

Didactics In Public High Schools In Madagascar

Régina Liziane ZAFIARISOA and Pr. Jean Claude Omer ANDRIANARIMANANA

Abstract

To be an English language teacher, one needs several competencies and amongst these, we have decided in this article to inquire about didactics in high schools in Madagascar. Within the last decades, teaching practices have evolved. What are the English Language Teaching practices and teaching difficulties in public high schools in Madagascar? Are Malagasy teachers using teaching and learning skills related to 21st century teaching and learning skills? In this article we will discuss the state of the teaching and learning of English in public high schools in Madagascar through the analysis of the results of the questionnaires that we distributed to 63 teachers of Malagasy public high schools. We used IBM SPSS 21 software for data processing. Our goals are to be able to identify the different didactic issues related to the teaching of English in Madagascar while suggesting to introduce new skills for the teaching and learning of English in the 21st century. Amongst these skills, we have singled out 5Cs: Communicative skills, Critical thinking, Collaboration, Creativity and imagination and last but not least Culture. In our era, 21st century skills are closely linked to technology so we have also devoted some research on the latter. The work would benefit the in-service teachers and specifically the pre-service teachers of public high schools at the 'Ecole Normale Supérieure', University of Antananarivo.

Keywords: Malagasy Teachers, English Teaching, 21st Century Skills.

Introduction

A few days before her high school internship, a novice teacher is anxious about how her English class will go, and 'what if I couldn't answer my students' questions? What are the best strategies to adopt for teaching grammar... ? And what about language skills? In particular listening? Should I correct all my students' errors and how should I evaluate them? What kind of teaching aids can I use...? What are the best strategies to adopt?'. Indeed, several skills are necessary if you want to be a language teacher. In this article, we will focus on the teaching of English as a foreign language (Teaching English as a Foreign Language or TEFL) in high schools in Madagascar. As part of our research on linguistics competencies and English Language Teaching competencies, we shared questionnaires with teachers serving in public high schools in Madagascar in order to inform us of the current practices and difficulties. Our objectives are to know the didactic practices that are used in our high schools, and to discuss the difficulties that our teachers face so that our apprentice teachers can learn, adapt and above all improve their teaching skills by anticipating the challenges. The information from our questionnaire allows to adjust the content of the initial curriculum of the English teacher training department within the "Ecole Normale Supérieure of Antananarivo", a state teacher-training school.

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Methods

Our questionnaire concerns 65 school English teachers from different regions of Madagascar. To process the results, we used the IBM SPSS 21 statistical software. Indeed, in addition to the discursive analysis for a qualitative study, the processing of the data also allowed us to obtain quantitative data.

Results

Communicative Skills

Our result shows that in-service teachers still have difficulty teaching language skills or communicative skills, particularly Listening and Reading skills. Xhuvani (2015) says that teachers must set high standards for an English classroom (...). They must strive to create the necessary conditions for students to learn effectively and achieve the desired outcome. For English teaching to be successful, the four skills, Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing, must be integrated effectively. These skills should be approached in a way that help students achieve the standards you (teacher) set for them and gradually develop their communicative competence. Among the 61 teachers surveyed, 30 teachers claimed to have difficulty teaching Listening comprehension, 14 assumed to have difficulties in teaching Reading, while 12 acknowledged to have difficulty in teaching oral production and 5 found Writing as the most difficult skill to teach. In a communication situation, these four skills are linked and it is difficult to treat them separately; they are, most of the time, intertwined and integrated even if there are theories on each of them. Teaching materials and teaching resources may partly be one reason for the difficulties, but teaching strategies also play an important role. English is based on “communication”, which is one of the main axes of 21st century skills, and therefore, the four language skills are meant to be developed effectively. Through the survey, we discovered that 49.2% of the respondents do not know the concept ‘pre-while-post stages’ or ‘Before-during and after stages’ while the other 49.2% declared to have a notion of the concept. This strategy is applied when teaching language skills.

