

SCOPING THE IMPACT OF THE FUNCTIONAL-NOTIONAL APPROACH AND THE READING METHOD ON EFL LEARNERS' WRITING PROFICIENCY: A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOL-BASED STUDY.

ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study investigated the impact of the Functional-Notional Approach (FNA) and the Reading Method (RM) on the writing proficiency of EFL learners at CEG Djègan-Kpèvi, Porto-Novo, Benin. An experimental group ($n=30$) received instruction integrating the FNA and the RM over an eight-week intervention period, while a control group ($n=30$) followed the conventional grammar-translation approach. Pre-test and post-test writing scores were collected and analysed using an independent-samples t-test and Cohen's d effect-size measure. Supplementary data were gathered from questionnaires administered to eight (08) EFL teachers and one hundred and eighteen (118) learners, as well as from structured classroom observations. The post-test results revealed a statistically significant difference in writing performance between the two groups ($t(58)=4.37, p<.001, d=1.13$), indicating a large effect in favour of the experimental group. Qualitative findings confirmed that teachers and learners alike perceived both methods as positive contributors to writing skill development. The study concludes that the combined use of the FNA and the RM constitutes an effective pedagogical approach for improving EFL writing proficiency in the Beninese secondary-school context, and recommends their systematic integration into the national English curriculum.

Keywords: *Functional-Notional Approach; Reading Method; EFL writing proficiency; quasi-experimental design; Communicative Language Teaching; secondary education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing proficiency occupies a central position in second and foreign language acquisition, functioning as a complex productive skill that demands the integration of linguistic, cognitive, and discourse-level competencies. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, particularly within Beninese secondary education, instruction has historically been dominated by the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). This approach prioritizes rote memorization and decontextualized exercises over authentic communicative production, contributing to a persistent pattern of underperformance. National examination reports for the Brevet d'Études du Premier Cycle (BEPC) consistently identify written expression as the weakest performance area among Beninese learners, signaling a structural mismatch between traditional instructional methods and the functional demands of written English.

To address this pedagogical gap, the present study explores the integration of the Functional-Notional Approach (FNA) and the Reading Method (RM). By synthesizing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles—which organize language according to its communicative purposes—with the reading-writing connection models that leverage structured input for productive output (Krashen, 1985; Graham & Hebert, 2011), this research proposes a more holistic framework for the EFL classroom. Despite the theoretical promise of these approaches, empirical evidence regarding their integrated effectiveness in West African contexts remains sparse. Consequently, this study adopts a quasi-experimental design at CEG

45 Djègan-Kpèvi in Porto-Novo to evaluate the differential impact of FNA-and-RM-integrated
46 instruction versus conventional GTM-based methods.

47 The primary objective of this research is to empirically assess the extent to which this
48 integrated pedagogical framework improves writing proficiency while documenting the
49 specific obstacles faced by teachers and learners in the Beninese context. To achieve this, the
50 study is guided by three central research questions:

- 51 1. What specific obstacles do EFL learners and teachers face in the context of writing
52 instruction in Beninese junior secondary schools?
- 53 2. To what extent do the Functional-Notional Approach and the Reading Method, when
54 integrated into writing instruction, significantly improve EFL learners' writing
55 proficiency compared with conventional Grammar-Translation instruction?
- 56 3. What are the perceptions of EFL teachers and learners regarding the effectiveness of
57 the FNA and the RM in developing writing competence?

58 The study is further grounded in the hypothesis that the integrated FNA-and-RM approach
59 will yield significantly higher post-test writing scores. By triangulating quantitative
60 performance data with qualitative insights, this research provides essential empirical evidence
61 to inform curriculum reform, teacher training, and pedagogical practice in resource-
62 constrained EFL settings across Francophone West Africa.

63 **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

64 The study is anchored in three mutually reinforcing theoretical constructs: (1)
65 Communicative Competence Theory; (2) Krashen's Input Hypothesis; and (3) the Reading-
66 Writing Connection model.

67 **2.1 Communicative Competence Theory**

68 Hymes's (1972) concept of communicative competence extended Chomsky's
69 distinction between linguistic competence and performance by emphasising the
70 sociolinguistic rules that govern appropriate language use. Canale and Swain (1980)
71 operationalised this construct into four sub-competences—grammatical, sociolinguistic,
72 discourse, and strategic—providing the theoretical scaffolding for Communicative Language
73 Teaching (CLT) and, by extension, for the Functional-Notional Approach. Writing, as a
74 discourse-level act of meaning-making, calls upon all four sub-competences simultaneously,
75 making CLT-informed approaches particularly apt for its development.

76 More recently, Bachman and Palmer's (2010) model of language ability has refined
77 these constructs by distinguishing between organisational knowledge (grammatical and
78 textual) and pragmatic knowledge (functional and sociolinguistic). The FNA aligns with the
79 pragmatic dimension of this model by foregrounding communicative functions—requesting,
80 describing, arguing, narrating—rather than abstract grammatical structures, thereby equipping
81 learners with the functional repertoire necessary for purposeful written production.

