# Excellence in the Foreign Language Classroom: Escapades of a junior high school French teacher

Anthony Akwesi Owusu, Principal Research Assistant,
College of Education Studies, DASSE, University of Cape Coast, Ghana

anthony.owusu@ucc.edu.gh

## Abstract

Teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in any Anglophone country such as Ghana is an extremely difficult task to undertake both on the part of the teacher and the student. This is evidenced in the general low performance of students in the subject at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) level in both public and private schools over the years. This case study paper follows, examines, and documents evidence (in a day) of an exemplary French teacher, Pangloss who, by dint of hard work, has brought tremendous success to his students. This article critically analyzes the difference and excellence he brings unto the teaching and learning of French even as a part-time teacher in a public Junior High School (JHS) in the Muzumba community within the Cape Zone Metropolis. The paper's preoccupation is to typically observe the characteristics of this individual foreign language teacher with a view to probing deeply and analyzing intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute his professional demeanor, the processes he employs in teaching, and the opportunities he creates for student learning purposely to establish some insights on how teaching and learning of French could be made better to the wider French teacher population in Ghana.

**Keywords:** teaching and learning, escapades, foreign language, Muzumba, Pangloss

## Introduction

Ghana is bounded by her French-speaking neighbors: Burkina Faso to the North, Togo to the South and Ivory Coast to the West. With this situation, it has become even more important for every Ghanaian to be literate in the language so as to be able to communicate with people from their neighboring countries. With this premise, it becomes very vital for French to be taught in Ghana as a foreign language. Preparing students for the 21st century cannot be accomplished without a sustaining emphasis on French as a foreign language. Literacy in French on only provides job opportunities internally but it also opens even wider doors for sub-regional integration which is key to national development. Students use French to communicate their thoughts to their neighbors and make connections in new and innovative ways in a way that inures to their benefit. Ghana's education has gone through many reforms dating back to colonial times to date. All these reforms aim at bringing constant improvements in its availability and relevance of education to the citizenry.

The Ministry of Education, with support from the French Embassy, has been promoting and supporting the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in the country since the 1980s. For instance, the White Paper on Report of the Education Reform Review Committee (Oct 2004) clearly stated the Government of Ghana's intention to ensure that French became a compulsory subject at the Senior High School (SHS) level and that efforts be made to ensure that the Junior High School (JHS) curriculum prepares students to meet this benchmark. The White Paper on the Education Reform Review Committee's findings which became more or less the policy framework on the teaching of French stated among other things that:

*It's also well established that an early and routine acquaintance with second, third and fourth language confers on children great advantages in their life-long proficiency in those languages… the facts of geography impose on Ghana a necessity to promote among wide segments of the commercial and financial sector's workforce a proficiency in the French language; Being an English-speaking country is also a source of considerable competitive advantage in international economic and political relations which Ghana needs to build upon. Therefore, government has in the past encouraged a policy of early introduction to English and French, ... in a balanced way with the primary use of mother tongues in KG and Primary school and then with increasing intensity in high school* (GoG, 2004, p. 29).

It was also a government decision to see that apart from assuring primary tongue proficiency in English by the end of Primary school, the study of French to working standard - will also become compulsory in second cycle education and the JHS curriculum accordingly to work up to that policy (GoG, 2004). This meant that JHS should offer French and lay the foundation for students to be able to participate in French as a compulsory subject at SHS level. Again, GoG White Paper on the Anamuah Mensah Committee Report of the Education Reform outlined initiatives to designate the teacher training colleges (TTCs) as Colleges of Education (COEs). The GoG White Paper indicated its commitment to build teachers' capacity to teach French particularly at teacher training college level. Special attention was also to be given to several subjects including French… at TTC level (GoG, 2004). The 2002 President's Committee report emphasized the need to recruit French teachers from neighboring countries through exchange programmes, and make use of retired professors and other qualified teachers to assist in the teaching of French to solve the shortage of French teachers.

Again, as a measure to promote teaching of French, the Ministry, with support from the French Embassy set up ten Regional Centers for the teaching and learning of French (CREFs) to provide in-service training for French teachers as well as providing French language resources for both teachers and students of French. The centers are responsible for monitoring and promoting the study of French. In order to provide the requisite quality of language teachers, the Embassy supports French students learning at higher education levels either abroad or within the country.