Table 1 ‘Pre-While-Post-stages’ or ‘Before-During and After’ stages

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I know this concept	31	49.2	50.0	50.0
	I do not know this concept	31	49.2	50.0	100.0
	Total	62	98.4	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.6		
Total		63	100		

Teaching Materials and Authentic Materials

Books, magazines, audio or video recordings and other teaching materials often offer a variety of activities to enable the practice of the four communicative skills, but do Malagasy teachers have these teaching materials and resources in their establishment? The opinion is mixed : half of the respondents use textbooks, and the other half do not use textbooks, 29 teachers out of 63 encourage their students to read magazines or novels. Learners are invited to really immerse in the target culture and language through authentic materials. It turns out that 62.9% of teachers know what authentic material is, while 36.5% have no idea what authentic

material is. Concerning the frequency of use, 3.2% have never used authentic materials, 15.9% have done so but rarely while 23.8% use authentic materials when they teach; 6.3% do it regularly and 9.5% use authentic materials at each session.

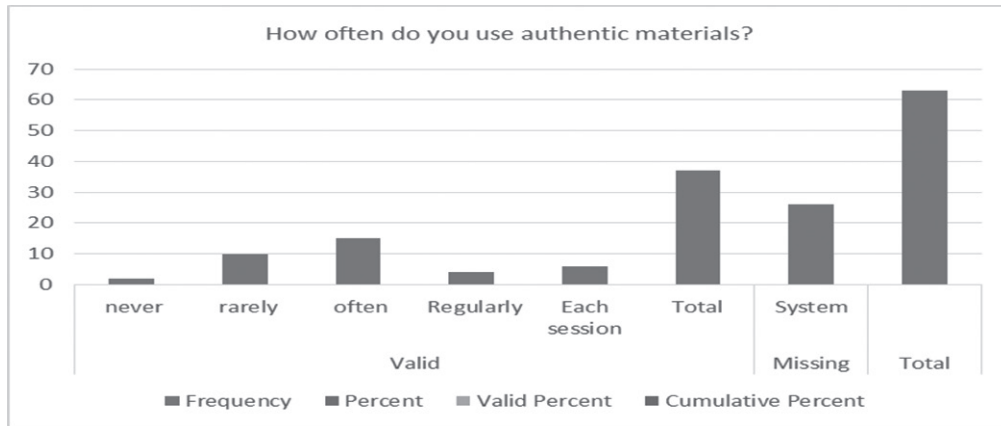


Figure 1: Authentic Materials Frequency of Use

From our observation, high school Malagasy teachers produce or mainly create their own texts and dialogues, as well as crafts, drawings and grammar tests or exercises. Teachers expressed their dissatisfaction (63.5% of respondents) regarding the infrastructure and available resources for language teaching in their establishment.

On the other hand, teachers often feel stressed and helpless in the face of the high number of learners in public high schools. Indeed, according to 77.8% of the teachers surveyed, large classes are difficult to manage.

Table 2 Teachers Having Difficulty Managing Large Classes

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I have issues managing large classes	49	77.8	77.8	77.8
	I have no issues managing large classes	14	22.2	22.2	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Critical Thinking

Students show reluctance when expressing their opinions. Critical thinking offers an opportunity to question and work on facts and opinions, observation and analysis to have better logic and problem-solving ability. It turns out that 4.8% of teachers have never tried to integrate critical thinking into their teaching, 15.9% have rarely done so, 23.8% often do so, while 14.3% include critical thinking in their activities, and 12.7% include it in every session. Only one teacher out of 63 uses problem solving in each session. The majority of teachers rarely use problem solving, for instance 11.1% have never tried this strategy while 15.9% often do so.

Collaborative Strategy

In our result, 50.8% of respondents to our questionnaire claim to know this strategy while 46.6% of them do not know it, 3.2% have no opinion.



Figure 2: Teacher's Knowledge of the Term 'Collaborative learning'

Collaborative learning was never used by 4.8% of respondents, 15.9% rarely use it in class, while 22.2% often use this technique, while 6.3% use it regularly, and 3.2% use it at each session.

Creativity and Imagination

To help learners develop critical thinking and problem solving, and to allow everyone to express their intelligence in their singularity, creativity is a necessary ingredient in the classroom. Indeed, our result seems to confirm that creativity is not often highlighted in our classes, because only 7.9% use it in each session, 7.9 use it regularly while 15.9% often use it and that 12.7% rarely do so while 6.3% almost never resort to creativity and imagination during their English lessons.

