



THE ACTIVE PEDAGOGY FOR ALL TEACHERS THROUGH TESSA OER

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ABSTRACT

One major observation about teaching in many West African schools is that there is no direct link between what is taught. Queries are therefore raised about this reality. Teachers at GSTS Baal (*Groupe Scolaire Tierno Sylemani Baal*), a private school (primary and secondary) on the outskirts of Guédiawaye in Dakar (Senegal), have shown the need to develop professionally as they find the means to achieve this goal. This paper backs the necessity to equip teachers with tools that drive them to look for open resources and active pedagogy to enhance their teaching methods.

THE CONTEXT

Bringing down the illiteracy rate has remained a challenge in West Africa on account of a multitude of factors, ranging from socio-economic and cultural factors to the inadequacy of educational policies in making a significant impact on the existing systems. It even extends to the nature of the school curriculum, which does little to encourage student engagement and success. One of the key aspects of the curriculum that can significantly improve both student engagement and outcomes is teachers' sound pedagogical choices to ensure that the learning process is more attractive and meaningful for learners. However, a large proportion of teachers in French Sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to professional development. For instance, only 27% of teachers benefitted from a training session held in Chad, and only 36–37% of teachers in Madagascar and Togo benefitted from such a session (Tilak, 2009, cited in Lauwerier & Akkari, 2015). In Senegal, more than half the country's primary school teachers are not trained (Unesco-ISU, 2014:19, cited in Lauwerier & Akkari, 2015). These samples of statistics show that many teachers are still totally inexperienced in matters of active teaching. This dilemma is the focus of the present report, which discusses the benefits of the active teaching/active pedagogy project undertaken by GSTS Baal using open educational resources from Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA OER). This report analyses the success of TESSA's resources in making learning active and helping to keep pupils engaged and focused when they are in school.

THE PROJECT: TESSA ACTIVE TEACHING

A key experiment of a holistic teaching-learning process has been undertaken by TESSA OER using active teaching. The kind of pedagogy used by TESSA aims to involve learners in what they are learning by providing challenging learning activities. TESSA groups primary school subjects into five domains that reflect the skills and competencies pupils should acquire in primary school: life skills, numeracy, literacy, sciences, and social studies and arts. Literature was made real and vivid, and sciences became more meaningful, relevant and practical for problem-solving and creativity.

Each domain is structured as follows (TESSA, 2017a):

LITERACY MODULE AREA			
Module	1: Reading and writing for a range of purposes	2: Using community voices in your classroom	3: Promoting communication in an additional language
Section 1	Supporting and assessing reading and writing	Investigating stories	Providing natural contexts for language practice
Section 2	Stimulating interest in reading stories	Ways to collect and perform stories	Ways to achieve fluency and accuracy
Section 3	Ways of reading and responding to information texts	Using local games for learning	Creating opportunities for communication
Section 4	Ways of presenting your point of view	Using stories and poetry	Ways to build on home-language knowledge
Section 5	Ways of becoming a critical reader and writer	Turning oral stories, poems and games into books	Supporting additional language learning



TESSA's resources draw the teaching-learning situation from learners' immediate environment or the local community. Lesson titles in the sample resources embody activities that support the purpose of literacy in society. The design of the lessons is guided by foregrounding the link between notions learned and the possible competencies required. Another key component of relevance in the teaching-learning process is the participation of learners. When learners work on the sections outlined above in class, they are gaining life skills at the same time. Section 2, for example, enables pupils to develop fluency and accuracy because they are required to collect stories from the community and perform them in class. Matching the contents to real-life situations remains a crucial element to assist pupils in developing a range of competencies. That is why the training of teachers is a prerequisite for the implementation of this type of pedagogy in their classrooms.

TESSA OER assists teachers to relate educational theories to the more concrete day-to-day world. Teachers who are trained with TESSA primary school OER at GSTS Baal (from primary to secondary school) develop confidence and explore their class practices in innovative ways. Most of them are inspired and start creating their own teaching strategies to achieve a learner-centered pedagogy. These teaching experiences are shared on the wiki (TESSA, 2017b) so that other teachers can assess, use or adapt them. Texts, pictures and videos are shared on a regular basis. This process enables teachers to collectively find solutions to issues that emanate from their practices and learn as a community. The teacher training aspect of TESSA OER aims to develop a set of pedagogical and reflective competencies to facilitate the professional development of teachers. Chief among these is the ability to evaluate one's own teaching practices.

THE BENEFITS

Teachers assess their own teaching strategies

Training offered to teachers in the project involves a careful process of familiarising teachers with a range of teaching methods. Its main objective is to enable teachers to devise experiences whereby pupils construct their own knowledge and skills in a stepwise process as recommended by Blake and Pope (2008). It was found that pupils' motivation became intrinsic as soon as their teachers adopted methods of teaching with less lectures. Teachers themselves questioned their own teaching methods and the impact of their teaching on pupils' understanding. A critical self-evaluation of one's own teaching naturally leads to an ongoing interest in

improvement through professional development. Teachers at GSTS Baal are a tangible example of how teachers continually attempted to understand how pupils really learn and how this learning process can be enhanced.

