



INTEGRATING INDIGENOUS ORAL LITERATURE INTO ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) TEACHING: A PEDAGOGICAL STUDY OF YAKA DIRGES IN CONGOLESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract: The teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in many African contexts continues to rely predominantly on imported instructional materials that often neglect learners' sociocultural backgrounds (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). This lack of cultural relevance may reduce learner motivation, engagement, and meaningful language use (Kramsch, 1993). This study investigates the pedagogical potential of integrating indigenous oral literature – specifically Yaka dirges – into EFL instruction in Congolese secondary schools. Using a qualitative research design, the study draws on textual analysis of selected Yaka dirges, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers and learners (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The findings indicate that Yaka dirges are rich in linguistic, poetic, and cultural features that can be effectively didactized to support vocabulary development, listening and speaking skills, and intercultural awareness (Finnegan, 2012). Participants reported increased motivation and stronger engagement when culturally familiar materials were used. The study argues that integrating indigenous oral literature into EFL classrooms supports culturally responsive pedagogy and fosters more meaningful language learning (Gay, 2018). Pedagogical implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and materials development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are discussed.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language, oral literature, Yaka dirges, authentic materials, culturally responsive teaching.

INTEGRATION DE LA LITTÉRATURE ORALE AUTOCHTONE DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT DE L'ANGLAIS LANGUE ÉTRANGÈRE (ALE) : UNE ÉTUDE PÉDAGOGIQUE DES COMPLAINTES FUNÉBRES YAKA DANS LES ÉCOLES SECONDAIRES CONGOLAISES

Résumé: Dans de nombreux contextes africains, l'enseignement de l'anglais langue étrangère (ELE) repose encore majoritairement sur des ressources pédagogiques importées qui négligent souvent le contexte socioculturel des apprenants (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Ce manque de pertinence culturelle peut réduire la motivation, l'engagement et l'utilisation significative de la langue par les apprenants (Kramsch, 1993). Cette étude explore le potentiel pédagogique de l'intégration de la littérature orale autochtone (et plus précisément des chants funèbres yaka) dans l'enseignement de l'ELE dans les établissements secondaires congolais. S'appuyant sur une méthodologie qualitative, l'étude utilise l'analyse textuelle de chants funèbres yaka sélectionnés, des observations en classe et des entretiens semi-directifs avec des enseignants et des apprenants d'ELE (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Les résultats indiquent que les chants funèbres yaka sont riches en caractéristiques linguistiques, poétiques et culturelles qui peuvent être efficacement exploitées didactiquement pour favoriser le développement du vocabulaire, les compétences d'écoute et d'expression orale, ainsi que la sensibilisation interculturelle (Finnegan,

2012). Les participants ont rapporté une motivation accrue et un engagement plus fort lorsque des ressources culturellement familières étaient utilisées. Cette étude soutient que l'intégration de la littérature orale autochtone dans les cours d'anglais langue étrangère (ELE) favorise une pédagogie culturellement adaptée et un apprentissage linguistique plus significatif (Gay, 2018). Les implications pédagogiques pour la conception des programmes, la formation des enseignants et le développement de ressources pédagogiques en République démocratique du Congo sont abordées.

Mots-clés : Anglais langue étrangère, littérature orale, chants funèbres yaka, ressources authentiques, pédagogie culturellement adaptée.

Introduction

0.1. *Background of the Study*

English has gained unprecedented importance as a global language of communication, education, science, and international mobility (Crystal, 2003). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), English is taught as a foreign language at secondary and tertiary levels with the aim of developing learners' communicative competence and preparing them for participation in global academic and professional communities (Brown, 2007). However, despite its strategic importance, EFL teaching in the Congolese context faces persistent challenges, including limited exposure to authentic language use, low learner motivation, and an overdependence on foreign-produced instructional materials (Richards, 2017).