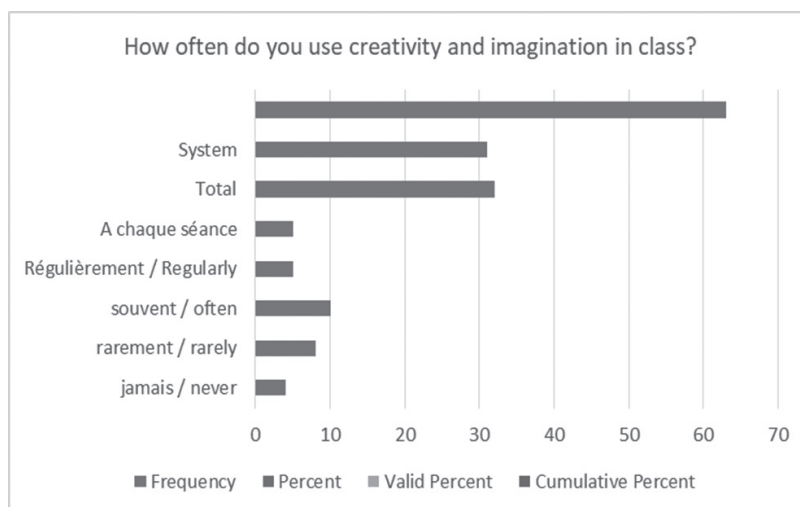


Figure 3: Creativity and Imagination

Culture

Culture is, according to the Resource Center for teaching American English ‘American English for Educators,’ culture embedded the ‘way of life of a group of people illustrated by their behavior, habits, attitudes and values’. From the questionnaire, one respondent out of 63 does not include culture in their teaching of English, while four out of 63 do so in each session. However, it is noted that 28.6% of them rarely consider culture during their course even if 11.1% often do it and 9.5% do it regularly.

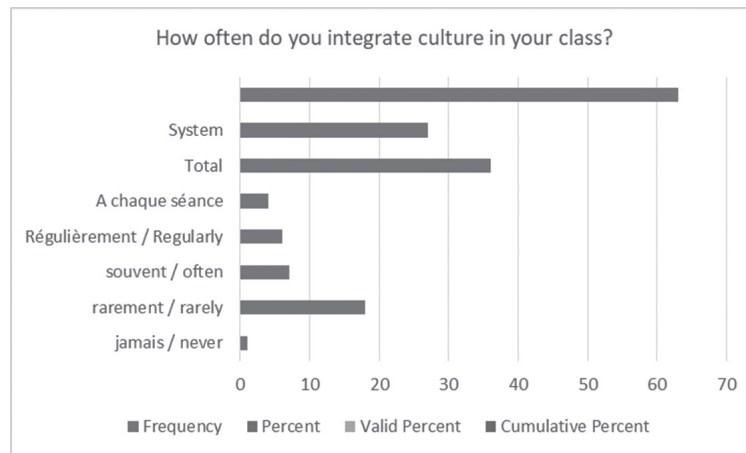


Figure 4: Integration of Culture in English Classes.

Technologies for Teaching English Language

In the era of the 21st century, the facilitation of learning through technology or “digital learning” is highlighted in education. In our opinion, in France as in England and the United States, new technologies are an integral part of the teaching of a language in the 21st century, particularly English. It is no wonder that young people are watching videos and are learning from their phones or downloading entertainment from cybers. Are Malagasy teachers taking advantages of this situation? Among respondents, 65.1% do not yet know what “digital learning” is, while 33.3% do.