According to Amonoo (1988, as cited by Kuupole, 2012), it is on record that the teaching and learning of French started in 1879 and was taught sporadically at Mfantsipim School and Adisadel College in Cape Coast, when the then colonial school authorities deemed it fit to introduce the subject as a second foreign language. It eventually spread to other schools in Ghana. The decision to teach French, it must be noted, was informed by the geographical location of Ghana: it is surrounded by three French speaking countries (Togo, Burkina Faso & Côte d'Ivoire). Consequently, the government of Ghana with French government's support has, over the years, put in place interventionist measures to salvage the teaching and learning of French. Some of these measures include the creation of departments of French at Mount Mary, Bagabaga and Wesley Colleges of Education apart from those at the Universities, with the view of augmenting the number of trained teachers of French for the basic schools.

Again, from 1970-1995, the government of Ghana with generous support from the French government saw the urgent need to establish in each of the ten (10) regions, Regional Centers for the Teaching of French (CREF). The objective for the creation of these centers was to boost the

teaching and learning of French through in-service-programmes and workshops. Hence, the National Coordination Office of CREF (set-up in 1997), in conjunction with the Ghana Association of French Teachers (GAFT), organizes all the continuous training for teachers in order to upgrade their knowledge in the content and methodologies and sharpen their skills in the teaching and learning of French in Ghana. In 2006, a resource and documentation Centre (Francozone) was established in Accra, again with massive support from the French government, to enhance research into various areas of French language teaching and learning. Ghana's interest in teaching and learning the French language and culture culminated in her attaining membership status of the prestigious International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF) in 2006, under the leadership of President John Agyekum Kuffour. As a member of the 56-member organization, it implied that Ghana accepts to adhere to democratic values, cultural diversity through co-operation and the use of the French language, and can have easy access to some special priority research and development grants/funds, which, as a non-member, she would not enjoy. As a member, Ghana also benefited from OIF's assistance in areas to strengthen the French language skills for Ghanaian diplomats and public officers with international responsibilities and engagements, to increase the number of teachers of French at the second and tertiary levels, and to develop partnership with the private sector for the teaching of the language in private companies and associations.

Part of these reforms focused on the revisions in the curriculum and syllabus at all levels of pre-tertiary education. One key area prominent to this policy initiative was language and literacy at the lower primary level. The 2002 President's Committee report recommended that French be introduced at the primary school level as an optional subject, and that extension into all schools should be based on the availability of teachers. The report also emphasized the need to introduce French into all Colleges of Education to equip newly trained teachers to teach French in basic schools. Despite the prominence of French language teaching and learning in key policy documents, much less emphasis has been placed in the strategic and operational documents of the MoE/Ghana Education Service (GES).

A cursory look at all educational reforms in Ghana from Governor Gordon Gugisberg's 1925 Education Ordinance through Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's 1951 Accelerated Development Plan of Education, Kwampong Review Committee of 1966, Dzobo Review Committee of 1974 that proposed the JSS concept, modified by Evans Anfom Committee in 1986 and implemented in 1987, up to the Anamuah-Mensah Review Committee of 2002, show that the educational policies never provided any clear focus regarding the teaching and learning of French (Kuupole, 2012). In fact, his observation was that the educational policies are so often ambitiously stated that they tend to fluctuate. This phenomenon was what Bambose (1991) long ago referred to as inconsistencies between the policies and practice on the ground. This, points to the fact that policy makers create some safety valves in the policies so as to exonerate themselves from any consequences emanating from policy failures.

It is, however, necessary to emphasize that the Anamuah-Mensah Review Committee (2002) was perhaps the only one that clearly stated Ghana government's intention to tackle the issue of French language teaching with all the seriousness it deserves at all the levels of our educational system as aspects of the report captured this intent as:

*As soon as enough teachers can be trained, French will be added to the list of compulsory subjects. .....facts of geography impose on Ghana a necessity to promote among wide segments of the commercial and financial sectors' work forces a basic proficiency in the French language. It is the decision of Government that apart from assuring primary-tongue proficiency in English by the end of primary school, the study of French to work – a-day standard will also become compulsory in second cycle education, and the Junior High curriculum should accordingly work up to that policy.* (p.11 – 16)

## Problem

Governmental effort to give priority attention to the teaching and learning of French has not been satisfactory. Perhaps, this is why teaching and learning of French do not feature prominently in the Education Strategic Plan (ESP), a key policy document which prioritizes educational needs of Ghana and sets targets for their achievement in the next 10 years. In fact, the policy document, the ESP (2010-2020) made no mention of any clear-cut strategy for promoting the teaching and learning of French (GoG, 2010). Again, an in-depth analytical assessment of the ESP reports for the last three years has revealed some problems in the teaching and learning in Ghana such as lack of instructional supervision in schools, inadequate teaching learning resources, poor learning environments, and poor managerial practices among others. These have given rise to poor performance of students at the BECE. With respect to French, this phenomenon has not only negatively affected students' performance at the BECE but it has also rendered them incapable of communicating in basic French. Some public commentators have blamed the failure to the increasing ineptitude of French teachers not forgetting the inadequate teaching and learning materials which affect the quality of teaching in schools (Kuupole, 2012). In fact, general interest of students in the French has in addition, been inexplicably waning. Some pundits have attributed failure of JHS students to the shortage of French teachers. In some cases too, head teachers wrongly reassign French-trained teachers to teach other subjects than French and this has also exacerbated the situation.