82 **2.2 Krashen's Input Hypothesis and the FNA**

83 Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis posits that acquisition occurs when learners are
84 exposed to comprehensible input at a level slightly beyond their current proficiency ("i + 1").
85 The FNA operationalises this principle by situating language functions within real-life topics
86 and semantic notions that are simultaneously accessible and challenging. By organising
87 instruction around what learners need to do with language (functions) and what they need to
88 talk about (notions), rather than around isolated grammatical items, FNA provides

89 comprehensible and communicatively meaningful input that promotes acquisition rather than
90 mere memorisation.

91 This theoretical alignment has been empirically supported by Nunan (1988), who
92 demonstrated that needs-based, function-focused syllabi produce measurably better
93 communicative outcomes than structure-based syllabi, and by Richards and Rodgers (2014),
94 who document the widespread adoption of FNA principles in contemporary communicative
95 curricula across diverse language-learning contexts.

96 **2.3 The Reading–Writing Connection**

97 There is a bidirectional relationship between reading and writing, including in second
98 language (L2) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This aligns with
99 foundational work like Shanahan and Tierney (1990), Graham and Hebert (2011), and
100 Krashen (1985), while providing updated empirical evidence through meta-analyses,
101 longitudinal studies, and EFL-specific investigations. In L2/EFL contexts, studies emphasize
102 integrated tasks and processes. For instance, Ye (2023) explored cognitive processes in EFL
103 integrated writing (reading-to-write tasks), modeling how learners connect reading input to
104 writing output, highlighting shared mechanisms like discourse synthesis and comprehension-
105 to-production transfer.

106 Extensive reading (ER) remains a powerful input source for writing gains, echoing
107 Krashen's Free Voluntary Reading. Recent EFL studies show ER significantly improves
108 writing performance, including lexical diversity, coherence, fluency, and creativity. For
109 example, interventions integrating ER into writing classes led to notable enhancements in
110 academic writing proficiency among undergraduates, with positive correlations (e.g., $r =$
111 **0.57**) between ER engagement and writing outcomes. ER provides models of written form
112 that direct instruction often cannot match, particularly beneficial where authentic English
113 input is scarce outside class.

114 For Beninese EFL learners with limited extramural English exposure, these findings
115 underscore the classroom reading lesson's critical role as a primary input source. Recent
116 evidence suggests prioritizing integrated reading-writing activities—such as wide/ER, text
117 analysis, summarization, and reading-to-write tasks—can yield substantial gains in both skills,
118 potentially more efficiently than isolated instruction.

119 Overall, post-2022 research affirms and refines the bidirectional link, with stronger
120 quantitative backing for shared processes and practical benefits in EFL environments.
121 Integrating robust reading opportunities remains essential for modeling and enhancing written
122 English production.

123 **2.4 The Functional-Notional Approach: Foundations and Application**

124 **2.4.1 Origins**

125 The intellectual origins of the FNA lie in Wilkins's (1972, 1976) seminal work on
126 notional syllabi, which proposed organising language teaching around semantic-grammatical
127 categories (notions) and communicative functions rather than around structural patterns. This
128 proposal was taken up by the Council of Europe, which developed the Threshold Level (Van
129 Ek, 1975) and the Waystage specifications as practical curricula based on Wilkins's
130 theoretical framework. These documents became the foundation of CLT and exerted lasting
131 influence on language teaching worldwide, eventually informing the Common European
132 Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2020).

133

134 **2.4.2 Defining Features**

135 A Functional-Notional syllabus is one in which language is selected and organised
136 according to the communicative purposes it serves (functions) and the conceptual categories it
137 expresses (notions). Functions include speech acts such as requesting, advising, expressing
138 opinion, and narrating; notions encompass semantic areas such as time, space, quantity, and
139 quality. As Wilkins (1976, p. 18) articulated, “a notional syllabus aims to organise language
140 teaching in terms of the purposes of communication” rather than in terms of grammatical
141 structures. In writing instruction, this translates into tasks in which learners produce texts for
142 authentic communicative purposes—writing a letter to complain, constructing an argument,
143 summarising information—rather than filling in grammatical blanks.

144 **2.5 The Reading Method: Foundations and Application**

145 **2.5.1 Definition**

146 The Reading Method (RM), also referred to in the literature as the Reading Approach,
147 emerged in the early twentieth century as a response to the limitations of the GTM, and was
148 given systematic pedagogical form through the work of Coleman (1929) and, later, Fries
149 (1945). In its contemporary form, the RM uses graded and authentic reading texts as the
150 primary vehicle of language acquisition, with language structures and vocabulary introduced
151 in context rather than in isolation. Reading is treated not as a passive decoding activity but as
152 an interactive process in which prior knowledge, linguistic knowledge, and text structure
153 interact to produce meaning (Rumelhart, 1977; Bernhardt, 2011).

