

Overcoming Language Barriers: Teaching English to French-speaking African Students

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ABSTRACT

As an English teacher, I embarked on a remarkable journey of teaching English to African students who were completely French-speaking and unfamiliar with the ABCD of English. Overcoming the language barrier was a daunting task, especially considering that I did not know French either. However, through sheer determination and innovative teaching methods, I succeeded in empowering my students to read, write, listen, understand, and speak English fluently within a span of just 8 months. Not only did they excel, but most of them even achieved highest grades in Cambridge certification. In this article, I will share the unconventional teaching techniques I adopted, emphasizing the importance of creating a nurturing classroom environment and a deep bond with my students.

Keywords: Language barriers, innovative teaching methods, nurturing classroom environment, English Fluency, overcoming language challenges.

Received 19.06.2025

Revised 09.07.2025

Accepted 14.09.2025

CITATION OF THIS ARTICLE

M. Sangamitra Sirisha. Overcoming Language Barriers: Teaching English to French-speaking African Students. Inter. J. Edu. Res. Technol. 16[3] September 2025:35-38

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to foreign students has always been a challenging yet immensely rewarding experience for educators around the world. As an English teacher, I embarked on a journey that was both unique and daunting when I was assigned the task of teaching African students who had no prior knowledge of the English language, but were fluent in French. The task of overcoming the language barrier between their native French and the ABCD of English presented a formidable challenge, but it also offered an opportunity to make a lasting impact on the lives of these students.

In this article, I aim to share my experiences, methods, and strategies that ultimately led to the successful transformation of these students from non-English speakers to confident English language learners. Teaching English to French-speaking African students required a fresh and innovative approach, given that I, too, was not well-versed in French. Nevertheless, armed with sheer determination and an open mind, I set out to create a conducive learning environment that would help bridge the linguistic divide.

Throughout the journey, I encountered various obstacles that tested my creativity and adaptability as an educator. The initial language barrier proved to be a significant hurdle, as the students were unfamiliar with even the most basic elements of English. However, I saw this challenge as an opportunity to explore unconventional teaching techniques that would cater specifically to their needs and learning preferences. The transformation of these students from timid non-English speakers to confident and fluent English users within a span of just eight months was nothing short of remarkable. Not only did they excel in their language skills, but many of them also achieved the highest grades in prestigious language certifications such as Cambridge, showcasing the immense progress they had made.

In the subsequent sections of this article, I will delve into the various innovative teaching methods that I adopted during this journey. These methods were designed not only to teach the English language but also to instill a sense of empowerment and confidence in the students as they navigated a new linguistic terrain. Additionally, I will emphasize the importance of creating a nurturing classroom environment and building a deep bond with my students, as these factors played a pivotal role in breaking down the language barriers and fostering a love for the English language.

Teaching English to French-speaking African students was indeed a transformative experience, not only for the students but also for myself as an educator. The journey tested my capabilities as a teacher and

pushed me to explore new horizons in the realm of language instruction. By sharing my insights and experiences in this article, I hope to inspire other educators facing similar challenges to approach their classrooms with creativity, determination, and a passion for bridging language gaps. Together, we can create a world where language barriers are no longer obstacles, but stepping stones to cross-cultural understanding and academic achievement.

KEY INITIATIVES

For implementing a multi-pronged strategy of a healthy teaching-learning ecosystem, a plethora of initiatives were taken up, each of which are vital, as listed hereunder:

Gauge on a Personal Challenge: When I first encountered my African students, the language barrier appeared insurmountable. I did not know French, and they had little to no exposure to English. Communication seemed impossible, and traditional teaching methods were ineffective.

Utilizing Body Language as a Teaching Aid: In the initial phase, I relied heavily on non-verbal communication. Through the use of body language, gestures, and facial expressions, I was able to convey basic concepts and instructions. Additionally, I incorporated visual aids like flashcards, pictures, and illustrations to enhance understanding and facilitate learning.

Role of a Teacher as a "Parent": Recognizing the significance of the mother tongue in language acquisition, I took on the role of a nurturing "mother". It may look like being emotional, but this feel gives tremendous energy to achieve far more as well as helps in establishing close relationship with the learners. I aimed to create a family-like and homely ambiance in the classroom, making my students feel comfortable and secure while learning in a foreign environment.

Learning Beyond Classroom Walls: To differentiate classroom learning from real-life language acquisition, I conducted sessions under the shade of trees, imitating the natural setting where language learning takes place organically.

Rest and Recuperation: Understanding the importance of rest and rejuvenation in the learning process, I allowed my students an hour to rest, sleep, and refresh themselves during the sessions. This helped in creating a relaxed and attentive learning atmosphere.

Cultural Immersion: To foster a deeper connection with the English language, I took my students to nearby markets and taught them the names of vegetables, spices, groceries, and stationary items. This experiential learning approach enhanced their language skills while immersing them in a new culture.

Emotional Bonding: By sharing meals, engaging in activities together, and showing genuine care, a profound emotional bond developed between my students and me. This bond encouraged open communication and created a sense of belonging in the learning process.

Language Acquisition as a Natural Process: Emphasizing language acquisition as a natural process akin to a small infant picking up words from its mother, I strived to recreate a similar environment in the classroom. This approach promoted a deeper understanding and appreciation of the language.

Success Stories: The impact of this motherly teaching method was evident as students excelled in their language skills. After completing their engineering degrees, some of my students returned to their home countries and became English teachers themselves, following the same nurturing approach they had experienced.

Building a Positive Learning Environment: Creating a positive and inclusive understanding learning environment was crucial to gaining my students' trust and encouraging active participation. I ensured that the classroom was a safe space where students felt comfortable making mistakes and expressing themselves freely.

