

## Challenges Facing the Teaching of English in Bunia Primary Schools in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to pinpoint the challenges facing English Language Teaching in Primary Schools of Bunia town. The research relayed on descriptive and exploratory designs. Data were collected through survey method where questionnaire served as technique. Indeed, both closed and open questions were addressed to 50 teachers selected randomly among a population of 55 primary school teachers. Data were coded and analyzed using the Descriptive Statistics such as frequencies and percentages with the help of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Then, they were presented using frequency tables. Findings supported that the younger the better. Young children are intrinsically better language learners, and become more proficient quickly. English is to be taught to children when they are still receptive. The results also showed that there is lack of English programme at primary level. Teachers of English in primary schools are not qualified. They teach without appropriate methodology.

**KEYWORDS:** education, teaching, learning, task, young learner.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Teaching English at primary school level is a challenging task in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The present study describes the situation and challenges in teaching English in Bunia Primary schools. It considers both benefits and constraints of introducing the English language as a compulsory subject to primary education and addresses the most serious concerns which are the lack of contents, methods and qualified teachers.

Some previous researchers have expressed their views on teaching young learners. Indeed, the primary goal of language teaching young learners should be to enable learners to communicate, using their abilities in the L2, in a variety of contexts and situations. Communicative Language Teaching is, therefore, *'an approach that aims to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication'* [1].

Young learners will learn best if the people involved in the teaching-learning process facilitate the learning and take into account the way they learn into the teaching practices. The author [2] suggested that children developed through specific stages. Besides, the reference [3] argues that early Language Learner (LL) has attitudinal benefits, which would pave the way for intercultural understanding. Moreover, children all over the world acquire their native language without formal training and there are some theories regarding the language acquisition process. The author [4] believed that learning was innate, in the sense that every child has an innate capability to learn a language. This idea of [4] was followed by the term Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) suggested by [5] who thought that there was a critical period, up to about the age of eleven, in which children were able to learn language. He believed that if language was introduced to children after this age (or this critical period) then it was extremely difficult for them to learn it.

For [6], children learn about their world in different ways, using their preferred learning styles. They may be characterized as visual, auditory or kinesthetic learners. A visual learner learns best if he sees what is happening and links it to its understanding. On the other hand, an auditory learner will need to hear the input, while a kinesthetic learner will learn best if the learning involves physical movement. Therefore, for good outcomes, it is important to take into account children's preferred learning styles *visual-auditory-kinesthetic* (VAK) in teaching English language to primary school pupils.

Younger Learner's classroom activities should involve games, songs, stories, puppets, role-play, and drama activities. Such classroom teaching would lead to better learning outcomes with positive attitudes, higher motivation, and understanding towards diversity in the world [7].

This study is part of a particular context. Indeed, nowadays, English is increasingly being taught at younger age in an expanding number of countries and milieus. In Democratic Republic of the Congo, there is a Ministerial order N° MINESPSP/ CABMIN/1180/2018 of 23/04/2018, allowing the introduction of the teaching of English language in primary school. This introduction of English in government primary schools arises a number of challenging issues that need to be successfully addressed if the teaching of English has to succeed.

Therefore, the article centers the following main question: How is the Teaching of English Language at primary Challenged? The subsidiary questions are the followings: Why is English Language Teaching introduced in Primary school? What to teach? Who should teach? And, How to teach?

The study aims essentially to pinpoint the challenges facing the introduction of English language teaching in Primary Schools.

The hypotheses to be verified throughout the present work are the followings: The reason for introducing the teaching of English language relays on the fact that younger children are intrinsically better language learners, and become more proficient quickly. So, English is to be taught when the child is still receptive. There is no language content for English in primary schools. Consequently, each teacher creates himself the materials to teach. English is taught without any appropriate methodology. Teachers of English in primary schools are not qualified.

## **2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Descriptive and exploratory survey was used in conducting the research. Descriptive survey designs are concerned with gathering information, from people with relevant experience, on current conditions, processes, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions on the issue or phenomenon being investigated [8]. The exploratory survey dimension sought to get more in-depth understanding of the same. Informants comprised primary school teachers. Their views were considered critical and contributed a lot in the elaboration of the present scientific work.

### **2.2 POPULATION**

The study targeted teachers as population. My investigation revealed that in Bunia, the teaching of English language is introduced in 20 primary schools and the total number of teachers of English is 55.