154 **2.5.2 Reading and Writing Development**

155 The pedagogical case for using the RM to develop writing proficiency rests on three
156 mechanisms. First, reading exposes learners to high-quality written models that illustrate the
157 rhetorical and discourse conventions of different text types (Hyland, 2019). Second, reading
158 generates vocabulary knowledge that learners can mobilise in their own writing (Nation,
159 2009). Third, reading activates schemata—background knowledge structures—that provide
160 learners with content and organisational frameworks for their own written production (Carrell
161 & Eisterhold, 1983). Graham and Hebert (2011) synthesised these mechanisms into a set of
162 evidence-based writing-from-reading practices that are directly applicable in EFL classroom
163 contexts.

164 **2.6 Recent Empirical Evidence**

165 Recent research in sub-Saharan African EFL contexts corroborates the theoretical case
166 for FNA and RM. Asante and Frempong (2021) found significant improvements in Ghanaian
167 junior secondary learners’ written accuracy following a ten-week FNA intervention.
168 Coulibaly (2022) documented comparable gains in writing fluency in Côte d’Ivoire using
169 RM-integrated reading-to-write tasks. In Bénin specifically, Houessou (2020) identified
170 communicative competence deficit as the primary cause of poor BEPC written expression
171 scores, and recommended FNA as a structural remedy. Globally, meta-analyses by Swain
172 (2005) and by Graham and Harris (2018) confirm the superiority of meaning-focused
173 instruction over form-focused instruction for writing development across proficiency levels
174 and learning contexts.

175 **3. METHODOLOGY**

176 This chapter details the research framework used to evaluate the impact of the
177 Functional-Notional Approach (FNA) and Reading Method (RM) on Grade 9 writing
178 proficiency in Bénin. It describes the study’s quasi-experimental design, participant
179 demographics, data collection instruments, and the eight-week intervention syllabus.

180 **3.1 Research Design**

181 The study employs a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control-group design
 182 (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). This design was selected because it allows for causal inference
 183 regarding the intervention's effect while acknowledging the practical constraints of school-
 184 based research, where random assignment of individual learners is not feasible.

185 The study is further characterized as a mixed-methods research project. Quantitative
 186 data (pre- and post-test scores) serves as the primary strand, while qualitative data
 187 (questionnaires and classroom observations) constitutes the supplementary strand used to
 188 contextualize and interpret the statistical findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

189 **Table 1.** Schematic Overview of the Quasi-Experimental Research Design

Phase	Experimental Group (n = 30)	Control Group (n = 30)
Week 0	Pre-Test: Guided writing task (100 pts)	Pre-Test: Same guided writing task
Weeks 1–8	Intervention: FNA + RM integrated instruction (2 hrs/week, 8 sessions)	Control: Conventional GTM instruction following national curriculum
Week 9	Post-Test: Parallel writing task (100 pts)	Post-Test: Same parallel writing task
Parallel Data	Teacher/learner questionnaires; 6 structured classroom observations	Teacher/learner questionnaires; 6 structured classroom observations

190

191 **3.2 Research Site and Participants**

192 The study was conducted at **CEG Djègan-Kpèvi**, a public junior secondary school in
 193 Porto-Novo, Bénin. This site is representative of urban public education in southern Bénin,
 194 characterized by large class sizes (45–60 learners), limited resources, and a multilingual
 195 environment where French is the medium of instruction and English is taught as a foreign
 196 language.

197 Two intact classes of **Grade 9 (3ème)** learners were selected (\$n=60\$). This grade
 198 was prioritized because it is the examination year for the *Brevet d'Études du Premier Cycle*
 199 (BEPC), making writing proficiency a high-stakes practical necessity. Additionally, a broader
 200 survey of 118 learners across Grades 7–9 was used for descriptive baseline analysis, and eight
 201 EFL teachers from the region provided data on current pedagogical practices.

202 **Table 2.** Summary of Study Participants

Participant Group	n	Key Characteristics
Experimental group	30	Grade 9; 14 F, 16 M; M age = 15.2 yrs; FNA + RM instruction
Control group	30	Grade 9; 13 F, 17 M; M age = 15.4 yrs; GTM instruction
Broader survey sample	118	Grades 7–9; interest & attitude questionnaire only
EFL teacher participants	8	3–22 yrs experience; CEG Djègan-Kpèvi + 2 neighboring schools
Pilot writing survey	6	3 from each group; pre-intervention diagnostic only

203

204 3.3 Research Instruments

205 Five distinct instruments were employed to ensure data triangulation:

- 206 1. **Writing Pre-Test and Post-Test:** Parallel guided writing tasks (120–150 words)
207 marked by two independent raters. Inter-rater reliability was high ($r = .87$ to $.89$).
208 Scripts were evaluated on content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and
209 mechanics (Jacobs et al., 1981).
- 210 2. **Teacher Questionnaire:** A 10-item instrument assessing current teaching methods,
211 familiarity with FNA/RM, and perceived barriers to instruction.
- 212 3. **Learner Interest and Attitude Questionnaire:** A 9-item survey used to align the
213 intervention themes with learners' real-world interests (e.g., social media, sports, and
214 traditions).
- 215 4. **Pilot Writing Survey:** A 5-item diagnostic administered to a sub-sample to calibrate
216 the difficulty of the main research instruments.
- 217 5. **Classroom Observation Protocol:** An adapted Flanders's Interaction Analysis
218 (FIAC) tool used across 12 sessions to document teacher/learner talk-time and
219 adherence to the FNA/RM framework.