Regular Assessment and Feedback: Constant assessment and feedback played a crucial role in tracking their progress and identifying areas that needed improvement. This iterative process helped them develop their language skills effectively.

TEACHING LEARNING PROCESSES

Table 1: Teaching Learning methods

Sl. No.	TL Method	Description
1	Immersive Language Learning	To immerse my students in the English language, I surrounded them with English materials such as books, audio clips, and videos. This exposure to real-life English usage helped them develop listening and speaking skills organically. Understanding that grammar and language are instinctively learned through immersion in the environment, I consciously avoided theoretical grammar the lessons through various activities and interactions.
2	Thematic Teaching	To keep my students engaged and motivated, I adopted a thematic

Sl. No.	TL Method	Description
		teaching approach. I designed lessons around topics that were relevant and interesting to them, such as their culture, hobbies, and aspirations. This method helped them connect with the language.
3	Task-Based Learning	This was another effective method I employed to improve their language skills. By providing them with tasks and projects to complete collaboratively, they were able to develop their reading, writing, and speaking abilities while solving real-life problems.
4	Encouraging Peer Learning	Group activities and pair work allowed my students to learn from each other. They supported and corrected one another, which not only built camaraderie but also reinforced their understanding of the language.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Blending Learning with Fun: To establish a strong bond with my students, I actively participated in their daily activities. Sharing meals, dancing, watching movies, and cracking jokes created a relaxed atmosphere, promoting open communication and trust.

Cultural Integration: I integrated cultural experiences into the language learning process, taking my students to local markets, introducing them to Indian customs and traditions through mime and pictures, and visiting Indian temples. This not only enhanced their language skills but also fostered cross-cultural understanding.

Conversational Approach: I prioritized conversations and communication over formal instruction. Encouraging my students to speak, even if their English was incorrect initially, allowed them to gain confidence and improve organically.

Extended Class Hours: Acknowledging the intensity of the learning journey, I conducted extended class hours from 8 am to 3 pm, with a substantial part dedicated to conversations and practical application. This approach maximized their exposure to English in real-life situations.

Building Lasting Bonds: Throughout the journey, I developed a strong emotional connection with my students. At the end of the course, parting ways was an emotional experience for all of us, as we had grown into a close-knit family.

Impact on Students' Futures: The impact of my teaching methods extended beyond the classroom. After completing their engineering degrees, some of my students returned to their home countries and began teaching English using the same transformative techniques they had learned from me, thereby perpetuating the cycle of effective language instruction.

DISCUSSION

Teaching English to foreign students, especially those with no prior knowledge of the language, requires innovative methods that go beyond traditional grammar-focused approaches. My journey with African students exemplified the power of immersive learning, cultural integration, and emotional bonding in language acquisition. By becoming a "mother" like personality and creating a warm, family-like environment, I not only enabled my students to master English but also instilled in them the confidence and enthusiasm to pass on their knowledge to others. As I continue my teaching journey, I carry with me the belief that language acquisition is not merely a skill but a bridge that connects cultures and opens doors to endless opportunities in the modern world.

Teaching English to French-speaking African students without knowing French was a formidable challenge, but the perseverance and dedication paid off. Through the use of body language, visual aids, immersive learning, and other effective methods, I was able to transform them into confident English speakers within just eight months. The journey was challenging, but their success in obtaining Cambridge certification was a testament to the effectiveness of these teaching techniques. This experience has not only enriched my teaching career but has also instilled in me a deep appreciation for the power of education and the boundless potential of language learning. my journey has been successful, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the continuation of this transformative While teaching method

CONCLUSION

Throughout the journey, I developed a strong emotional connection with my students. At the end of the course, parting ways was an emotional experience for all of us, as we had grown into a close-knit family. Teaching English to French-speaking African students, who were initially unfamiliar with the ABCD of the English language, was an extraordinary journey that exemplified the power of innovative teaching and

the strength of determination. Throughout this article, I have shared my experiences and the unconventional methods that led to the successful transformation of these students into confident English language learners.

The initial language barrier posed a significant challenge, but it also provided an opportunity to explore new teaching techniques tailored to the specific needs of the students. By creating a nurturing classroom environment and fostering a strong bond with my students, we were able to break down the linguistic divide and create a space where language learning flourished.

The remarkable progress made by these students within just eight months was a testament to their dedication and the effectiveness of the teaching strategies employed. Witnessing them not only become fluent in English but also excel in prestigious language certifications like Cambridge, filled me with immense pride and joy.

This journey has taught me valuable lessons as an educator. It has reinforced the importance of adaptability and open-mindedness, urging me to continually explore innovative ways to reach and engage diverse learners. It has also emphasized the significance of creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment, where students feel valued and empowered to embrace their linguistic journey.

Moreover, this experience highlights the potential for cross-cultural understanding and academic achievement when language barriers are addressed with empathy and resourcefulness. It is a reminder that language should not be a dividing factor but a bridge that connects people from different backgrounds, fostering mutual respect and appreciation for diverse cultures.

As educators, we play a crucial role in shaping the future of our students and preparing them to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. By sharing the insights and experiences gained from teaching English to French-speaking African students, I hope to inspire fellow teachers to embrace the challenges of language instruction with determination and creativity.

In conclusion, overcoming language barriers is an achievable feat, given the right approach and dedication. Teaching English to foreign students, particularly those with no prior knowledge of the language, requires us to be catalysts of change and advocates for transformative education. Let us continue to strive for excellence in language instruction, fostering a love for learning, and breaking down linguistic barriers to build a brighter and more inclusive global community. Together, we can empower our students to conquer new horizons and embrace the richness of linguistic diversity.

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