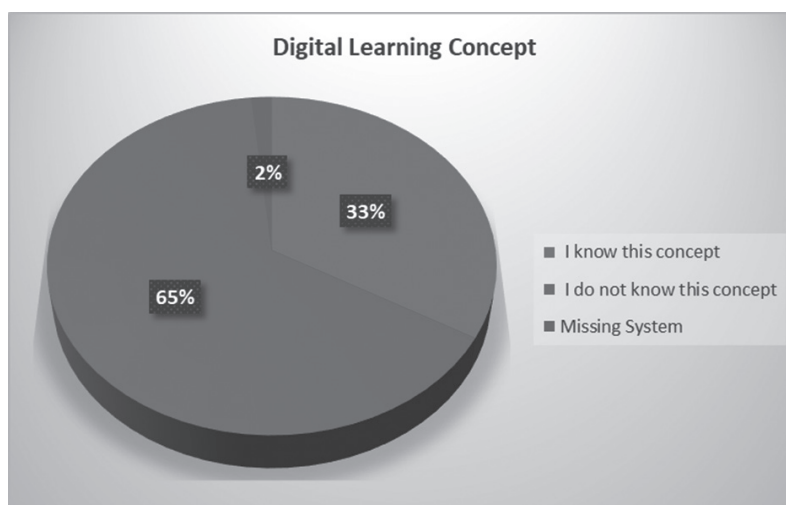


Figure 5: Do Teachers’ Know What Digital Learning Is?

Using podcasts or Websites also help with lessons or teaching resources, the survey reveals that the majority of teachers, 55.6% of the respondents never resort to language websites for their teaching, however, 42.9% of respondents visit a website to obtain resources or to acquire new techniques in order to improve the quality of teaching/learning of the English language.

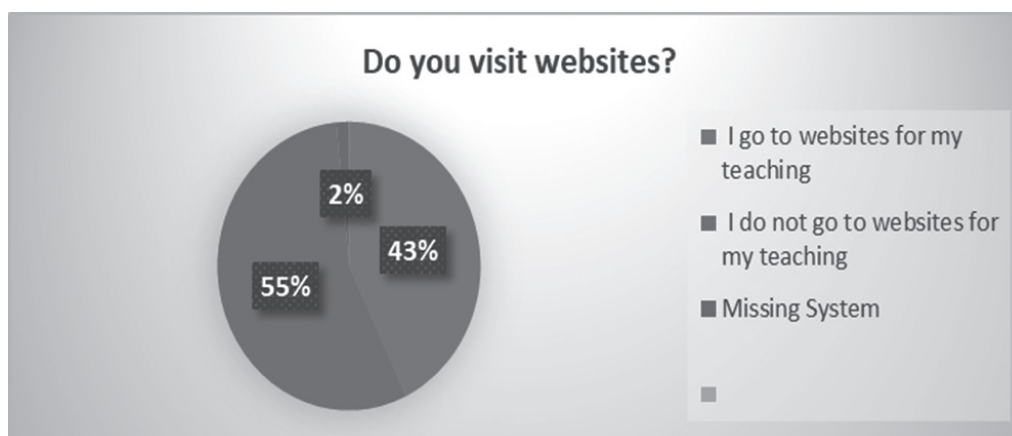


Figure 6: Do Teachers Visit Websites for their Teaching ?

Discussion

Constraints

Optimal conditions are difficult to achieve since the rooms are in poor condition and the benches and chairs are difficult to move not only because they are large but also because there are so many of them (considering that a 9m² room for example accommodates at least fifty students). According to Dhalluin (2012), numerous studies reveal that in France, as everywhere in the world, the quality of ventilation in school buildings is poor, which is all the more worrying given that the population concerned is among the most fragile. Air renewal rates are generally too low due to unsuitable, poorly sized or simply absent systems, which very often give rise to problems with indoor air quality (IAQ) and thermal comfort in particular, responsible for many health problems and the decline in student performance. Apart from the need for natural comfort, the difficulties lie on the mobility of the teacher, the limitation of choice of activities and the possibility of the learner to create freedom to approach one another to exchange and share or even collaborate as in a real-life situation is merely impossible. Respondents to our questionnaire, for example, noted that the lack of electricity penalises teachers and students, who must do regular listening activities to acquire language skills. Calling on technology seems a euphemism since, for example, even if the digital tablets have been distributed by the Ministry, there is neither electricity nor network available. During a conversation with Serge, a teacher in the depths of Vavatenina, in the Eastern part of the island, tells us that he has to travel more than 50 km to reach a nearby village in order to be able to connect and having the time and money often poses problems for him. His phone has poor reception of networks and therefore it is also difficult for him to chat with colleagues. The majority of teachers specifically consult the American government website entitled “americanenglish@state.gov” since most of them received training from the American Embassy in Madagascar in 2021-2022. To conclude, the conditions for achieving the objectives set by the Official High School Program are not met. Teachers must be helped in order for them to be effective and efficient, otherwise as Doff (1987)