Prior to this workshop, many teachers had never received initial or in-service teacher training. Furthermore, most of them had never asked themselves whether pupils always benefitted from or enjoyed learning in their classes, though they were aware of their pedagogical shortcomings. During and after the 2014 workshop for using TESSA primary school OER, they began to make a significant shift in their practice as they started questioning their teaching methods. They realised that pupils were not sufficiently motivated to engage interactively with their teaching methods. Although adopting a researcher stance was not an easy process, it allowed them to become more creative.

Working collaboratively

A number of relevant ideas and practices emerged from the workshop. These included the need to work collaboratively on issues that cut across different contexts. Pooling together teachers across phases and levels proved to be successful throughout the training session, as participants realised that each of them came with different, yet relevant, teaching methods. This enabled a shared assessment of methods and approaches. Working across phases also gave teachers the opportunity to find solutions to their immediate pedagogical challenges. Difficulties encountered by teachers and learners during the teaching-learning process led the way to discussions about the quality of education and how this could be researched. The wiki facilitated the discussions by means of an online platform for interactive teacher-led sessions to take place.

There is strong evidence to suggest that teachers who participated in the workshop became more creative and equipped to adapt the curriculum to the contextual realities and learners' needs. Teachers realised that using TESSA methodology enhances the existing curriculum. Although the existing curriculum may not be designed according to competencies-based approaches, active methods enabled learners to acquire many competencies. To allow the learners to feel that they are learning something valuable, activities have to be selected with hypotheses formulation, manipulation and conclusion drawing in mind. This practice is not typically seen among teachers in primary and secondary schools in the West African context. However, even in the context of the currently available curriculum,



well-trained teachers can bring about some solutions to adjust the curriculum to fit the new trends in education in line with the needs of the learners. This was one of the main aims of the training workshops. For example, a TESSA inductive strategy allowed pupils to carry out field investigations among their family members and in their communities. With learner-centered teaching, teachers found that pupils could remember and reconstruct a particular experiment, speak about its benefits and demonstrate relevant skills.

Using some of the resources in TESSA OER, the GSTS Baal workshop invited teachers to reflect on and assess their own style of teaching. Teachers realised that different strategies could be used to teach the same content more effectively using active pedagogy. After both TESSA workshops, participants became confident and shared constructive experiences concerning lesson preparation with secondary school teachers who did not have the opportunity to participate in the workshop.

Developing new skills

Since teachers produced OER on a wiki as an outcome of their understanding of active pedagogy, distance learning through the wiki became a means of disseminating the good experience to GSTS Baal teachers. Resources such as videos, podcasts and audio with clear instructions may help pupils to strengthen their understanding of concepts and ideas.

TESSA resources provide teachers with some creative ideas to alleviate the problems associated with the lack of laboratories in schools in West Africa. For example, a lesson on germination became a hands-on experience where a teacher asked his pupils to sow a seed and make notes on the germination process a month before the class took place.

TESSA workshops served as a great opportunity for all participating teachers to learn from each other. Physics teachers understood that they must use skills developed in mathematics, and secondary teachers and university lecturers worked together with primary school teachers and found that sharing experiences contributed to assisting them in rethinking the kind of pedagogy to use in classrooms. This can be an open door for teachers to conduct continual research on how to improve the teaching-learning process in primary, secondary and high schools, as well as at university. For example, GSTS Baal primary school teachers discovered that they had been teaching equations in primary school. By being aware of the progression

of teaching equations through the child's school career, primary school teachers can improve the teaching of this concept, knowing that it will be built upon at a later stage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of this project, and to contribute to quality education for Africa, we recommend the following:

- Continuous research must be conducted on both teachers' and learners' styles, as well as the teaching materials in use.
- All teachers must be trained in active teaching according to the reality of the milieu and with regard to the globalisation of education.
- Africa must develop a relevant bank of OER as a solution to the lack of teaching material and laboratories, and promote collaborative work between teachers, regardless of phases. Distance learning is an important tool to be developed in the framework of Education for All.
- More input from parents and the community is required to support the teaching-learning process.
- Evaluation methods have to be improved.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The case study of GSTS Baal shows that teaching can be improved when teachers engage in collaborative endeavours and assess their own teaching. Active teaching has had a positive impact on both teachers and learners. This workshop was an invitation to develop an awareness of the possibilities for collaborative work and research about teachers' practices and pupils' learning styles in private or state schools. TESSA's approaches equipped teachers to provide a holistic education that prepares students for life. This approach can enhance teaching across all levels of the education system.



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