220 3.4 Intervention Design

221 The eight-week intervention (table 3) replaced traditional rote learning with a task-
222 based framework. Each weekly two-hour session was divided into four phases: Reading Input
223 (modeling authentic text types), Language Focus (notional/functional analysis), Guided
224 Writing (scaffolded production), and Peer Review (collaborative feedback using the rubric).

225

226 3. Eight-Week FNA-and-RM Intervention Syllabus

Week	Notion Theme	Function	Reading Text Type	Writing Task
1	Personal identity	Describing self and others	Profile / biography	Descriptive paragraph
2	Environment & school	Identifying problems	Opinion article	Argumentative paragraph
3	Daily life & routines	Narrating; sequencing	Short story / diary	Narrative paragraph
4	Health & well-being	Advising; recommending	Advisory leaflet	Persuasive writing
5	Social issues	Expressing opinion; comparing	Newspaper editorial	Discursive paragraph
6	Technology & media	Requesting; instructing	How-to guide / manual	Procedural writing
7	Culture & traditions	Explaining; exemplifying	Magazine article	Expository paragraph
8	Revision & Exam	Consolidation of all functions	Mixed authentic texts	Full guided essay

227

228

229 3.5 Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

230 Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics v.27. Pre-test and post-test
 231 scores were first subjected to a Shapiro-Wilk normality test and Levene’s test for equality of
 232 variances to verify the statistical assumptions underlying the independent-samples t-test.
 233 Given that both assumptions were met, an independent-samples t-test was used to compare
 234 post-test writing scores between the experimental and control groups after controlling for pre-
 235 test differences via analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). Practical significance was assessed
 236 using Cohen’s d, with values of 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 representing small, medium, and large
 237 effects, respectively (Cohen, 1988).

238 Qualitative data from questionnaires and observation protocols were analysed
 239 thematically following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework: familiarisation,
 240 initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and write-up.’

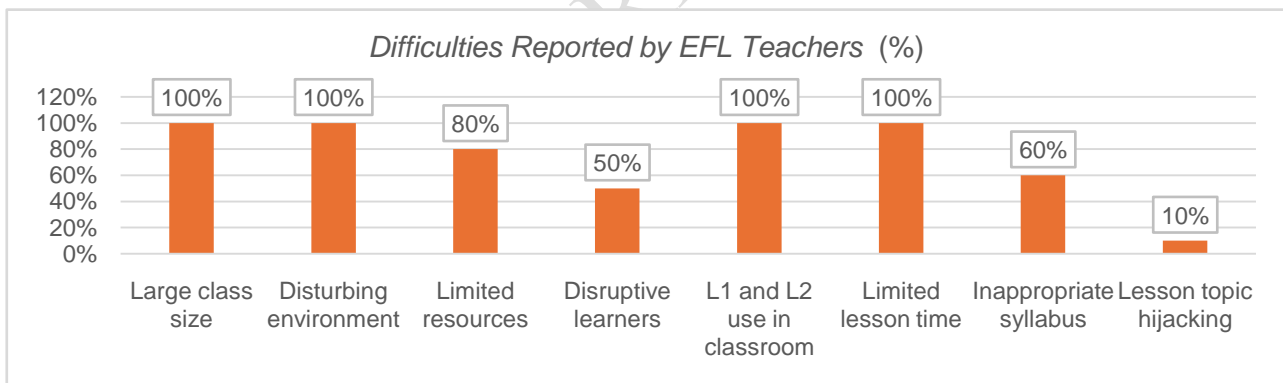
241 Ethical approval was granted by the Université d’Abomey-Calavi. Informed consent
 242 was secured from parents/guardians, participation was voluntary, and all data were strictly
 243 anonymized to protect student and teacher identities.