says, the teaching of English has all the characteristics of teaching in difficult circumstances, as if we were facing endless periods of war or famine or natural disaster all the time, and perhaps this is how ultimately teachers need to be trained but not (in Doff's idea) to be based on Anglo-Saxon and European models which work in privileged conditions. All their hypotheses are non-compliant, once we leave the Anglo-Saxon and European contexts. This, according to him, entails reviewing the entire content of training materials, methods in general, and the very education of teachers. Our perception is that taking into account our culture and reality is a must when we teach and when we train our teachers, while knowing what is best practice in these contexts and adapting a practice or some of them because as we say so well in our language “andrianiko ny teniko ny an'ny hafa koa feheziko” (free translation: I value my language and I master those of others), we can do the same with resources we have and teaching methods.

Learner-centered Approach

The learner can learn without the teacher while the teacher cannot teach without the learner ; thus, a learner-centered approach is highly encouraged. It is up to the teacher to find the appropriate content, methods and techniques that can help learners to not only acquire knowledge but also transform knowledge into skills. Robbes (2019) understands by competence the “ability to operationalize knowledge in practice, that is to say, not to mobilize knowledge in itself but to articulate formalized knowledge, as well as other cognitive and affective resources, to be able to act and re-act in a situation. Learners needs more opportunity to practice, to show that they have learned, that they have made a mistake or simply to realize their progress. We invite teachers to have a community of practice and to participate, even more, in different events in English and involve their students in different projects because “the teacher is often seen as the centerpiece of quality teaching, the linchpin in the acquisition of students’ skills”, (Diane Cour and Nelly Rakoto Tiana, 2010) but also their motivation. In class, the “modeling” technique can be of great help to students who are not really sure of themselves. Coleman (2020) explains that “modeling is an extremely useful educational tool that should be used as often as possible. Modeling is a teaching strategy in which a teacher explicitly shows students how to complete an activity or assignment before the students begin. Modeling is also an excellent classroom management technique. He says it eliminates frustration, anxiety and confusion. It can be used with the four language skills but also with communicative grammar and pronunciation, language function... but also for classroom routines or creative activities where the teacher participates with the students. For his part, Brown (2014, p.235) reminds us that the communicative approach, known as “Communicative Language Teaching or CLT”, undoubtedly has been for three decades, the approach that offers strategies for different ages and to achieve various objectives. It gives four characteristics which are interconnected:

1. Class objectives focus on all components of classroom communication and are not limited to grammatical or linguistic competence.
2. Language techniques are designed to engage the learner in the pragmatic, authentic, and functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central goal, but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to achieve these goals.
3. Fluency and accuracy are considered complementary principles underlying communication techniques. Sometimes fluency may be more important than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.

4. In a communicative classroom, students must ultimately use language, productively and receptively, in non-rehearsed contexts.

However, it is also essential to know our students, the way they learn, we suggest that teachers do not focus only on teaching strategies but also on learning strategies because we have noted that this aspect is still poorly exploited in our Malagasy context.