Most EFL textbooks used in Congolese schools are designed for learners in Western or Asian contexts and often reflect sociocultural realities that are distant from learners' lived experiences. Although such materials may be linguistically accurate, they frequently fail to resonate with learners' cultural identities, beliefs, and communicative practices (Kramsch, 1993). As a result, English is often perceived by learners as an abstract and alien language rather than as a meaningful medium for communication (Norton, 2013). This pedagogical gap underscores the need for instructional approaches that connect language learning with learners' sociocultural environments. Scholars in applied linguistics have increasingly emphasized the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in language education (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Such approaches advocate the use of teaching materials that reflect learners' cultural backgrounds and promote identity affirmation alongside linguistic development. Within this perspective, indigenous oral literature emerges as a valuable yet underutilized resource for EFL teaching in African contexts.

0.2. *Indigenous Oral Literature and EFL Teaching*

Indigenous oral literature (including folktales, proverbs, songs, chants, and dirges) constitutes a central component of African cultural heritage and knowledge systems (Finnegan, 2012; Okpewho, 1992). These oral genres serve multiple social functions, such as transmitting moral values, preserving collective memory, reinforcing social cohesion, and articulating communal identities (Mbiti, 1990). From a linguistic standpoint, oral literary forms are characterized by rich vocabulary, figurative language, repetition, rhythm, and performativity, all of which are pedagogically exploitable in language classrooms (Finnegan, 2012).

In EFL contexts, the use of literature has been widely recognized as a means of enhancing language skills, cultural awareness, and critical thinking (Lazar, 1993; Paran, 2008). Literary texts provide learners with exposure to authentic and meaningful language use while encouraging personal response and interpretation (Duff & Maley, 2007). When literature is drawn from learners' own cultural environments, it may further enhance motivation and engagement by creating a sense of familiarity and relevance (Kramsch, 1993).

Among the Yaka people of the DRC, dirges performed during funeral ceremonies constitute a significant oral genre that combines poetic expression, emotional depth, and communal participation. These dirges articulate themes of death, morality, social responsibility, and spiritual continuity, using metaphorical and symbolic language (Mbiti, 1990). Despite their educational potential, Yaka dirges remain largely absent from formal EFL curricula, reflecting a broader marginalization of indigenous knowledge in postcolonial education systems (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986).

0.3. *Problem Statement*

Although the Congolese EFL curriculum emphasizes communicative competence and learner-centred instruction, classroom practices remain largely textbook-driven and culturally disconnected (Richards, 2017). Indigenous oral literature, which could serve as authentic and culturally relevant teaching material, is rarely integrated into English language instruction. This exclusion limits opportunities for contextualized learning and may contribute to learners' low motivation and limited communicative engagement (Norton, 2013).

Moreover, existing research on literature in EFL has largely focused on written and canonical texts, with limited attention paid to oral and indigenous genres, particularly in Central African contexts (Paran, 2008). There is therefore a need for empirical studies that explore how indigenous oral texts can be pedagogically adapted and utilized in EFL classrooms.

0.4. *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to examine the pedagogical potential of integrating Yaka dirges into EFL teaching in Congolese secondary schools. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze the linguistic and cultural features of Yaka dirges and to explore how these features can be didactized to support English language learning within a culturally responsive pedagogical framework (Gay, 2018).

0.5. *Research Questions*

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- What linguistic and cultural features characterize Yaka dirges that are relevant to EFL instruction?
- How can Yaka dirges be didactized and integrated into EFL classroom activities?
- How do EFL teachers and learners perceive the use of Yaka dirges as instructional materials?

1. Literature Review

1.1. *Oral Literature and Orature in African Contexts*

Oral literature occupies a central position in African societies as a medium for transmitting knowledge, values, and collective memory across generations (Finnegan, 2012; Okpewho, 1992). Unlike written literature, oral literature is characterized by performance, audience participation, variability, and immediacy, which contribute to its social and aesthetic functions (Finnegan, 2012). Genres such as folktales, proverbs, praise poetry, songs, and dirges are not merely artistic expressions but also serve educational, moral, and communicative purposes within their communities (Mbiti, 1990).