### **2.3 SAMPLE SIZE**

In this study, the sample comprised 50 out of 55 teachers; which was representative. To select teachers I used simple random sampling. Indeed, each member of the population (teachers) under the study had an equal chance of being selected and the probability of a member of the population being selected was unaffected by the selection of other members of the population, i.e each selection was entirely independent of the next. The method involved selecting at random from a list of the population the required number of subjects for the sample. This was done by using a table of random numbers set out in matrix form.

### **2.4 INSTRUMENTS**

Data collection relied on survey method where questionnaire was used as technique.

In the present study, questions were open and closed ended. For close ended, respondents simply provided "yes" or "no" answers, checked an item from the list given or ticked the best answer from the option given. For open ended questions, respondents responded freely using their own word.

It was the case of self- administered questions without the presence of the researcher. The absence of the researcher was helpful in the way that it enabled respondents to complete the questionnaire in private, to devote as much time as they wished to its completion, to be in familiar surroundings, and to avoid the potential threat or pressure to participate caused by the researcher's presence. And, it is more anonymous than having the researcher's presence.

The questionnaire concentrated on 'Teachers' perception on teaching English in Primary School'. It was aimed to get an overview on teachers' opinion on the introduction of English in primary school; which is currently still an attempt. The results obtained from this section were used to determine the challenges affecting the teaching of English in Bunia primary schools.

On the other hand, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software technique served for data analysis on the basis of Descriptive Statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Coded and analyzed data were therefore, presented in frequency tables.

There were both a closed-ended and an open-ended section in the questionnaire, resulting in both quantitative and qualitative data. Prior to the analysis, the returned questionnaires were first sorted out and organized by serial number as per category. Upon return, they were checked for their completeness after which those not completed at 50% were eliminated.

The raw data were of two types: quantitative data from the closed-ended items in the questionnaires and content analysis, and the qualitative data from the open-ended items in the questionnaires and semi-structured interview. Quantitative data were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, percentages) to show the general tendencies in the data. Frequencies and percentages were systematically applied in the analyses of single variables, and presented through tables.

To analyze the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions in the Teacher questionnaire, first the data were coded under themes which were pre-determined considering the research questions and the sections and/or questions in the questionnaires. The codes under each theme were identified in time from the answers provided and attention was paid to make them suitable for the predetermined themes. Later, the coded data under thematic categories were converted to frequencies and percentages. While computations were made, the missing responses were taken into account, and the results that are related to each question and obtained from each group of participants were displayed in separate tables. The tallying technique was then used to count the frequencies of their occurrences. The frequencies were converted to percentages and tabulated to facilitate rank-order transparency and reading of the data.

### 3 RESULTS

The data are presented in frequency tables which show the pertinence of each element in terms of frequency converted in percentage. The analysis is based on teachers' views on the teaching of English in primary school.

**Table 1. The reason for introducing English**

Reason	f	%
Proximity with English Speaking Countries	23	46
Getting more pupils	15	30
Develop pupils' ability in ELT	10	20
No answer	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data

The above table shows that according to 23 teachers (46%), English is introduced in primary schools because of the proximity with English speaking countries; for 15 (30%), it is the matter of getting more pupils; for 10 (20%), the reason for introducing English at this level is to develop pupils' ability in ELT; but 2 (4%) have given no answer.

**Table 2. Copy of National Programme**

Possession of the national programme	f	%
No	50	100

Source: Primary data

Concerning the possession of a copy of the national programme, all the teachers questioned (100%) have answered that they do not have any.

Table 3. Textbook use

Textbook	f	%
Go for English	2	4
Britain I	2	4
Sounds to Read (level 1,2,3)	1	2
I create my material	45	90
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data

As far as the textbook is concerned, the table above shows that 45 teachers (90%) do not have any; they create their material themselves; 2 (4%) use *Go for English*; 2 again (4%), *Britain I*; and 1 (2%) *Sound to Read (level 1, 2, 3)*. It results from the present analysis that most of the teachers create their material themselves.

