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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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

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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.

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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

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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 Djègan-Kpèvi in Porto-Novo to evaluate the differential impact of FNA-and-RM-integrated instruction versus conventional GTM-based methods. The primary objective of this research is to empirically assess the extent to which this integrated pedagogical framework improves writing proficiency while documenting the specific obstacles faced by teachers and learners in the Beninese context.

To achieve this, the study is guided by three central research questions:

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

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

Literature Review:-

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

Communicative Competence Theory:-

Hymes's (1972) concept of communicative competence extended Chomsky's distinction between linguistic competence and performance by emphasising the sociolinguistic rules that govern appropriate language use. Canale and Swain (1980) operationalised this construct into four sub-competences—grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic—providing the theoretical scaffolding for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and, by extension, for the Functional-Notional Approach. Writing, as a discourse-level act of meaning-making, calls upon all four sub-competences simultaneously, making CLT-informed approaches particularly apt for its development. More recently, Bachman and Palmer's (2010) model of language ability has refined these constructs by distinguishing between organisational knowledge (grammatical and textual) and pragmatic knowledge (functional and sociolinguistic). The FNA aligns with the pragmatic dimension of this model by foregrounding communicative functions—requesting, describing, arguing, narrating—rather than abstract grammatical structures, thereby equipping learners with the functional repertoire necessary for purposeful written production.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis and the FNA:-

Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis posits that acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input at a level slightly beyond their current proficiency ("i + 1"). The FNA operationalises this principle by situating language functions within real-life topics and semantic notions that are simultaneously accessible and challenging. By organising instruction around what learners need to do with language (functions) and what they need to talk about (notions), rather than around isolated grammatical items, FNA provides comprehensible and communicatively meaningful input that promotes acquisition rather than mere memorisation. This theoretical alignment has been empirically supported by Nunan (1988), who demonstrated that needs-based, function-focused syllabi produce measurably better communicative outcomes than structure-based syllabi, and by Richards and Rodgers (2014), who document the widespread adoption of FNA principles in contemporary communicative curricula across diverse language-learning contexts.

The Reading–Writing Connection:-

There is a bidirectional relationship between reading and writing, including in second language (L2) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This aligns with foundational work like Shanahan and Tierney (1990), Graham and Hebert (2011), and Krashen (1985), while providing updated empirical evidence through meta-analyses, longitudinal studies, and EFL-specific investigations. In L2/EFL contexts, studies emphasize integrated tasks and processes. For instance, Ye (2023) explored cognitive processes in EFL integrated writing (reading-to-write tasks), modeling how learners connect reading input to writing output, highlighting shared mechanisms like discourse synthesis and comprehension-to-production transfer. Extensive reading (ER) remains a powerful input source for writing gains, echoing Krashen's Free Voluntary Reading. Recent EFL studies show ER significantly improves writing performance, including lexical diversity, coherence, fluency, and creativity. For example, interventions integrating ER into writing classes led to notable enhancements in academic writing proficiency among undergraduates, with positive correlations (e.g., $r = 0.57$) between ER engagement and writing outcomes. ER provides models of written form that direct instruction often cannot match, particularly beneficial where authentic English input is scarce outside class.

For Beninese EFL learners with limited extramural English exposure, these findings underscore the classroom reading lesson's critical role as a primary input source. Recent evidence suggests prioritizing integrated reading-writing activities—such as wide/ER, text analysis, summarization, and reading-to-write tasks—can yield substantial gains in both skills, potentially more efficiently than isolated instruction. Overall, post-2022 research affirms and refines the bidirectional link, with stronger quantitative backing for shared processes and practical benefits in EFL environments. Integrating robust reading opportunities remains essential for modeling and enhancing written English production.

The Functional-Notional Approach: Foundations and Application:-**Origins:-**

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

Defining Features:-

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

The Reading Method: Foundations and Application:-**Definition:-**

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

Reading and Writing Development:-

The pedagogical case for using the RM to develop writing proficiency rests on three mechanisms. First, reading exposes learners to high-quality written models that illustrate the rhetorical and discourse conventions of different text types (Hyland, 2019). Second, reading generates vocabulary knowledge that learners can mobilise in their own

writing (Nation, 2009). Third, reading activates schemata—background knowledge structures—that provide learners with content and organisational frameworks for their own written production (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). Graham and Hebert (2011) synthesised these mechanisms into a set of evidence-based writing-from-reading practices that are directly applicable in EFL classroom contexts.