Scholars have emphasized that African oral literature constitutes a legitimate and complex literary system that deserves recognition within formal education (Okpewho, 1992; Vansina, 1985). Dirges, in particular, are ritualistic oral texts performed during funeral ceremonies to express grief, commemorate the deceased, and reinforce communal solidarity (Mbiti, 1990). Linguistically, dirges employ figurative language, repetition, rhythm, and parallelism, which enhance memorability and emotional impact (Finnegan, 2012). These features also make dirges pedagogically valuable for language instruction, especially in contexts where learners are familiar with their cultural meanings. Despite their richness, oral literary forms have historically been marginalized in formal education systems, largely due to colonial legacies that privileged written Western literary canons over indigenous knowledge systems (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). This marginalization has contributed to the underrepresentation

of oral literature in language teaching curricula, particularly in EFL contexts in Africa.

1.2. *Literature in English as a Foreign Language Teaching*

The use of literature in EFL teaching has been widely advocated as a means of developing learners' linguistic competence, cultural awareness, and critical thinking skills (Lazar, 1993; Paran, 2008). Literary texts expose learners to authentic language use, diverse discourse structures, and rich vocabulary, while also encouraging personal engagement and interpretive skills (Duff & Maley, 2007). In contrast to purely functional texts, literature offers emotional and aesthetic dimensions that can enhance learner motivation and deepen comprehension (Collie & Slater, 1987).

Research has shown that literature-based instruction can support the development of all four language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—when appropriately integrated into classroom activities (Lazar, 1993). For example, poetry and songs have been found to be particularly effective in promoting pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation, as well as vocabulary retention (Maley & Duff, 2005). However, much of the literature on EFL instruction focuses predominantly on written and canonical literary texts, often drawn from British or American traditions (Paran, 2008).

This emphasis raises concerns about cultural relevance, especially in postcolonial EFL contexts where learners may struggle to relate to foreign cultural references (Kramsch, 1993). Scholars have therefore called for a broader conception of literature in EFL that includes local and indigenous texts capable of fostering both linguistic development and cultural identity affirmation (Norton, 2013).

2. **Authentic Materials in EFL teaching**

Authentic materials are commonly defined as texts produced for real-life communicative purposes rather than for pedagogical use (Gilmore, 2007). In EFL teaching, authentic materials are valued for their capacity to expose learners to natural language use and contextualized meaning-making (Richards, 2001). Studies have demonstrated that authentic materials can increase learner motivation, enhance communicative competence, and promote pragmatic awareness (Gilmore, 2007).

Oral literary texts, particularly those embedded in learners' cultural environments, may be considered a form of culturally authentic material. Unlike imported texts, indigenous oral literature reflects learners' social realities, belief systems, and communicative practices (Kramsch, 1993). When adapted for

classroom use, such materials can facilitate comprehension and participation by drawing on learners' prior cultural knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978).

However, the pedagogical use of authentic materials requires careful didactization to ensure linguistic accessibility and instructional relevance (Richards, 2001). Teachers must select appropriate texts, design meaningful tasks, and align activities with learning objectives. In this respect, oral literature such as dirges offers flexible opportunities for task-based and communicative language teaching approaches.

3. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Language Education

Culturally responsive pedagogy emphasizes the importance of using learners' cultural backgrounds as resources for teaching and learning (Gay, 2018). Rooted in sociocultural theories of learning, this approach views language acquisition as a socially mediated process shaped by identity, power, and cultural context (Vygotsky, 1978; Norton, 2013). In language education, culturally responsive pedagogy seeks to create inclusive learning environments that validate learners' identities while promoting academic achievement. Empirical studies have shown that culturally relevant materials can enhance learner engagement, motivation, and self-confidence, particularly among marginalized learner populations (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2018). In EFL contexts, the integration of local cultural content has been associated with increased participation and more meaningful language use (Kramsch, 1993).

The use of indigenous oral literature aligns closely with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, as it foregrounds learners' cultural knowledge and positions it as a legitimate source of learning. By incorporating Yaka dirges into EFL instruction, teachers can create opportunities for learners to engage with English through familiar cultural narratives, thereby bridging the gap between local identity and global language learning.