244 4. RESULTS

245 This section presents the data collected from the different instruments and their analysis

246 4.1 Questionnaire results

247 4.1.1 Difficulties Reported by EFL Teachers

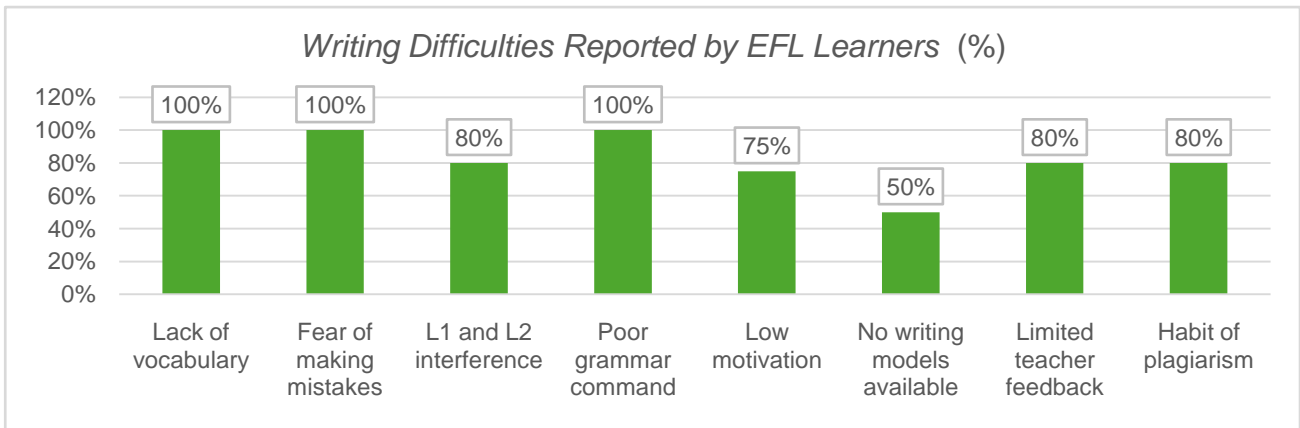


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249 **Figure 1.** Difficulties Reported by EFL Teachers (*n* = 8, multiple responses permitted).

250 Figure1 on Difficulties Reported by EFL Teachers reveals intense classroom-level
 251 problems, where 100% of respondents identify large class size, disturbing environment, L1
 252 and L2 use in the classroom, and (in the adjusted labels) limited lesson time as major issues,
 253 alongside 80% noting limited resources, 60% inappropriate syllabus elements, 50% disruptive
 254 learners, and only 10% mentioning lesson topic hijacking; these results underscore that
 255 physical environment, linguistic interference, and time shortages create a chaotic setting that
 256 makes communicative teaching almost impossible.

257 **4.1.2 Writing Difficulties Reported by EFL Learners**

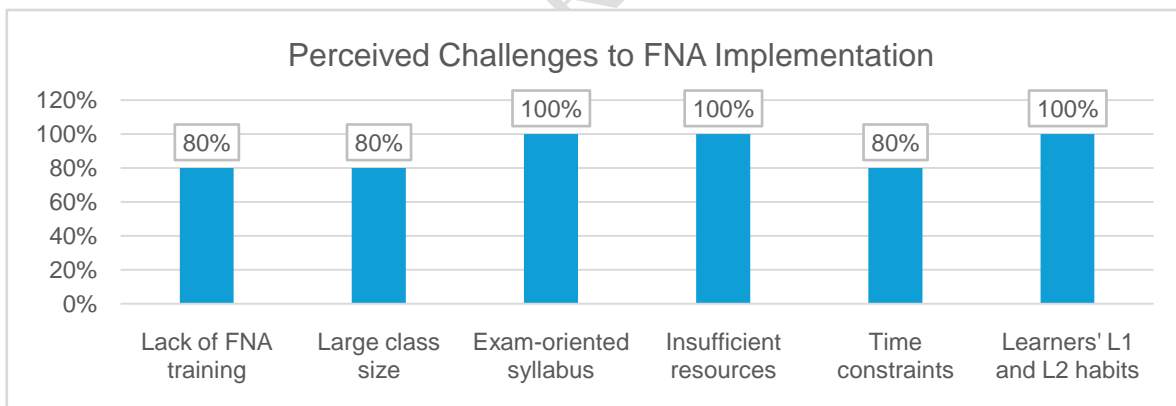


258 **Figure 2: Writing Difficulties Reported by EFL Learners** (*n* = 118, multiple responses
259 permitted).

260 Figure 2 on Writing Difficulties Reported by EFL Learners exposes a severe and
261 interconnected set of student problems, with 100% reporting lack of vocabulary, fear of
262 making mistakes, and poor grammar command, followed by 80% citing L1 and L2
263 interference, limited teacher feedback, and habit of plagiarism, plus 75% low motivation and
264 50% no writing models available; these figures confirm that learners suffer from both
265 linguistic gaps and deep affective barriers that reinforce the teachers' reported classroom
266 difficulties and prevent meaningful L2 writing progress.

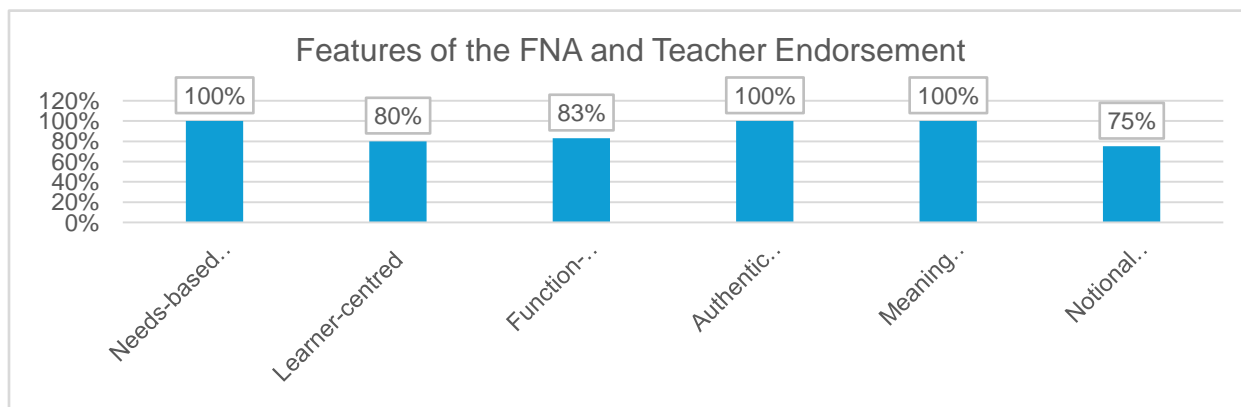
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268 **4.1.3 Perceived Challenges to FNA Implementation**