Recent Empirical Evidence:-

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

Methodology:-

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

Research Design:-

The study employs a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control-group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). This design was selected because it allows for causal inference regarding the intervention's effect while acknowledging the practical constraints of school-based research, where random assignment of individual learners is not feasible. The study is further characterized as a mixed-methods research project. Quantitative data (pre- and post-test scores) serves as the primary strand, while qualitative data (questionnaires and classroom observations) constitutes the supplementary strand used to contextualize and interpret the statistical findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

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

Research Site and Participants:-

The study was conducted at CEG Djègan-Kpèvi, a public junior secondary school in Porto-Novo, Bénin. This site is representative of urban public education in southern Bénin, characterized by large class sizes (45–60 learners), limited resources, and a multilingual environment where French is the medium of instruction and English is taught as a foreign language. Two intact classes of Grade 9 (3ème) learners were selected (N=60). This grade was prioritized because it is the examination year for the Brevet d'Études du Premier Cycle (BEPC), making writing proficiency a high-stakes practical necessity. Additionally, a broader survey of 118 learners across Grades 7–9 was used for descriptive baseline analysis, and eight EFL teachers from the region provided data on current pedagogical practices.

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

Research Instruments:-**Five distinct instruments were employed to ensure data triangulation:**

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

Intervention Design:-

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

Table 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

Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations:-

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics v.27. Pre-test and post-test scores were first subjected to a Shapiro-Wilk normality test and Levene's test for equality of variances to verify the statistical assumptions underlying the independent-samples t-test. Given that both assumptions were met, an independent-samples t-test was used to compare post-test writing scores between the experimental and control groups after controlling for pre-test differences via analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). Practical significance was assessed using Cohen's d , with values of 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 representing small, medium, and large effects, respectively (Cohen, 1988). Qualitative data from questionnaires and observation protocols were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarisation, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and write-up. Ethical approval was granted by the Université d'Abomey-Calavi. Informed consent was secured from parents/guardians, participation was voluntary, and all data were strictly anonymized to protect student and teacher identities.

Results:-

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

Questionnaire results:-

Difficulties Reported by EFL Teachers:-

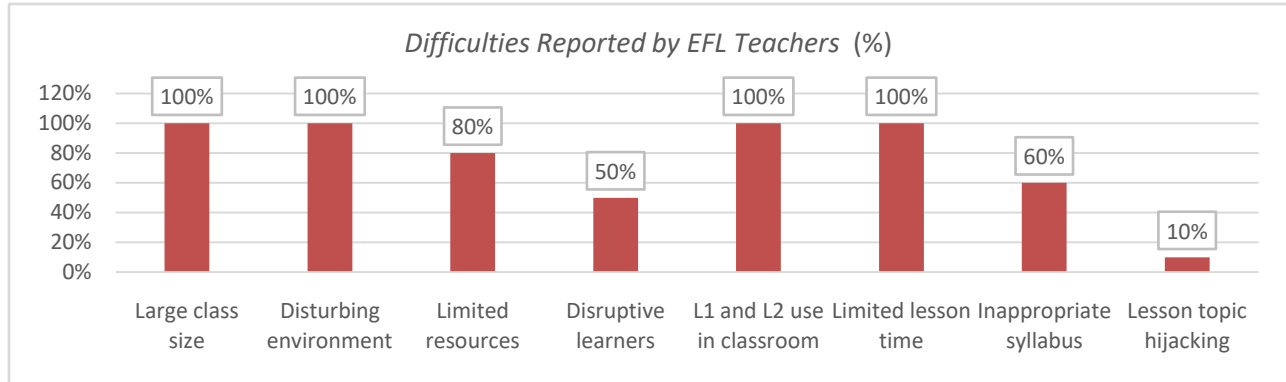


Figure 1. Difficulties Reported by EFL Teachers (n = 8, multiple responses permitted).

Figure 1 on Difficulties Reported by EFL Teachers reveals intense classroom-level problems, where 100% of respondents identify large class size, disturbing environment, L1 and L2 use in the classroom, and (in the adjusted labels) limited lesson time as major issues, alongside 80% noting limited resources, 60% inappropriate syllabus elements, 50% disruptive learners, and only 10% mentioning lesson topic hijacking; these results underscore that physical environment, linguistic interference, and time shortages create a chaotic setting that makes communicative teaching almost impossible.