4. Empirical Studies on Indigenous Texts in EFL Contexts

A growing body of research has explored the integration of indigenous and local texts into EFL instruction in African and other postcolonial contexts. Studies have reported positive effects on learner motivation, cultural awareness, and communicative competence when local narratives and oral traditions are used as teaching materials (Adeyemi, 2008; Choudhary, 2016). These studies suggest that learners respond more actively to texts that reflect their cultural realities and lived experiences.

However, empirical research specifically focusing on oral genres such as dirges remains limited, particularly in Central African contexts. Most existing studies concentrate on folktales or proverbs, leaving funeral songs and ritual

texts underexplored (Paran, 2008). This gap highlights the need for context-specific research that examines the pedagogical value of diverse oral genres within EFL classrooms. The present study contributes to this emerging field by providing an empirical examination of Yaka dirges as instructional resources for EFL teaching in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By combining linguistic analysis with classroom-based data, the study seeks to extend current understandings of culturally grounded EFL pedagogy.

5. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrative theoretical framework drawing on Communicative Language Teaching, Sociocultural Theory, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, and Learner-Centred Language Teaching. These perspectives collectively inform the pedagogical rationale for integrating Yaka dirges into EFL instruction and guide the analysis of classroom practices and learner responses.

5.1. Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes the development of communicative competence through meaningful interaction and authentic language use (Hymes, 1972; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Rather than focusing exclusively on grammatical accuracy, CLT prioritizes learners' ability to use language appropriately in social contexts. Authentic texts and communicative tasks play a central role in this approach, as they expose learners to real-world discourse and pragmatic meaning (Littlewood, 1981).

Within this framework, Yaka dirges can be viewed as communicative texts that convey meaning through culturally embedded language use. When adapted for EFL classrooms, these dirges can serve as stimuli for communicative activities such as discussion, role-play, oral interpretation, and vocabulary negotiation, thereby supporting the development of learners' communicative competence.

5.2. Sociocultural Theory and Mediated Learning

Sociocultural theory, as articulated by Vygotsky (1978), conceptualizes learning as a socially mediated process in which knowledge is constructed through interaction with others and with cultural artifacts. Language is both a tool for communication and a mediational means through which cognitive development occurs. From this perspective, learning is closely linked to learners' cultural and social environments. Indigenous oral literature constitutes a powerful cultural artifact that can mediate language learning by connecting new linguistic forms to familiar cultural meanings. The use of Yaka dirges in EFL instruction aligns with the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, as

learners can draw on their prior cultural knowledge to scaffold the acquisition of English language skills (Vygotsky, 1978). This theoretical lens underscores the importance of contextualized and culturally meaningful materials in language education.

5.3. *Culturally Responsive teaching*

Culturally responsive teaching advocates the integration of learners' cultural backgrounds into instructional practices as a means of enhancing academic achievement and identity affirmation (Gay, 2018). In language education, this approach challenges deficit views of learners' cultures and positions them as valuable resources for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Applying culturally responsive teaching to EFL teaching in the DRC entails recognizing indigenous oral literature as legitimate pedagogical content. By incorporating Yaka dirges into English lessons, teachers can validate learners' cultural identities while fostering linguistic development. This approach also contributes to the decolonization of language education by resisting the exclusive dominance of Western texts and epistemologies (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986).

6. **Learner-Centred Language Teaching**

Learner-centred language teaching emphasizes active learner participation, autonomy, and responsibility in the learning process (Benson, 2001; Weimer, 2013). In this approach, learners are encouraged to engage critically with content, collaborate with peers, and reflect on their learning experiences. The integration of Yaka dirges into EFL teaching supports learner-centred pedagogy by encouraging learners to share cultural knowledge, interpret texts collaboratively, and express personal responses. Such practices can enhance motivation and engagement, particularly in contexts where learners may feel disconnected from foreign instructional materials (Norton, 2013).

7. **Methodology**

7.1. *Research Design*

This study adopts a qualitative research design in order to explore the pedagogical potential of Yaka dirges in EFL teaching and to capture participants' perceptions and experiences in depth (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A qualitative approach is appropriate for examining culturally embedded phenomena and for understanding how meaning is constructed in specific educational contexts.