Despite all these problems, it would be justifiably rewarding to follow the escapades of a young French teacher, Pangloss, who has made a mark in his school with teaching excellence of French. His students are able to express themselves in the language, he has managed to sustain students' interest in studying French and above all, performance of students at the BECE has been par excellence for the past four consecutive academic running years. The questions one is likely to ask therefore are: '*How does this teacher go about teaching French? What activities and interactions characterize his classrooms? What is the content and feedback machinery he puts in place to guarantee an enabling environment for his students?* And *what are the reactions of his students towards his teaching techniques?*' Answers to these questions are the interest of this paper to delve into these issues and perchance help chart a new course for French teachers desirous of excelling in their teaching. Data on all these issues were addressed observing him a day in line of duty in his Muzumba school.

## Theoretical Foundation

Contemporary teaching and learning underscore co-construction of knowledge. Educators have long been interested in how students learn from students as well as from teachers. Nearly 30 years ago, Schwab (1976) argued for a 'community of learners.' Several models for teaching and

learning presume that teaching is shared work between students and teachers (teachers still have responsibility for making sure that students learn). Cooperative learning, team learning, and reciprocal teaching are but a few examples of the many ways classroom work can be distributed. Cooperative learning, broadly defined as an educational opportunity in which students learn from one another, has taken numerous forms (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne 2000). With roots in theories of social interdependence, collaborative learning has been very successful when implemented well. Slavin (1990) argues that two hallmarks of high-quality cooperative learning are positive interdependence and individual accountability. Team learning is closely related to cooperative learning. Perhaps the most critical shift I think in education in the past years has been a move away from a conception of learner as sponge toward an image of 'learner' as active constructor of meaning. Plato and Socrates (not to mention Dewey) reminded us long ago that learners were not empty vessels, blank slates, or passive observers; much of American schooling has been based on this premise. Teachers have talked; students have been directed to listen (Cuban, 1993; Block & Cameron, 2002). The assumption has been that if teachers speak clearly and students are motivated, learning will occur. If students do not learn, the logic goes, it is because they are not paying attention or they do not care. These ideas were grounded in a theory of learning that focused on behavior. One behavior leads to another, behavioral-learning theorists argued, and so if teachers act in a certain way, students will likewise act in a certain way.

Central to behaviorism was the idea of conditioning - that is, training the individual to respond to stimuli. The mind was a 'black box' of little concern. But behavioral theorists had to make way for the cognitive learning theory, which involved putting the mind back into the learning equation (Skehan, 1998). As Lesh and Lamon (1992) put it, behavioral psychology based on factual and procedural rules has given way to cognitive psychology based on models for making sense of real life experiences (Skehan, 1998). In this shift, I think several fields of learning theory emerged. Neuroscientists, for example, learned that the brain actively seeks new stimuli in the environment.

Reciprocal teaching, another form of teaching as shared work, is a technique used to develop comprehension of text in which teacher and students take turns leading a dialogue concerning sections of a text. Students are taught to use four strategies in working through the text: predicting, questioning, summarizing, and clarifying misleading or complex portions of the text (Brown & Palincsar, 1989). Designed to improve children's reading comprehension, modifications of reciprocal teaching have been used to teach poor decoders, second-language learners, and nonreaders, including adaptations that involved other pedagogies, such as jigsaw (Brown & Campione, 1996). Reciprocal teaching draws directly on sociocultural and activity theories of learning that emphasize the critical role of authentic participation in meaningful, purposeful activities.

It is important to note here that suggesting a re-conceptualization of teaching as including more listening to students, sharing of work, and asking of probing questions does not mean telling teachers to stop talking or holding the classroom's center stage (Skehan, 1998). Some overzealous reformers urge teachers to change their practice radically, implying that lectures and direct instruction are 'bad.' The effectiveness of inquiring into students' thinking versus direct instruction is an empirical question yet to be thoroughly researched. Most good teachers presume that they need to use a broad array of very different instructional strategies depending on whom

and what they are trying to teach, as well as when and where. The reformist ideas being discussed propose integrating more inquiry about students' thought into teachers' practices, as well as strategically deciding when teaching ought to be shared among teachers and their students. Again, my argument is one of shifting emphasis, not wholesale rejection or acceptance of one ideology or methodology.