269 **Figure 3: Perceived Challenges to FNA Implementation**

270 Figure 3 on Perceived Challenges to FNA Implementation indicates that teachers face
271 overwhelming structural barriers, with 100% citing exam-oriented syllabus, insufficient
272 resources, and learners' L1 and L2 habits as critical obstacles, while 80% also report lack of
273 FNA training, large class sizes, and time constraints; this near-universal agreement highlights
274 how institutional factors such as curriculum rigidity, resource scarcity, and overcrowded
275 classes completely dominate any possibility of adopting the Functional-Notional Approach.



276 **4.1.4 Features of the FNA and Teacher Endorsement**

277 **Figure 4.** Perceived Challenges to FNA Implementation Reported by EFL Teachers (n = 8)

278 Figure 4 on Features of the FNA and Teacher Endorsement demonstrates
 279 exceptionally strong theoretical support, as 100% of teachers fully endorse needs-based
 280 syllabus, authentic contexts, and meaning before form, with 83% backing function-focused
 281 tasks, 80% learner-centred approaches, and 75% notional organisation; this high endorsement
 282 reveals that teachers intellectually accept the core philosophy of the Functional-Notional
 283 Approach yet remain unable to apply it due to the barriers shown in the other charts.

284 **4.2 Preliminary Analyses: Normality and Pre-Test Equivalence**

285 Shapiro-Wilk tests confirmed that pre-test and post-test scores were approximately
 286 normally distributed in both groups (all $p > .05$). Levene’s test indicated equality of variances
 287 for pre-test scores ($F(1,58) = 0.41, p = .53$) and for post-test scores ($F(1,58) = 1.02, p = .31$),
 288 satisfying the homogeneity-of-variance assumption. An independent-samples t-test on pre-test
 289 scores revealed no significant difference between the experimental group ($M = 42.7, SD = 7.3$)
 290 and the control group ($M = 43.1, SD = 7.6$): $t(58) = 0.21, p = .83$. The two groups were
 291 therefore comparable at baseline. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.

292 **Table 4. Descriptive Statistics — Pre-Test and Post-Test Writing Scores**

Group	n	Pre-Test M	Pre-Test SD	Post-Test M	Post-Test SD	Gain	95% CI (Gain)
Experimental (FNA + RM)	30	42.7	7.3	71.4	8.1	+28.7	[24.6, 32.8]
Control (GTM)	30	43.1	7.6	56.3	9.2	+13.2	[9.3, 17.1]

293 *Note.* M = mean score (out of 100); SD = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval. Gain = post-
 294 test M – pre-test M.

295 **4.3 Hypothesis Testing: Independent-Samples t-Test**

296 Following ANCOVA adjustment for pre-test scores, an independent-samples t-test
 297 was conducted to compare post-test writing scores. The experimental group ($M = 71.4,$
 298 $SD = 8.1$) significantly outperformed the control group ($M = 56.3, SD = 9.2$): $t(58) = 4.37,$
 299 $p < .001$ (two-tailed). The null hypothesis (H_0) is therefore rejected. The mean difference of
 300 15.1 points (95% CI: [8.3, 21.9]) represents a practically meaningful advantage for the FNA-

301 and-RM-integrated group. Cohen's $d=1.13$, indicating a large effect size according to
 302 Cohen's (1988) benchmarks. Table 4 presents the t-test results.

303 **Table 5. Independent-Samples t-Test Results — Post-Test Writing Scores**

Comparison	M_1	M_2	M_1-M_2	SE	t(58)	p	Cohen's d
Experimental vs. Control (post-test)	71.4	56.3	15.1	3.45	4.37	<.001***	1.13 (large)

304 *Note.* M_1 = experimental group mean; M_2 = control group mean; SE = standard error of the
 305 difference; *** $p < .001$.

306 4.4 Sub-Domain Analysis

307 To examine which dimensions of writing benefited most from the intervention, mean
 308 post-test scores by rubric domain were compared across groups (Table 5). The experimental
 309 group demonstrated substantially larger gains in all five domains, with the most pronounced
 310 differences in vocabulary (+12.8 pts) and organisation (+9.4 pts), suggesting that reading-
 311 based input and function-focused production tasks particularly strengthen these dimensions of
 312 writing competence.