Writing Difficulties Reported by EFL Learners:-

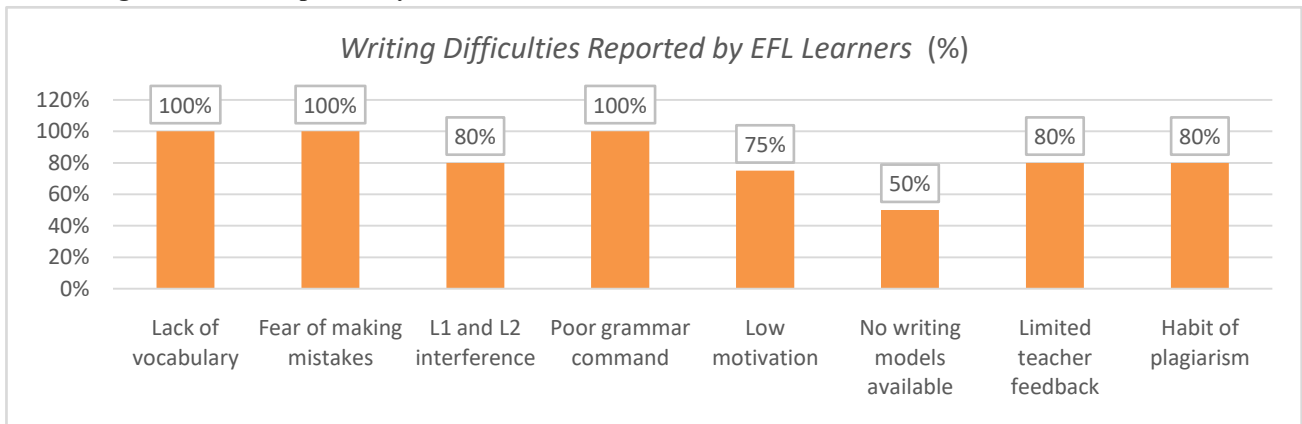


Figure 2: Writing Difficulties Reported by EFL Learners (n = 118, multiple responses permitted).