7.2. *Research Context*

The study was conducted in selected secondary schools in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, where English is taught as a foreign language

as part of the national curriculum. These schools were chosen due to their accessibility and the presence of learners from Yaka-speaking communities, which facilitated the use of Yaka dirges as instructional materials.

7.3. *Participants*

Participants included EFL teachers and secondary school learners. Teachers were selected based on their teaching experience and willingness to experiment with culturally grounded instructional materials. Learners were drawn from upper secondary classes where English instruction emphasizes communicative skills. All participants took part voluntarily and provided informed consent.

8. **Data Collection Instruments**

Data were collected using multiple qualitative instruments to ensure triangulation and enhance the credibility of the findings (Denzin, 1978). These instruments included:

- Textual analysis of selected Yaka dirges to identify linguistic, poetic, and cultural features relevant to EFL instruction
- Classroom observations to document teaching practices and learner engagement during lessons incorporating Yaka dirges
- Semi-structured interviews with teachers and learners to elicit perceptions of the pedagogical value and challenges of using indigenous oral literature.

9. **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data were analyzed thematically following established qualitative analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interview transcripts and observation notes were coded inductively to identify recurring themes related to language learning, cultural relevance, and learner engagement. Textual analysis focused on identifying linguistic features such as repetition, metaphor, and vocabulary patterns that could be exploited pedagogically.

10. **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were central to the research process. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through the use of pseudonyms, and data were stored securely. Particular attention was paid to cultural sensitivity in the collection and use of Yaka dirges, with respect shown to community norms and traditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

12. Findings

This section presents the findings of the study based on the thematic analysis of textual data, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers and learners. The findings are organized around four major themes: linguistic features of Yaka dirges, cultural and thematic content, pedagogical applications in EFL classrooms, and participants' perceptions of their instructional value.

12.1. *Linguistic Features of Yaka Dirges Relevant to EFL teaching*

Analysis of selected Yaka dirges revealed a range of linguistic features that are pedagogically relevant to EFL teaching. One prominent feature was the extensive use of repetition and parallelism, which served both aesthetic and mnemonic functions. Repetitive lexical patterns and syntactic structures were found to facilitate comprehension and retention, particularly for lower-intermediate EFL learners, as repetition reinforced key vocabulary items and grammatical forms (Finnegan, 2012).

Metaphorical and symbolic language was another salient feature. The dirges frequently employed metaphors related to nature, journey, and transition to express themes of death and continuity. These figurative expressions provided opportunities for introducing and practicing metaphorical language in English, an area often challenging for EFL learners (Lazar, 1993). Teachers reported that learners were able to grasp figurative meanings more easily when these metaphors were first discussed in the learners' cultural context before being explored in English. Additionally, the dirges exhibited a rich lexical repertoire related to emotions, kinship, social roles, and moral values. Such vocabulary was particularly useful for teaching descriptive language and abstract nouns, as learners could relate the lexical items to familiar social experiences (Kramsch, 1993). The rhythmic and formulaic nature of the texts also supported pronunciation practice, stress patterns, and intonation.

12.2. *Cultural and Thematic Dimensions of Yaka Dirges*

Thematic analysis revealed that Yaka dirges address culturally significant themes such as death, communal solidarity, respect for elders, moral responsibility, and spiritual continuity. These themes were deeply embedded in the social and religious worldview of the Yaka community (Mbiti, 1990). Learners demonstrated a high level of engagement when discussing these themes, as they resonated with their lived experiences and prior cultural knowledge.

Classroom observations indicated that learners were more willing to participate in discussions when the content reflected familiar cultural practices. Learners frequently drew parallels between the themes expressed in the dirges

and contemporary social realities, thereby extending classroom discourse beyond linguistic form to include meaning-making and critical reflection (Norton, 2013). This engagement contributed to more sustained oral interaction in English. The cultural familiarity of the texts also reduced learners' affective barriers to participation. Unlike foreign literary texts, which some learners perceived as culturally distant or intimidating, Yaka dirges created a sense of ownership and confidence, enabling learners to contribute actively to classroom activities (Gay, 2018).