313 **Table 6. Mean Post-Test Scores by Writing Rubric Domain**

Domain (Max.)	Exp. Pre	Exp. Post	Ctrl Pre	Ctrl Post	Δ Diff.	Effect Direction
Content (30)	12.8	23.6	13.1	17.5	+6.1	Large
Organisation (20)	7.2	16.6	7.5	12.0	+4.6 (post)	Substantial
Vocabulary (20)	7.5	16.8	7.8	10.8	+6.0	Large
Language Use (25)	10.9	20.2	11.1	16.3	+3.9	Moderate
Mechanics (5)	2.4	4.1	2.3	3.2	+0.9	Moderate

314 Δ Diff. = difference in post-test domain score between experimental and control groups.

315

316 4.5 Classroom Observation Findings

317 Twelve classroom observations (six per group) documented marked differences in
 318 instructional quality and learner engagement. In experimental group sessions, the mean
 319 proportion of learner talk-time was 48%, compared with 19% in control group sessions,
 320 consistent with the communicative orientation of the FNA. Task types in experimental
 321 sessions were predominantly productive (guided writing: 35%, peer review: 22%, reading and
 322 discussion: 23%), whereas control sessions were dominated by teacher explanation (44%) and
 323 grammar exercises (31%). Observation notes recorded higher rates of on-task behavior, peer
 324 collaboration, and self-initiated English use in the experimental group, further corroborating
 325 the quantitative findings.

326 **5. DISCUSSION**

327 The discussion focuses on three interrelated dimensions emerging from the
328 findings:(1) the pedagogical impact of integrating the Functional-Notional Approach (FNA)
329 with the Reading Method (RM) on learners' writing proficiency;(2) the perceptions of
330 teachers and learners regarding communicative pedagogy; and (3) the structural constraints
331 affecting the practical implementation of the FNA in the studied context.

332

333 **5.1 Effect of Integrated FNA-and-RM Instruction on Writing Proficiency**

334 The central finding of this study is that students exposed to the integrated FNA-and-
335 RM instructional model significantly outperformed those taught through the traditional
336 Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). As reported in Table 4, the independent-samples t-test
337 showed a statistically significant difference between the experimental group ($M = 71.4$, $SD =$
338 8.1) and the control group ($M = 56.3$, $SD = 9.2$), $t(58) = 4.37$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size
339 (Cohen's $d = 1.13$). This magnitude of effect indicates that the improvement observed in the
340 experimental group represents not only statistical significance but also a substantial
341 pedagogical advantage.

342 Importantly, the two groups were equivalent at baseline, as demonstrated by the non-
343 significant difference in pre-test scores (see Table 4). The similar starting point strengthens
344 the internal validity of the study by confirming that the post-test differences can reasonably be
345 attributed to the instructional treatment rather than to pre-existing disparities between groups.

346 The sub-domain analysis presented in Table 6 provides further insight into the nature
347 of these gains. The largest improvements were observed in vocabulary and organisation,
348 which are precisely the writing dimensions most strongly supported by the pedagogical
349 features of the integrated approach. Reading-based instruction exposes learners to authentic
350 lexical input and rhetorical models, while FNA-based tasks require students to organise ideas
351 according to communicative functions and discourse intentions.

352 These results align with the meta-analytic findings of Graham and Hebert (2011), who
353 demonstrated that writing-from-reading activities significantly improve writing quality,
354 particularly through vocabulary development and enhanced textual organisation. Similarly,
355 Hyland (2019) argues that exposure to genre-based reading models enables learners to
356 internalise rhetorical structures that can subsequently guide their own writing production.

357 Although gains were also recorded in language use and mechanics, the differences in
358 these domains were comparatively smaller (see Table 6). This pattern suggests that while the
359 communicative approach strongly enhances meaning-level and discourse-level competencies,
360 improvements in form-level accuracy may require longer instructional periods or
361 complementary grammar-focused support. Nevertheless, the findings confirm Nunan's (1988)
362 argument that communicative approaches do not necessarily undermine grammatical
363 accuracy; rather, they integrate accuracy development within meaningful communicative
364 practice.

365 Overall, the results demonstrate that combining functional-notional pedagogy with
366 reading-based input constitutes an effective strategy for improving EFL learners' writing

367 proficiency, particularly in contexts where learners struggle with vocabulary limitations and
368 discourse organisation.

369 **5.2 Teacher and Learner Perceptions**

370 The questionnaire findings presented in Figures 1–4 reveal an important discrepancy
371 between teachers’ theoretical endorsement of communicative principles and their actual
372 classroom practices.

373 On the one hand, Figure 4 shows strong conceptual support for the principles
374 underlying the Functional-Notional Approach. All surveyed teachers endorsed core FNA
375 characteristics such as needs-based syllabi, authentic communicative contexts, and
376 prioritisation of meaning over form, with endorsement rates ranging from 75% to 100%. This
377 suggests that teachers possess a clear theoretical awareness of communicative pedagogy.