## Method

The single case study design was adopted in this study to collect and analyze data on Pangloss, a French teacher in the Muzumba JHS. I needed to use this design to be able to have an in-depth thought regarding the rudiments of teaching and learning and this explains the rationale for the use of this blueprint (Cohen, Manion, & Keith, 2007). Also, I think the method could afford me the opportunity to investigate the phenomenon of teaching in a natural setting and hence its use, given also that the phenomenon is predefined (Cohen et al., 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001).

### Research Site

Muzumba is a neighborhood of Cape Zone metropolis located in the central region of Ghana. It is situated on a mountainous area, and predominantly grassland giving it a very beautiful landscape. It is inhabited by so-called elites most of whom are government workers housed in estate apartments. There are however, few residents who live in this area with some level of difficulty: clearly who seem to fight to make ends meet. Though the elites form the majority, there are still pockets of people in the minority who, by their lifestyle, typify the down trodden in society. In this area is also situated the CREF which serves all pre-tertiary institutions in the region as far as teaching and learning of French are concerned. Parents of students are either government workers, or self-employed people. All JHSs, especially the ones which offer French compete to make full use of the facility (CREF) provided by the French government to promote teaching and learning of French. Schools patronize the facility by going there during French lessons to use the center. French teachers also go there to update their knowledge and make use of the huge furnished library. With the encouragement of the regional coordinator of the center, schools have been urged to whip up interest in students so that they can put the facility to very good use. Generally, public JHSs in Muzumba lack the necessary teaching resources that make for effective teaching even though through Parent Teacher Association (PTA) initiatives, some schools in this community such as Muzumba SOCA JHS have a number of but not adequate physical infrastructure which aid teaching and learning. Parents here are very responsible ones who live in the Muzumba community. Muzumba SOCA JHS is one of the few, if not the only school in the metropolis which has performed creditably in French at the BECE four years passing (from 2010). Teachers in Muzumba, like those in other schools do subject teaching where they made to rotate teaching in all classes depending on the dictates of the school's time-table.

### Participants

This teacher was a colleague at the Mount Mary Training College, then a course mate at the University for our Undergraduate Program. I have also worked professionally close with him especially during regional CREF workshops which are organized annually for French teachers.

At such workshops, we almost always found ourselves working and presenting works in the same groups anytime we were assigned to do a presentation. He is a French-trained professional teacher with a wealth of teaching skills. He lives in the Muzumba community as teacher and has served in his current school for the past seven years though 15 years as a teacher. This young teacher has considerably vast wealth of teaching experience, speaks French very fluently. He had learnt the language in Ghana though he had, during school, also been a beneficiary of government scholarship for a year abroad program that affords students the opportunity to 'taste' the language in a native context: Village du Benin in Togo.

In his school Muzumba SOCA JHS, he is known to work hard. He is the only French man taking charge of about six classes (from JHS 1 -3) and doing 42 periods on the average per week. Students are put into streams 'A' and 'B' with an average class population of 40 students. Prior to his transfer to the school, the students '*never liked*' French. In fact, some bold students actually declared without fear that they detested the subject. By dent of hard work, the situation has changed for the better. He teaches in a public school where all students are required to study French. The school environment is conducive for learning while difficult to say for French. Students in this school have respect for authority and discipline is their trademark. The school authority has devised schemes to however tame students with dubious character peculiarities. Ethos of the school is one that promotes teaching and learning and mutual respect for staff and students alike. Parents are responsible here in that they provide the school needs of their children. In all these, the study sought the reaction of students towards teaching of French in the school.

## Data Collection and Analysis

I personally went to the school to collect data after I have gone through the necessary procedures allowable for the conduct of any research. In order not breach ethical regulations regarding this research, I had to negotiate access to the setting. I therefore had to rely on the long standing friendship between me and Pangloss to facilitate the process. I wrote a formal letter to the headmistress on the 15th of May 2015, three days after they had resumed for the third term requesting her to allow me collect data just on a day in the school as research ethics require (Cohen et al., 2007). The letter did not stipulate any date for the observation and so it was for the head to give a fitting date for the observation. In three days' time, I called her and by consensus, we both agreed on the 21st of May, 2015, a Thursday. By this time, I had already spoken to my colleague about the exercise. I acted as participant-observer for the one-day-in-school-observation and put down my observations through detailed field notes on the predetermined phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2007; Miles, & Huberman, 1994; O'Leary, 2014). Also, I used structured interviews to document views of some students with regard to teaching and learning of French.