13. Pedagogical Applications in EFL Classrooms

Classroom observations revealed multiple pedagogical applications of Yaka dirges in EFL instruction. Teachers successfully adapted the dirges into listening, speaking, and vocabulary-focused activities. For instance, recorded performances of dirges were used as listening comprehension tasks, followed by guided discussions and vocabulary extraction exercises. These activities aligned with communicative and task-based approaches to language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

In speaking activities, learners were encouraged to summarize the content of the dirges in English, express personal reactions, and compare traditional funeral practices with those of other cultures. Such tasks promoted meaningful oral interaction and supported the development of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Group work and collaborative interpretation further reinforced learner-centred practices (Weimer, 2013).

Teachers also reported that Yaka dirges were effective in teaching cultural pragmatics, as learners explored how emotions, respect, and social relationships are expressed linguistically in different contexts. This comparative perspective fostered intercultural awareness and pragmatic sensitivity (Kramsch, 1993).

14. Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions

Interview data revealed generally positive perceptions of the use of Yaka dirges in EFL classrooms. Teachers highlighted increased learner motivation, participation, and attentiveness during lessons incorporating indigenous oral literature. They noted that learners who were typically reluctant to speak in English became more confident when discussing culturally familiar content. Learners expressed appreciation for the inclusion of their cultural heritage in English lessons, reporting that it made learning more meaningful and enjoyable. Several learners indicated that using Yaka dirges helped them understand that English could be used to express local realities and cultural experiences, rather than being limited to foreign contexts (Norton, 2013).

However, some teachers identified challenges related to time constraints, curriculum alignment, and the need for additional training in materials development. These concerns suggest that while the pedagogical potential of Yaka dirges is significant, institutional support and professional development are necessary for sustainable implementation (Richards, 2017).

15. Discussion

This study set out to examine the pedagogical potential of integrating Yaka dirges into EFL instruction in Congolese secondary schools. The findings indicate that indigenous oral literature constitutes a rich and effective resource for culturally responsive and communicative language teaching. This section discusses the findings in relation to existing literature and the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study.

15.1. *Indigenous Oral Literature as a Linguistic Resource in EFL*

The linguistic features identified in Yaka dirges—such as repetition, metaphor, rhythm, and formulaic expressions—align closely with features previously identified as beneficial for language learning (Lazar, 1993; Maley & Duff, 2005). Repetition and parallelism, in particular, supported vocabulary retention and grammatical awareness, confirming earlier research that highlights the pedagogical value of patterned language in EFL instruction (Collie & Slater, 1987).

The findings further demonstrate that metaphorical language embedded in culturally familiar contexts can facilitate learners' understanding of figurative meaning in English. This supports Kramsch's (1993) argument that cultural familiarity plays a crucial role in meaning construction and language interpretation. By anchoring abstract linguistic forms in familiar cultural narratives, Yaka dirges functioned as effective mediational tools in the language learning process (Vygotsky, 1978).

15.2. *Cultural Relevance and Learner Engagement*

One of the most significant findings of this study is the positive impact of culturally relevant materials on learner engagement and participation. Learners displayed increased confidence and willingness to communicate in English when lessons incorporated Yaka dirges. This observation corroborates previous studies emphasizing the relationship between identity affirmation and language learning motivation (Norton, 2013; Gay, 2018).

The integration of indigenous oral literature enabled learners to perceive English not merely as a foreign or imposed language but as a communicative tool capable of expressing local realities. This finding aligns with culturally

responsive pedagogy, which advocates the validation of learners' cultural identities within academic settings (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this sense, the use of Yaka dirges contributed to a more inclusive and empowering EFL learning environment.