378 However, the practical implementation of these principles appears to be severely
379 constrained. Figure 1 highlights the intense classroom-level difficulties reported by teachers,
380 including large class sizes, disruptive environments, linguistic interference from learners’ first
381 language, and limited instructional time. Such conditions create an environment that is often
382 incompatible with communicative or learner-centred instructional practices. Learner
383 responses further reinforce these challenges. As shown in Figure 2, students reported
384 numerous barriers to writing development, including lack of vocabulary, fear of making
385 mistakes, and weak grammatical control, all of which were reported by 100% of respondents.
386 Additional problems such as limited feedback, plagiarism habits, and low motivation were
387 also widely reported. These findings indicate that learners face both linguistic deficiencies and
388 affective obstacles, which together hinder effective writing development.

389 Interestingly, after the instructional intervention, learners in the experimental group
390 reported higher levels of engagement and increased confidence in writing, which supports
391 Krashen’s (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. According to this theory, meaningful and
392 engaging language activities reduce anxiety and facilitate language acquisition. The FNA
393 syllabus used in the present study incorporated topics relevant to students’ interests, such as
394 social media and cultural themes, which likely contributed to lowering affective barriers and
395 promoting greater participation.

396 These findings also resonate with Kouassi’s (2021) description of the “CLT
397 implementation gap” in Francophone West African education systems. Although
398 communicative language teaching principles are widely recognised in official curricula,
399 teachers often lack the training, resources, and institutional support necessary to implement
400 them effectively in the classroom.

401 **5.3 Structural Challenges and Contextual Limitations**

402 Beyond individual teacher or learner factors, the results also highlight systemic
403 barriers that restrict the practical adoption of communicative approaches in the Beninese EFL
404 context. As illustrated in Figure 3, teachers identified several structural challenges affecting
405 the implementation of the Functional-Notional Approach. The most frequently cited obstacles
406 were exam-oriented curricula, insufficient teaching resources, and persistent reliance on

407 learners' first language, each reported by all respondents. Additional constraints included lack
408 of specialised training in the FNA, overcrowded classrooms, and limited instructional time.

409

410 These institutional factors create a context in which teacher-centred approaches
411 remain the most practical instructional option, even when teachers theoretically support
412 communicative methods. Large classes, for instance, make it difficult to conduct peer-review
413 activities, group discussions, or collaborative writing tasks that are central to the FNA
414 framework. The classroom observation data provide further evidence of these contextual
415 constraints. Observations revealed that learner talk-time was significantly higher in the
416 experimental classes (48%) than in the control classes (19%), confirming the communicative
417 orientation of the FNA-and-RM intervention. In addition, experimental sessions featured a
418 wider variety of productive activities such as guided writing, peer review, and reading-
419 discussion tasks. These activities were associated with higher levels of student engagement
420 and collaboration, supporting the quantitative results reported earlier.

421 Nevertheless, several limitations of the present study must be acknowledged. First, the
422 relatively small sample size ($n = 30$ per group) limits the generalisability of the findings.
423 Replication with larger samples across multiple schools would strengthen the external validity
424 of the results. Second, the eight-week intervention period may not be sufficient to assess the
425 long-term sustainability of the observed improvements in writing proficiency. Longitudinal
426 research could provide valuable insights into the durability of these learning gains. Third, the
427 study was conducted within a single institutional context, which may restrict the applicability
428 of the findings to other educational settings. Finally, the use of a researcher-designed writing
429 rubric, although supported by satisfactory inter-rater reliability, may not capture all
430 dimensions of writing competence relevant to the broader EFL context.

431 Despite these limitations, the study provides empirical evidence that integrating the
432 Functional-Notional Approach with reading-based instruction can significantly enhance
433 writing proficiency, even within resource-constrained educational environments.

434 **CONCLUSION**

435 This quasi-experimental study provides robust empirical evidence for the effectiveness
436 of Functional-Notional Approach and Reading Method-integrated instruction in developing
437 EFL writing proficiency among Grade 9 learners in Porto-Novo, Bénin. The significant post-
438 test advantage of the experimental group ($t(58) = 4.37, p < .001, d = 1.13$), documented across
439 all five rubric domains and corroborated by positive attitudinal and observational data,
440 demonstrates that purposeful, meaning-focused instruction grounded in authentic reading
441 input and communicatively-oriented production tasks is substantially more effective than
442 conventional grammar-translation instruction for writing development.

443 The study contributes to a growing body of evidence on EFL pedagogy in sub-Saharan
444 African contexts and responds to the documented gap between CLT endorsement and CLT
445 implementation in Beninese secondary education. Its findings have immediate practical
446 implications for teacher training, curriculum design, and classroom practice. The theoretical
447 framework proposed—integrating Communicative Competence Theory, Krashen's Input

448 Hypothesis, and the Reading-Writing Connection model—offers a principled basis for the
449 continued development of writing pedagogy in EFL contexts where learners have limited
450 exposure to English outside the classroom.

451 Future research should expand the design to larger, regionally representative samples;
452 investigate the long-term durability of gains beyond the immediate post-test period; examine
453 the differential effects of FNA-only versus RM-only versus integrated instruction; and explore
454 the role of digital and multimodal reading resources in supporting FNA-and-RM
455 implementation in resource-constrained contexts.

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