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

Perceived Challenges to FNA Implementation:-

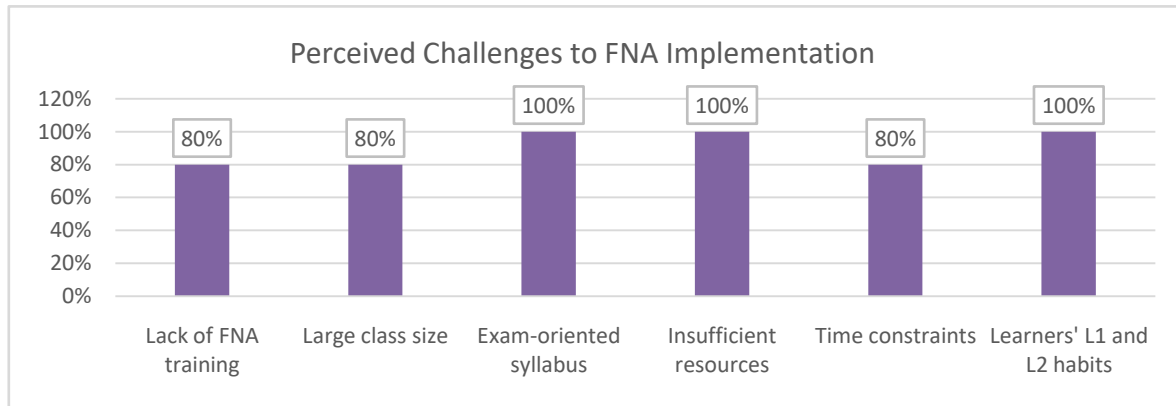


Figure 3: Perceived Challenges to FNA Implementation

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

Features of the FNA and Teacher Endorsement:-

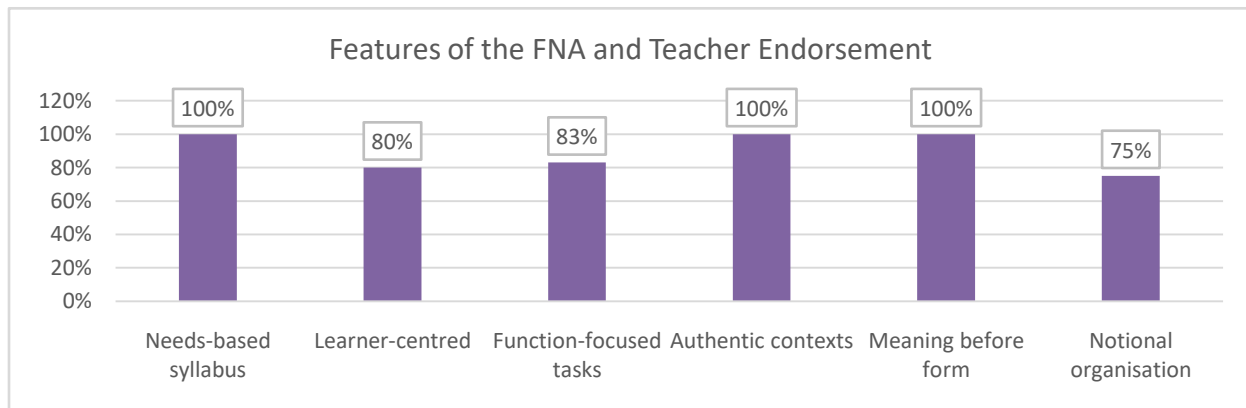


Figure 4. Perceived Challenges to FNA Implementation Reported by EFL Teachers (n = 8)

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

Preliminary Analyses: Normality and Pre-Test Equivalence:-

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

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]

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

Hypothesis Testing: Independent-Samples t-Test:-

Following ANCOVA adjustment for pre-test scores, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare post-test writing scores. The experimental group (M = 71.4, SD = 8.1) significantly outperformed the control group (M = 56.3, SD = 9.2): $t(58) = 4.37, p < .001$ (two-tailed). The null hypothesis (H_0) is therefore rejected. The mean difference of 15.1 points (95% CI: [8.3, 21.9]) represents a practically meaningful advantage for the FNA-and-RM-integrated group. Cohen’s $d = 1.13$, indicating a large effect size according to Cohen’s (1988) benchmarks. Table 4 presents the t-test results.

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)

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

Sub-Domain Analysis:-

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

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

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

Classroom Observation Findings:-

Twelve classroom observations (six per group) documented marked differences in instructional quality and learner engagement. In experimental group sessions, the mean proportion of learner talk-time was 48%, compared with 19% in control group sessions, consistent with the communicative orientation of the FNA. Task types in experimental sessions were predominantly productive (guided writing: 35%, peer review: 22%, reading and discussion: 23%), whereas control sessions were dominated by teacher explanation (44%) and grammar exercises (31%). Observation

notes recorded higher rates of on-task behavior, peer collaboration, and self-initiated English use in the experimental group, further corroborating the quantitative findings.

Discussion:-

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

Effect of Integrated FNA-and-RM Instruction on Writing Proficiency:-

The central finding of this study is that students exposed to the integrated FNA-and-RM instructional model significantly outperformed those taught through the traditional Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). As reported in Table 4, the independent-samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference between the experimental group ($M = 71.4$, $SD = 8.1$) and the control group ($M = 56.3$, $SD = 9.2$), $t(58) = 4.37$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.13$). This magnitude of effect indicates that the improvement observed in the experimental group represents not only statistical significance but also a substantial pedagogical advantage. Importantly, the two groups were equivalent at baseline, as demonstrated by the non-significant difference in pre-test scores (see Table 4). The similar starting point strengthens the internal validity of the study by confirming that the post-test differences can reasonably be attributed to the instructional treatment rather than to pre-existing disparities between groups. The sub-domain analysis presented in Table 6 provides further insight into the nature of these gains. The largest improvements were observed in vocabulary and organisation, which are precisely the writing dimensions most strongly supported by the pedagogical features of the integrated approach. Reading-based instruction exposes learners to authentic lexical input and rhetorical models, while FNA-based tasks require students to organise ideas according to communicative functions and discourse intentions.