16. Implications for Communicative and Learner-Centred teaching

The classroom practices observed in this study illustrate how Yaka dirges can be effectively integrated into communicative and learner-centred EFL instruction. Activities such as group discussions, oral summaries, and comparative cultural analysis promoted interaction, collaboration, and critical thinking, all of which are central to Communicative Language Teaching (Hymes, 1972; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

From a sociocultural perspective, the findings support the view that learning is enhanced when instructional materials function as culturally meaningful mediational artifacts (Vygotsky, 1978). By drawing on learners' prior knowledge and cultural experiences, teachers were able to scaffold language learning more effectively. This reinforces the argument that indigenous knowledge systems should be recognized as legitimate pedagogical resources in language education (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986).

17. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for EFL teaching, curriculum development, teacher education, and language policy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and similar contexts.

17.1. Implications for EFL Classroom Practice

EFL teachers are encouraged to incorporate indigenous oral literature, such as Yaka dirges, as authentic instructional materials. When appropriately didactized, these texts can support the development of listening, speaking, vocabulary, and intercultural competence. Teachers should design communicative tasks that allow learners to interpret, discuss, and respond to oral texts in English, thereby promoting meaningful language use (Richards, 2017).

17.2. Implications for Curriculum Design

Curriculum developers should consider the systematic inclusion of indigenous oral genres within EFL syllabi. Such integration would align with learner-centred and culturally responsive educational goals and help bridge the gap between formal education and learners' sociocultural environments (Gay, 2018). Incorporating local oral literature can also contribute to the preservation and valorization of indigenous cultural heritage.

18. Implications for Teacher Education and Training

Teacher education programs should equip future EFL teachers with the skills necessary to adapt indigenous texts for pedagogical use. Training in materials development, qualitative text analysis, and culturally responsive teaching strategies is essential for effective implementation (Benson, 2001). Professional development initiatives should also address potential challenges, such as curriculum constraints and assessment alignment.

19. Implications for Language Policy and Educational Equity

At the policy level, the recognition of indigenous oral literature as a pedagogical resource can contribute to more equitable and inclusive language education. By valuing local knowledge alongside global languages, educational systems can move toward decolonized pedagogical practices that respect learners' linguistic and cultural identities (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986).

20. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted in a limited number of secondary schools within an urban context, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly rural settings. Future studies could expand the geographical scope to include diverse educational contexts and learner populations.

Second, the study relied primarily on qualitative data, which provided in-depth insights into participants' perceptions and classroom practices but did not allow for the measurement of learning outcomes in quantitative terms. Further research could adopt mixed-methods or experimental designs to examine the impact of indigenous oral literature on specific language skills, such as vocabulary acquisition, speaking fluency, or listening comprehension.

Third, this study focused exclusively on Yaka dirges as a single oral genre. While this focus enabled a detailed analysis, other indigenous oral forms—such as folktales, proverbs, praise poetry, and epic narratives—also warrant investigation. Comparative studies across different genres and ethnolinguistic groups could enrich understanding of the pedagogical potential of African oral literature in EFL contexts.

Finally, future research could explore teachers' professional development needs and institutional constraints related to the integration of indigenous texts into formal curricula. Longitudinal studies examining sustained classroom implementation would also provide valuable insights into the long-term effectiveness of culturally responsive EFL pedagogy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Conclusion

This study examined the pedagogical potential of integrating Yaka dirges into English as a Foreign Language Teaching in Congolese secondary schools. Drawing on qualitative data from textual analysis, classroom observations, and interviews, the findings demonstrate that indigenous oral literature constitutes a rich linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical resource for EFL teaching. The study showed that Yaka dirges offer valuable opportunities for developing vocabulary, listening and speaking skills, and intercultural awareness through culturally familiar and emotionally engaging content. By connecting English language learning to learners' sociocultural identities, the integration of indigenous oral literature fosters increased motivation, participation, and communicative confidence. These findings support the principles of communicative, learner-centred, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

By foregrounding indigenous oral literature within EFL instruction, this study contributes to ongoing debates on the decolonization of education and the recognition of local knowledge systems in language teaching. The paper concludes that the meaningful integration of culturally grounded texts such as Yaka dirges can enhance both linguistic development and cultural affirmation, thereby promoting more inclusive and effective EFL education in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and comparable contexts.

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