the effective adoption of the Learner-Centered Pedagogy.

Here as well, English teacher 2 from Totsi secondary school elaborates that “inadequate time on the teaching schedule obstructs the successful implementation of learner-centered pedagogy and as a result, the time-related challenge must be addressed by rethinking the structure of the school day, incorporate longer class periods, and provide dedicated time for teacher collaboration and professional development” if a minimum proficient fluency level is expected from young English learners.

The English teacher from Sanguera secondary school also highlighted time as a challenge. He/she notes that “the most significant hindrance to applying Learner-Centered Pedagogy is the time needed to design and implement activities in the classroom.”

English teacher 2 from Legbassito secondary school does not think otherwise. He/she also identified time as a barrier to applying Learner-Centered Pedagogy because according to him/her “English involves multiple skills that need dedicated time to develop through practice and exposure and teachers need time to assess progress and provide constructive feedback to the learners. However, limited time in the timetable considerably hinders them to provide personalized feedback and conduct formative assessments, which are crucial for adjusting instruction to meet learners’ needs.”

From the analysis of the data collected, it is clear that despite the fact that the Learner-Centered Pedagogy offers numerous benefits for student engagement and learning of English, several factors, when it comes to considering the educational context in Togo, hinder the effective implementation of such a teaching subject. These challenges often necessitate exploring transitional alternatives to integrate both Learner-Centered and Teacher-Centered

Pedagogies. By considering a hybrid model, teachers can leverage the strengths of both methods to create a more balanced and flexible learning environment that addresses the diverse needs of the students.

3. Exploring Transitional Alternatives for a Better Education Outcome

The Learner-Centered approach to education, despite its being promoted around the world as the preferred model for education, has seemed not to be fully appropriate to teaching in secondary schools in a resource-constrained environment like Togo, especially when it comes to teaching English as a foreign language. The challenges faced by this sector have seriously worked against the proper and effective implementation of this new approach with inconclusive results. Consequently, a call for a re-innovation of Learner-Centered Pedagogy in Togo's secondary schools is needed. Developing nations like Togo, where conditions are not met for the systematic implementation of the Learner-Centered Pedagogy, must apply a teaching approach that best suits their realities, especially in the teaching of English as a foreign language because "learner-centredness does not imply that teachers should abandon the classroom to the learners" David Nunan (1991) in Arsenio Sánchez Calvo (2007, p. 194). This new invented teaching method must combine both the Learner-Centered and Teacher-Centered methods which are essential for effective education, because both methods can be more conclusive and fruitful in Togo where conditions are not yet met, because "[t]here is no single best way to teach. Some learning objectives are better understood using teacher-centered approaches." (S. E. Msonde & C. E. Msonde, 2019, p. 143). Combining both approaches to teaching will surely improve student proficiency and learning in terms of fluency, critical thinking, the mastering of the complexities of English grammar, vocabulary, and nuanced expressions, depending on prevailing classroom realities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Though Togo, through reforms, has been committed to enhancing the quality of education and to bringing about a paradigm shift from the Teacher-Centered Pedagogy to the Learner-Centered Pedagogy for some years now, at secondary school level it must be noted that much remains to be done to see the light at the end of the tunnel. In a real sense, the effective implementation of this approach is only theoretical and when it comes to the reality, it remains a mirage, given the major challenges facing public schools in Togo.

To overcome these challenges, it would be necessary to adopt a gradual training strategy that incorporates a hybrid method blending the Learner-Centered Pedagogy and the Teacher-Centered Pedagogy. This combination can leverage the strengths of both methodologies in order to create a more balanced and adaptable educational framework, especially in the teaching-learning of English as a foreign language in Togo.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that if Togo wishes to effectively implement the Learner-Centered Pedagogy, teaching-learning strategies must improve school infrastructure, provide proper teacher training to familiarize them with the methods specific to the Learner-Centered Pedagogy, reduce class sizes, provide useful training resources by equipping both students and teachers with appropriate educational materials and mobilize local and international resources to support these reforms.

The Ministry responsible for Secondary Education in collaboration with regional education policymakers, through a strong political commitment, must also make sure that the Learner-Centered Pedagogy is associated with the Teacher-Centered Pedagogy in order not to jeopardize the training and future of learners in the name of an educational model for which our country is not yet ready because learning English is demanding in several respects.

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