To facilitate analysis of data, thematic transcriptions of the field notes and pattern matching were made to describe and comprehend issues about teaching and learning of French in the school. The events in which the teacher taught French were selected and analyzed in relation to how the teaching process started, the elements of the teaching process including the lessons' duration, whether the teacher took learners' needs into consideration, and the general learning climate. Again, the analysis highlighted activities of the teacher in the teaching process, the types of interactions which were observed, the kind of materials used for teaching reinforcement

techniques of the teacher, how he corrected error, and the general student participation in the lesson discussions.

The rest touched on how the teacher illustrate their teaching, the non-verbal communication used in the classroom, the kind of feedback the teacher gave to his pupils, and how the teacher acknowledged individual needs of his learners. The teaching and learning events that were observed were analyzed in light of whether they allow for maximized learning and in juxtaposition to the context of teaching French. Observed events during the teaching and learning experience were coded, labeled and counted across the predetermined domains of teaching (O'Leary, 2014). Finally, I looked at how students faired in the French classroom, how they interacted with the teacher and how they actively immersed themselves in the French class. Inspired by the thoughts of Miles and Huberman, (1994), O'Leary (2014) and Cohen et al., (2007), I triangulated the interview data with the actual observation data to help unearth the various dynamics at play during teaching and learning of French in an Anglophone milieu.

## Context: Teaching and Learning in Ghana

The vision and mission of the MoE is to provide relevant education to all Ghanaians at all levels to enable them to acquire skills that will assist them to develop their potential to be productive, to facilitate poverty reduction and to promote socio-economic growth and national development and to formulate and implement policies to accelerate development capacity of its citizens. In a manner that guarantees good health, poverty reduction, national integration and international recognition. The Ghana Education Service (GES), established as part of the Public Service of Ghana in 1974 by NRCD 247 and subsequently amended by NRCD 252, 357 and SMCD 63 which is an umbrella body of the MoE also shares its vision and mission that perfectly dovetails into the broad vision of the Ministry of Education. Specifically, it desires to create an enabling environment in all educational institutions and management positions that sustain effective teaching and learning in school and promote management efficiency within the Service. Since the GES is also charged with the responsibility of implementing pre-tertiary education policies of government, it works to ensure that all Ghanaian children of school-going age are provided with quality formal education and training. Among the objectives of the policy framework governing the JHS concept is to help graduates discover their aptitudes and potentials and induce desire for self-improvement. From the above objectives, public basic school is supposed to prepare pupils for life and not merely as a preparatory stage for secondary education, though not excluding that aim also.

It is traditionally accepted that for any effective teaching, the teacher should have both the content knowledge and the pedagogy. Teachers' knowledge about the subject matter to be learned or taught and that of content to be covered in the syllabus are very important and when applied well will promote effective teaching and learning (Kuupole, 2012; Willis & Willis, 1996).A teacher with deep pedagogical knowledge understands how students construct knowledge and acquire skills and how they develop habits of mind and positive dispositions toward learning. As such, pedagogical knowledge requires an understanding of cognitive, social, and developmental theories of learning and how they apply to students in the classroom. A thorough grounding in college-level subject matter and professional competence in professional practice are necessary for good teaching. Recent scholars have emphasized that meaningful

learning is a product not of activity *per se*, but of *sense-making discourse* aimed at developing conceptual understanding and the links between theory and observable phenomena (Mortimer & Scott, 2003). Thus, learning is not accomplished through teacher's approach to teaching and learning but rather how the teacher will integrate curriculum content to teacher's own professional content knowledge to diverse interests and abilities of learners (Mortimer & Scott, 2003). The teacher is required to blend both the nature and the scope of the subject to achieve its purpose, goals and objectives.

In the process of administering education, there is a clause which deals with management issues in the supply chain. Management in this sense is defined as those responsible for ensuring that resources are judiciously used to achieve their objectives, administration may refer to designs of rules, procedures, practices and system for effectively implementing policies and programs of the organization. At the public level, the head teacher is both the manager and administrator who are supposed to report happenings in the schools to their superiors at the district education offices. However, the basic education system is plagued with problems like poor supervisions of heads, inadequate preparations of heads and teachers and the lack of appropriate incentives for heads and teachers which is inadvertently affecting teaching (Willis & Willis, 1996). These are having adverse effects on teaching quality in schools today. The school environment including management of personnel, provision of teaching and learning materials, in private schools are to be provided public basic schools to ensure effective teaching and learning. Successive governments since independence pretend to fully fund public schools where parents do not pay full fees therefore denying the schools of resources needed to discharge their duties.