Table 4. Methodology

Methodological approach	f	%
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)	5	10
Total Physical Response (TPR)	3	6
Both CLT and TPR	2	4
Traditional method	1	2
I teach without any specific method	39	78
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data

As far as the methodological approach is concerned, the above table proves that 39 teachers (78%) teach without any specific method; 5 (10%) use Communicative Language Teaching; 3 (6%) use Total Physical Response; 2 (4%) use both CLT and TPR; whereas 1 (2%) teacher still refers to traditional method. It results from the present analysis that most English teachers in Bunia primary schools do not use appropriate methods for the primary level.

Table 5. The profile of a good Teacher of English

Profile of a good Teacher	f	%
A graduate teacher	4	8
A specifically trained teacher	29	58
A generally trained teacher	17	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data

As seen in the above table, 29 teachers (58%) state that a good teacher of English should be specifically trained; for 17 (34%) he should be generally a trained teacher; finally, 4 teachers (8%) state that he should have a degree i.e. a graduate.

Table 6. Interest of Pupils for English

Rate of pupils' interest for English	f	%
Excellent	11	22
Good	36	72
Satisfactory	2	4
Unsatisfactory	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data

It emerges from the above table that for 36 teachers (72%) constituting the majority, the interest of pupils for English is *good*; for 11 (22%) it is *excellent*; for 2 (4%), *satisfactory*; and 1 teacher (2%) has rated the interest *unsatisfactory*.

**Table 7. Didactic Materials Use**

Didactic material	f	%
It depends upon the topic	13	26
The use of objects	5	10
The use of pictures	17	34
No material	15	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data

Considering the above table, 17 teachers (34%) use pictures as didactic materials; 15 (30%) do not use any material; for 13 (26%), the use of material depends upon the topic; finally, 5 teachers (10%) use objects.

**Table 8. Difficulties faced in the Teaching of English**

Difficulties	f	%
Lack of Programme	44	88
Lack of appropriate books	5	10
Lack of appropriate methods	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Considering the above table, 44 teachers (88%) face the problem of lack of programme; for 5 (10%) the difficulty is at the level of lack of appropriate books; for 1 teacher (2%), the difficulty is at the level of appropriate method. It results that in Bunia primary schools for the majority of the teachers, the difficulty resides in lack of programme.

**Table 9. Suggestions**

Suggestions	f	%
Provide teachers with national programme	36	72
Provide teachers with appropriate materials	1	2
Train Teachers	13	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data

Considering the above table, most of the teachers i.e 36 (72%) suggest that schools should be provided with the appropriate national programme for primary level; for 13 (26%), teachers should be supplied with appropriate materials; but for 1 (2%), teachers should be provided with appropriate material.

To sum up, the results have demonstrated that there is no language content for English in Bunia primary schools. Each teacher creates himself the materials to teach. Teachers of English in primary schools are not qualified. Some have been trained in English centers, others are undergraduate or graduate in ELT. In other schools again, the class is taught by P- school teachers (with State Diploma in Pedagogy) simply on the basis they got in secondary school. Then, English teachers should be submitted to a specific training. English is taught without any appropriate methodology. Findings finally has supported that "*The younger the better*". Younger children are intrinsically better language learners, and become more proficient quickly. English is to be taught when the child is still receptive.

#### 4 DISCUSSION

Introducing English as a compulsory subject in primary school brings into a number of pressing challenges to address if the expected results are to be reached. The challenges are namely, the reasons for introducing English in Primary School, the content, nature of the learner and the training of trainers i.e. who will teach English in primary school, what will be taught, at which level and how?

The widespread introduction of languages in primary school has been described by the reference [9] as 'possibly the world's biggest policy development in education' and English is nearly the language most commonly introduced. There are good reasons to this trend. The majority of my informants found as main reasons for the introduction of English, the proximity with English speaking countries, globalization and dominance of English language. But the real reason for teaching English in primary school is quite different. First, it is often assumed that it is better to begin learning languages early [10] because it falls within the limits of the Critical Period Hypothesis and Age of Onset [5] in line with the author [11] 's view that *'the earlier the better'*. Second, economic globalization has resulted in the widespread use of English as the world lingua franca and many stakeholders believe that it is essential to train an English-speaking workforce in order to compete on the global market. [12] Third, parents want their children to develop English skills in order to benefit from the new economic world order. For this purpose, pressure is often put on governments to introduce English to younger children. This advent is particularly important in contexts of massive language contact as is the case of the DRC for the future of both children and the nation. English in primary school appears to be a good opportunity to lay a solid foundation for the learning of other subjects. The spread of English as a lingua franca has given rise to the belief that learners need to acquire communication skills rather than accumulating knowledge about English as a language.