Large Class Management

Like many countries in Africa, Madagascar has embarked on the policy of Education for All and has therefore increased the number of students in classrooms. Pare Cabore and Gambre-Idanynd (2014) explain that “one of the consequences of this overcrowding in classes is obviously the slowdown, or even the obstacle to the smooth running of educational activities. The concern that drives both researchers and education practitioners is to find an educational solution to this problem, because as the contemporary educator Célestin Freinet said so well, “(...) any overcrowding of classes is always a pedagogic error. Large classes often cause disciplinary problems, corrections are difficult to handle,” it is also difficult to interest or involve each student. Gambré-Idany (2012) observed in a study that for English teachers in Burkina Faso, large classes are an obstacle to communicative approach or CLT. Furthermore, “assessment in large groups would be very difficult to carry out, so they settle for a limited number of assessments and favor types of questions that are easy to correct such as multiple-choice questions (MCQ), dichotomous questions, true or false questions as well as matching questions. Open questions or those which require opinion are reduced to the strict minimum, or even avoided so as not to overload the teacher with corrections.” However, it is precisely this last category of questions that most develops the critical and analytical spirit of learners and, in turn, promotes the learning process (Shohamy, 1992). These issues have certainly some solutions. Firstly, among the most used learning strategy is Collaborative Learning. Indeed, sharing knowledge among learners promotes success and is a source of motivation. In the acquisition of skills for 21st century, researchers and educators encourage collaboration, cooperation, sharing and exchange between learners, see more at americanenglish.state.gov. Regarding assessment, learners can be very good companions if they are aware of what is being asked and why. It is also possible to draw up competency evaluation grids or rubrics with them for regular monitoring. Students can self-assess without the teacher intervening. Doff (1987) emphasises that “positive large class methodologies (...) such as peer working, and questioning techniques, (...) can all be specifically designed to be used in large classes with minimal resources and are quite different from equivalent small class methodologies.” Ur (1996) provides more precision on the need to use the advantages of large classes, as in case there are many students, they have several life experiences and different knowledge, various opinions, different forms of intelligence-which enriches teaching and learning. Over the last two years, the American English Training of trainers or AETOT project led by the American Embassy in Madagascar sensitizes teachers to use some of the strategies above. Pare Cabore and Ambre-Idany (2014) affirm that “despite (the) training, many teachers in the field still have difficulty handling large groups (...). Nowadays, the admission of volunteer teachers (without basic training in the teaching profession) into primary education classes can only make the situation worse. Let us also point out that the problem of teachers without professional qualifications is not specific only to basic education, because secondary education has always had its “auxiliary” teachers (without specific training in the subject) that the State, faced to the lack of teachers in secondary education, recruits and sends directly to

middle and high schools without prior educational training. Considering the profile of these teachers, it is necessary to provide them with know-how to better manage large groups.”

21st Century Teaching Skills

In the 21st century, lifestyles, jobs and careers have evolved. The teacher must manage and adapt to all these changes and integrate new skills into students so that later they can meet the needs of the working world and also be efficient economic actors. Teaching has reached a turning point, where the question is not to overwhelm the student with a quantity of information that will not be useful to them later, but to concentrate on them, their knowledge, know how, in order for them to act as a “whole”. They are required to use critical thinking to solve problems, create and innovate through good communication skills and have the ability to collaborate, working as a team to find practical solutions to problems. As Christian Puren (2001) explains, the term “new” does not mean to say that all other approaches and strategies should be forgotten or replaced but rather added to what exist. Our research leads to the conclusion that these strategies, which are the pillars of the skills required for the 21st century, are not yet mastered in our establishments. The reason is simple, either the teacher does not know these strategies, hence the need to integrate their techniques into teacher training or teachers know them but are not convinced of their effectiveness.

Integrating New Technologies

As trainings about Chat GPT, Artificial Intelligence and online teaching and learning are now the trends, for most Malagasy teachers, access to internet, the use of CDs and other audio-visual materials, podcasts and websites, computer softwares are still arduous. More trainings on how to integrate technologies and the importance of integrating technologies in English Language teaching are now a challenge for Malagasy Teacher Trainers and that is one of the unit or module that must be included in the curriculum for English Language Teacher-Training Schools in Madagascar.

Conclusion

Malagasy teachers still use traditional approaches and strategies. Teaching and learning skills related to the 21st century skills are not well-exploited and even not known. Herrel and Jordan (2020, 2016, 2012, p. 9) quote Cummins (2000) who highlights the power of academic language in promoting the success of English learners, in school and in life. Pre-service English language teachers must be aware of these issues in order to be able to effectively tackle their task as English language teachers. To be efficient and effective, teachers should learn to be resilient when teaching, as Vilchez and Sucari (2021) explain, teacher resilience is understood as the capacity, process, and management of positive qualities and abilities that encompass the emotional, motivational, and social dimensions of the teacher.

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