## Findings and Discussion

### Observations: *Physical Environment*

On the 21st of May, 2015, a Thursday I went to the school to collect my data. I got to the school at about 7:13 am before most of the students and teachers arrived. At about 7:45 am, my 'mentor', Pangloss arrived. He quickly handed a copy of his teaching time table for the day (as I had requested) and I realized that he had to teach for four hours (four periods) that day. He had to teach from Form 2A between 8:15 and 9:25 am. He quickly ushered me into the classroom. There, I realized that the classroom was very conducive for teaching and learning in sense that it was spacious enough with the requisite furniture for each student. However, the class was an extremely large one with about 45 students. The students were arranged according to how their names, I was told, appeared in the attendance register and so the boys were mixed with the girls. The teacher's desk was placed in front of left hand corner of the class. The classroom bore drawings on flashcards of science laboratory equipment and other site-attracting educational flash posters which easily suggest to any stranger that they were in a classroom. The class had a whiteboard, a duster and a marker. I could also see a cupboard in which students submit their assignments and other exercise books. From these, it is clear that the classroom environment was good for learning.

### Teaching and Learning

No sooner had the teacher and I entered the class than the students stood up to greet us, '*Bonjour, monsieur*'. There and then he quickly had to correct them by repeating the correct thing (since we were more than one teacher). '*Bonjour, messieurs*'. *Comment allez-vous?* Then, they

responded, '*nous allons bien merci et vous?*' '*Asseyez-vous*', he instructed them to sit down. He started the teaching process by '*mise en train*' which is an introductory activity that prepares students' minds for a language class. He started by asking questions to recap the previous lesson after which he linked it with the relevant previous knowledge (*la connaissance supposée acquise*). He introduced the lesson on the topic, '*savoir exprimer ses goûts et ses préférences*' translated being able to express one's taste and preferences in French). It was the students themselves who, through oral questions and answers brought out the topic of the day. However, the teacher did not share objectives of the lesson with students. The lesson consisted of an introduction, actual lesson evaluation of the lesson. Pangloss made very good use of questioning techniques that were interspersed with appropriate reinforcement techniques. He interacts with the students, establishes what the syllabus calls the '*actes de paroles*' on the board. Figure 1 illustrates a teaching session at Muzumba SOCA JHS.
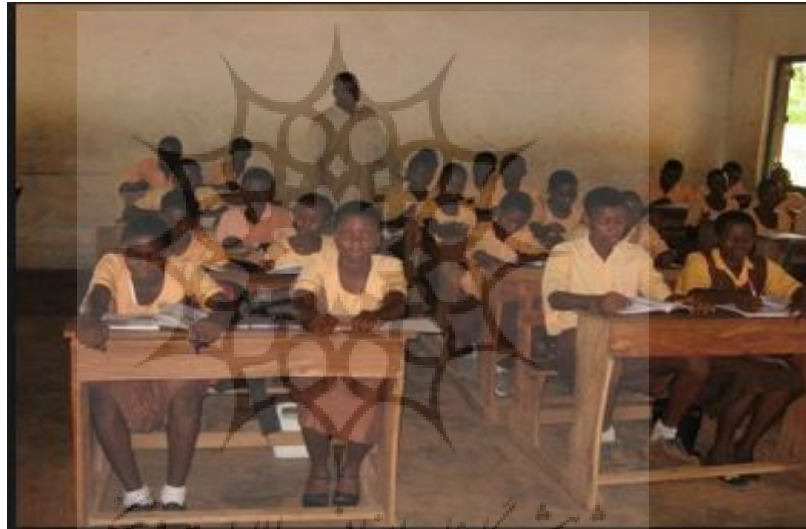


**Figure 1**: A Teaching and Learning Session at Muzumba SOCA JHS

**Activities and Interactions**

After establishing the linguistic structures on the board, he assists students to use the linguistic formations, first between him and the students (Teacher –student interaction) and then helps them to engage themselves in conversations (student – student). The teaching atmosphere was so relaxed that it allowed students to easily ask questions for clarification. Since I took and read his lesson note, I observed that every process of the teaching period was allocated time and so this minimized tendency for digressions. The interaction throughout the period was symbiotic and not lopsided. The '*mise en train*' was allocated five (5) minutes, the introduction and its activities took 10 minutes, and the lesson itself was allocated 40 minutes whereas 15 minutes was reserved for the closure. I observed that Pangloss was particular about the individual needs of all his students though constraints of time and space could not allow him to address all their needs. The teacher used the students themselves to meet the needs of their colleagues. For instance if a construction was wrong, the teacher made other students who have mastered these constructions to help clarify all nuances. A case in point was when a student wrongly said, '*je préfère écoute la radio mais je n'aime pas du tout nage*'. The teacher quickly made use of another student to