What is taught? The majority of teachers questioned stated that there does not exist any syllabus to refer to for the teaching of English at primary school level; that is why each teacher creates his/her material to teach him/herself. Hence, a need for the elaboration of a syllabus for this level. Children are willing to participate in all class activities. They are motivated and happy with different materials depending on their cognitive level. They are interested in themselves, in what is live, in 'here and now' and they learn by doing i.e. through physical activity. Then, they should be taught whatever materials to be chosen as content of a lesson, unit, term, school year programme or long range plan must be interesting, varied, attractive, encouraging, challenging, surprising and calling for activity to elicit a sense of achievement among learners. Sometimes children, particularly the younger ones, do not attach importance to the purpose of an activity even when they partake in it. There are of course activities for younger and older children. Stories, games, songs, chants, rhymes and poems, dances, arts and crafts, computers, magic, drama activities, puzzles and problem solving activities, and any other selected materials should aim at making the learning of English a motivating and pleasurable experience.

Who should teach? The literature on the teaching of English to primary school children has encountered a number of pressing challenges, one of which is that English is introduced as a subject in primary school without due consideration of who will teach it. Indeed, my informants believe that teachers of English should receive a particular training. It is in this context that I assume that Teacher Training Colleges which are entrusted with the mission of training specialist teachers in the various disciplines that form the core of secondary education, are that right place where specialized teachers should be trained. But, these Colleges have not yet considered training such teachers because nothing had been planned on their curriculum accordingly. Now that the landscape lends itself to new demands, the mission of Colleges of Education will have to change in order to compensate for the lack of courses in special didactics intended to train teachers of pre- and primary education. Such courses are expected to provide teachers with wider responsibilities than simply teach English. Teachers must possess a sound know-how expertise and a variety of language techniques, including ability to teach art and crafts, drama, games, storytelling and songs that will stay with children long after they will have left language classes. This entails familiarity with child-centered approaches, understanding of learning needs and knowledge of the psychology and nature of the learners. *"Teachers should not take it for granted that children will arrive in the classroom with a strong positive attitude to foreign language learning"*. [13] The teacher is, therefore, an important factor in the process of raising student motivation and thus encouraging language learning.

How to teach? The majority of my informants stated that teachers do not use any specific methodology and the reason is that they have not received a specific training accordingly. Besides, because children are activity-sensitive, the most appropriate teaching approaches would be Total Physical Response (TPR) for younger children and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and/or Task-Based Learning (TBL) for older children. It is for this reason that teachers of primary school must be well-trained to develop eclecticism as an option.

Besides, so far as the method is concerned it is relevant to refer to the eclectic approach. Indeed, the concept has emerged from the fact that none of the ELT methods known today is practiced exclusively, and that many teachers choose to combine principles and techniques from various approaches in a "carefully reasoned manner" that the reference [14] calls "principled eclecticism". The point being made here is that even though the approach does not rest on any independent view of language, it has to be informed by relevant theories of language and language learning, such as those described above. The challenge facing most teachers with this approach lies with the extent to which education and training will have equipped them to make appropriate choices for their classes from the available approaches. Other terminologies associated with the approach include *integrated approach* [10].

Knowing that children learn from the world around them, it is necessary that teachers provide conducive environment for children to learn. Teachers should also make sure that the subject is taught in a very practical, hand-on way that they can interact with actual, physical and here and now or concrete aspects, which is appropriate with their concrete operational stage [2].

Following [15] 's and [6] 's views, it is equally essential to support children learning by providing support or scaffolding. This can be done by simplifying the tasks, providing the vocabulary, giving guiding questions or phrases, and so forth.

Teachers should provide adequate support to the learners, but not excessive, because children's ability to hypothesize in the new language should not be underestimated. It is also advisable to remember that we are trying to provide opportunities for these learners to find out about and use the new language. The teaching and learning process should be connected with everyday life, and more importantly, should be fun. Children have a short attention span so teachers should be ready with a rich variety of learning activities. Language teachers also have roles as mentors – who must support and scaffold the learning, and as modelers – who must provide good examples of the language in use. As a good model, a teacher should make sure that she/he uses the correct forms of language and pronunciation, because children imitate their teachers with deadly accuracy. Providing incorrect model will lead children to fossilize the error until they are adults.