correct the sentence orally after which he asked the one who had it wrong to write the correct sentence on the whiteboard. The student was able to write it: *je préfère écouter la radio mais je n'aime pas du tout nager'* (I prefer listening to radio but I do not like swimming at all). All the students actively participated in the lesson and therefore the lesson was very lively. Occasionally, I also asked questions just to measure the depth of students' understanding. And in these instances, Pangloss expertly throws back such questions to the class and only makes final comments on the matter after students' thoughts on it have been exhausted. The teacher used *jeu de role,* (role play), discussion, *les chansonnettes* (songs) and question and answer techniques for drumming home salient points.

Pangloss used basically the textbook, '*A New Practical French Course Book 2*' and did not make use of any other teaching materials. After the lesson I asked him why and he explained that the book had a lot of pictures and therefore there was no need to bring other teaching materials to support the teaching process. It was also observed that the teacher used the cane to point on the board but did not use it on the students.

## Content, Feedback Facilitating Learning

The teacher mostly used examples to illustrate teaching and adapting to the level of the students. He made use also of gesticulations (non-verbal communication) techniques to explicate concepts. He asked oral questions to ascertain the grasp of concepts too. In the process, Pangloss gave feedback in the form of either positive or negative reinforcements. He also moved around the class to have 'personal touch' with almost every student. He used reinforcement words such as, *Applaudissez-le/la/les, bien, très bien,* among others. As I have indicated earlier, errors in responses of students were corrected using the students. I observed also that the teacher discouraged tendency of students to laugh at their friends when they give wrong answers or mispronounce words/phrases. He made good use of oral questions as a way of formatively assessing students and finding out about their progress in the teaching process. Finally, a written exercise was given to students to do in their class exercise books and a take-home assignment was also given. After, the class, the exercise books were sent to the staff room, marked and sent back to students. When I asked why this was so, Pangloss explained that it was the only way of providing them immediate feedback on the lesson.

During their break time, I randomly called two students from Form 2A: a boy and a girl to seek their views about the study of French. The rationale for this was just to ensure gender balance in the views of students. Each of the interview session lasted for 10 minutes. Asked to state their impressions about their French teacher, they said, '*he is a very good teacher*'. The two students indicated a general liking for their teacher. They said he allowed them to ask questions in class and he explained concepts to them. One of them said, '*our teacher gives us the chance to speak French even though he knows we make mistakes. When we make mistakes, he corrects us*'. Asked whether they are tensed in the French classroom, they said they had no tension in the French class. The only thing they both indicated was that sometimes it is their friends who make them tensed. '*There is tension sometimes if friends laugh at me when I give wrong answers*'. Interviews with children revealed use of songs and stories in teaching and these they said make French lessons interesting. Asked how they will rate their teacher's teaching they said they would rate his teaching very high. *In this school, he is our best teacher*', the girl interviewee indicated.

Asked whether he uses the cane in class, they responded in the affirmative. They said he caned them when they misbehaved in class. The boy interviewee said, '*sometimes if someone misbehaves he canes; as for that one, he will cane the person.*' The responses from the interview almost confirmed all the areas of interest in the observation data.

From between 12:30 pm to 1:40 pm, Pangloss had to be in Form 1A for his last class. Virtually the same things were observed in the second class except that this time, he used text Book 1. The lesson for this class was not as lively as the one held in the morning perhaps because the day was growing old and resulting in diminishing returns. I observed that the students nonetheless were very fascinated by the presence of the French teacher: '*bonjour monsieur*' they stood up to greet. *Comment allez-vous, mes enfants? Nous allons très bien merci et vous?* The students in this class were also much disciplined though I could count three of them sleeping while the lesson was on-going. The teacher spotted them and asked them to stand at the back of the class. The classroom arrangement was just like the one in Form 2A except that the teacher's chair was a plastic one. I asked him why the chair was a plastic one and he explained that it was so because of inadequate furniture for the staff. Here, too he used flash cards on which pictures of people who are supposed to be from the same family were nicely drawn to teach the topic: '*savoir décrire sa famille et ses liens familiaux*' (Describing one's family and relatives). He went through the introduction lesson successfully and asked students a lot of questions. He used the question-answer technique to elicit responses from students and assisted them to come out with the '*actes de parôle*' (constructive structures or the building blocks of the language). The teacher provided them enough opportunities to contribute actively in the discussions and also to ask questions. He gave a written exercise after the series of oral exercises.

When I asked the teacher to comment on the environment for teaching French, he admitted the environment was conducive but urged the school to strive for a language laboratory. He added that it is perhaps the only way to ensure the production of graduates who are fluent and competent in French. With regard to his teaching methodology, I observed that he used code switching (translation methods) in teaching French at JHS level especially when students fail to grasp certain concepts. This approach helped him to clarify himself well for the understanding of students. It was observed that in certain cases, the rote method where pupils repeat what their teachers say and memorize (*répétition/mémorisation*) was used. The teacher also focused on both grammar and communication. In my interaction with him, he told me that the CREF organizes in-service training for teachers and this exposes them to the use of more participatory approaches to teaching French.

Teacher Pangloss' case study, from a critical perspective, helps language teachers better understand the necessary ingredients for quality teaching and what makes a good model worthy of emulation in the language classroom. Making deduction from how he approached teaching, it was conspicuous that he was convinced learning was not accomplished only through the teacher's approach to teaching and learning but rather through how the teacher integrates curriculum content to their own professional content knowledge to diverse interests and abilities of learners in a class (Block & Cameron, 2002; Mortimer & Scott, 2003).

This study also points out that language teachers (especially foreign language teachers), would create interest in their students if they make their classrooms enjoyable by using all the tools available both institutional and teacher in-built tools (Stern, 1983). The study has also

revealed that employing cooperative learning is among the best methods to adopt in teaching French as a foreign language in an Anglophone context. Cooperative learning, team learning, and reciprocal teaching are but a few examples in the literature of the many ways in which classroom work can be distributed. This gives a learning opportunity to students to learn from one another. (Johnson, & Stanne, 2000). With its roots in theories of social interdependence, collaborative learning has proven very successful when implemented well and perhaps it is the best alternative way to go for teachers of language. Once students feel free to air their views and given the opportunity to ask questions in class, it goes a long way to inure to their benefit. This reverberate the idea that learners are not empty vessels, blank slates, or passive observers and that once they are deeply involved they can learn better (Block & Cameron, 2002).

Perhaps, the government of Ghana should also do more to equip schools with the requisite learning resources to promote learning of French. Language laboratories could serve as locations where students of French could have the opportunity to learn from native-speakers of the language. This support may give impetus to the position of government in the White Paper on the Education Reform Review Committee that stated among other things an early and routine acquaintance with a third language (French) confers on the citizenry of Ghana great advantages in their life-long proficiency in that language. By fact of geography, this also generates for Ghana, a competitive advantage in international, economic, and political relations with its neighbors in the sub-region (GoG, 2004). The French government could also further increase their support for the government of Ghana in a bid to promote the study of French in Ghana. Training of personnel at the CREF to supervise teaching of French could inure to the benefit of teachers since a lot of the head teachers are not literate in French to do this. Lesson notes are in French and this deters circuit supervisors from the district education office from regularly monitoring teachers (French) across the system (Willis & Willis, 1996). This concern which is inimical to quality teaching and learning was passionately expressed by Pangloss during our interaction.

## Conclusions

Teaching French in the public education system is not mean job to be undertaken by a teacher.  It is possible and admissible to assert that French teachers in public JHSs are teaching under very difficult situations. In most schools, emphasis has shifted to giving priority attention to so-called 'important' subjects in the curriculum with the surprise exclusion of French. For this reason, a lot of schools do not offer French even though this, in some cases could be as a result of inadequate French teachers. As if this is not enough, students interest in studying French at the JHS level have deteriorated over the years. Consequently, performances of students in public schools which continue to offer French as a subject of study have been low generally due to the myriad of challenges. Government has done and continues to do its bit, together with support from the French government, to raise the stakes as far as teaching and learning of French are concerned. In all these, teachers too have a crucial role to play so as to promote learning. They should arouse interest of students in the study of the language. The role of the foreign language teacher in modern times needs to change to one of full innovative strategies to help students learn. This paper concludes that the teacher, despite their challenges, can make a difference and can provide their best in the class by instilling interest in learners, helping them perform well in

their examinations, and helping them communicate in the language. The example in this study provides a model, which when adopted, could be valuable to French students in Ghana. The study suffices at inspiring language teachers to adopt better methods to achieve excellence in the language classroom. This sustaining emphasis on teaching excellence is perhaps the only way of adequately preparing the Ghanaian student for the 21st century.

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