In the same way, [2] supports that very young learners create their own learning engaging with their environment and they are active in their learning process by exploring immediate settings. According to [14], children construct knowledge through social interaction. Within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), children acquire knowledge through interaction with other people. Working within ZPD helps children reach their optimum capacity to solve problems with assistance. Children learn effectively through scaffolding with the help or guidance of an adult or more proficient peer. [6] It is not only the repetition of sounds they receive, instead, they develop rules and prove their assumptions to figure out for themselves. They need to involve in hands-on experiences for effective learning. As young learners have a lot of energy but minimum concentration, it is better to engage them in physical activities within concrete environment. Immediate world around them always prevails and it is their hands and eyes and ears that they use to understand this world. Furthermore, if children create their own visuals and realia, they will probably be engaged and interested in the activities and take more responsibility for the materials [16].

When to start? Most of my informants ensured that the teaching of English should occur at the first year of primary school, some proposed the third year, others the 7<sup>th</sup> year. But referring to the theory *The earlier the better*, one would support the teaching of English starts at the first year of Primary Schools. Indeed, literature on second language acquisition suggests that acquisition is possible in the 0 – 12 age range. [2]; [5]; [17]

It is the teacher's responsibility to use the best approach possible and the best materials available to foster the motivation that young learners bring to class. They bring not only their motivation to learn, but also their willingness to participate in class activities. Their energy is a further asset that teachers should capitalize on. Children are willing to volunteer as they enjoy using the language to act out roles, to sing songs, to recite, to play games, and so on. They are ready to use the target language in dialogues, games, role plays, storytelling and other situations presented in class without being ashamed. Using the language this way helps fixing the roots of the language. It is the teacher's responsibility to make the best of this potential to make children grow personally as personal growth at this stage is more important than just learning a foreign language.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This article has essentially concerned *Challenges Facing the Teaching of English in Bunia Primary School*. It considered both benefits and constraints of introducing the English language as a compulsory subject to primary education. The study opened with an introduction followed by the section of research methodology. The coming section presented the results of the research, which was finally discussed in the last section. A conclusion put an end to the elaboration of the article.

The study aimed at establishing the challenges affecting the introduction of English Language Teaching in Bunia Primary schools.

To reach the objective, the study was conducted using descriptive design. For data collection, the main concern was survey method where a questionnaire was addressed to teachers. Besides, documentary technique was found relevant for deskwork. Data were coded and analyzed using the descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, then data were presented using frequency tables, bar graphs, and pie charts.

The hypotheses have been attested, therefore the results have demonstrated that there is no language content for English in primary schools. Each teacher creates himself the materials to teach. Teachers of English in primary schools are not qualified. They teach without appropriate methodologies. Findings finally has supported that younger children are intrinsically better language learners, and become more proficient quickly.

Regarding the above results I suggest the followings:

- Elaboration of curriculum or textbooks for primary school;
- Training of teachers for ELT in primary school;
- Sensitization of the school stakeholders about the starting of English Language Teaching at Early age

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## APPENDIX

## QUESTIONNAIRE: TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

**I. According to you, why is English introduced in Primary School?**

1. Proximity with English Speaking Schools
2. Getting more pupils
3. develop pupils' ability in ELT
4. Other possibilities

**II. What is the first language of your pupils?**

1. Swahili
2. Lingala
3. French
4. Swahili and Lingala
5. Other possibilities

**III. Do you have a copy of the national program?**

1. Yes
2. No

**IV. What textbook do you use?**

1. *English for Africa*
2. *Go for English*
3. *Britain I*
4. *Sounds to Read (level 1,2,3)*
5. I create my material myself.

**V. What methodological approach (es) do you use?**

1. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)
2. Total Physical Response (TPR)
3. Both CLT and TPR
4. Traditional method
5. I teach without any specific method.

**VI. How do you rate the interest of your pupils for English?**

1. Excellent
2. Good
3. Satisfactory
4. unsatisfactory

**VII. According to you what should be the profile of a good Teacher of English?**

1. A graduate teacher
2. A specifically trained teacher
3. A generally trained teacher
4. Other possibilities

**VIII. What difficulties do you face in the teaching of English?****IX. What do you suggest to improve the teaching of English in primary school?**