These results align with the meta-analytic findings of Graham and Hebert (2011), who demonstrated that writing-from-reading activities significantly improve writing quality, particularly through vocabulary development and enhanced textual organisation. Similarly, Hyland (2019) argues that exposure to genre-based reading models enables learners to internalise rhetorical structures that can subsequently guide their own writing production. Although gains were also recorded in language use and mechanics, the differences in these domains were comparatively smaller (see Table 6). This pattern suggests that while the communicative approach strongly enhances meaning-level and discourse-level competencies, improvements in form-level accuracy may require longer instructional periods or complementary grammar-focused support. Nevertheless, the findings confirm Nunan's (1988) argument that communicative approaches do not necessarily undermine grammatical accuracy; rather, they integrate accuracy development within meaningful communicative practice. Overall, the results demonstrate that combining functional-notional pedagogy with reading-based input constitutes an effective strategy for improving EFL learners' writing proficiency, particularly in contexts where learners struggle with vocabulary limitations and discourse organisation.

Teacher and Learner Perceptions:-

The questionnaire findings presented in Figures 1–4 reveal an important discrepancy between teachers' theoretical endorsement of communicative principles and their actual classroom practices. On the one hand, Figure 4 shows strong conceptual support for the principles underlying the Functional-Notional Approach. All surveyed teachers endorsed core FNA characteristics such as needs-based syllabi, authentic communicative contexts, and prioritisation of meaning over form, with endorsement rates ranging from 75% to 100%. This suggests that teachers possess a clear theoretical awareness of communicative pedagogy. However, the practical implementation of these principles appears to be severely constrained. Figure 1 highlights the intense classroom-level difficulties reported by teachers, including large class sizes, disruptive environments, linguistic interference from learners' first language, and limited instructional time. Such conditions create an environment that is often incompatible with communicative or learner-centred instructional practices. Learner responses further reinforce these challenges. As shown in Figure 2, students reported numerous barriers to writing development, including lack of vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and weak grammatical control, all of which were reported by 100% of respondents. Additional problems such as limited feedback, plagiarism habits, and low motivation were also widely reported. These findings indicate that learners face both linguistic deficiencies and affective obstacles, which together hinder effective writing development.

Interestingly, after the instructional intervention, learners in the experimental group reported higher levels of engagement and increased confidence in writing, which supports Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. According to this theory, meaningful and engaging language activities reduce anxiety and facilitate language acquisition. The FNA syllabus used in the present study incorporated topics relevant to students' interests, such as social media and cultural themes, which likely contributed to lowering affective barriers and promoting greater participation. These findings also resonate with Kouassi's (2021) description of the "CLT implementation gap" in Francophone West African education systems. Although communicative language teaching principles are widely recognised in official curricula, teachers often lack the training, resources, and institutional support necessary to implement them effectively in the classroom.

Structural Challenges and Contextual Limitations:-

Beyond individual teacher or learner factors, the results also highlight systemic barriers that restrict the practical adoption of communicative approaches in the Beninese EFL context. As illustrated in Figure 3, teachers identified several structural challenges affecting the implementation of the Functional-Notional Approach. The most frequently cited obstacles were exam-oriented curricula, insufficient teaching resources, and persistent reliance on learners' first language, each reported by all respondents. Additional constraints included lack of specialised training in the FNA, overcrowded classrooms, and limited instructional time. These institutional factors create a context in which teacher-centred approaches remain the most practical instructional option, even when teachers theoretically support communicative methods. Large classes, for instance, make it difficult to conduct peer-review activities, group discussions, or collaborative writing tasks that are central to the FNA framework. The classroom observation data provide further evidence of these contextual constraints. Observations revealed that learner talk-time was significantly higher in the experimental classes (48%) than in the control classes (19%), confirming the communicative orientation of the FNA-and-RM intervention. In addition, experimental sessions featured a wider variety of productive activities such as guided writing, peer review, and reading-discussion tasks. These activities were associated with higher levels of student engagement and collaboration, supporting the quantitative results reported earlier.

Nevertheless, several limitations of the present study must be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample size ($n = 30$ per group) limits the generalisability of the findings. Replication with larger samples across multiple schools would strengthen the external validity of the results. Second, the eight-week intervention period may not be sufficient to assess the long-term sustainability of the observed improvements in writing proficiency. Longitudinal research could provide valuable insights into the durability of these learning gains. Third, the study was conducted within a single institutional context, which may restrict the applicability of the findings to other educational settings. Finally, the use of a researcher-designed writing rubric, although supported by satisfactory inter-rater reliability, may not capture all dimensions of writing competence relevant to the broader EFL context. Despite these limitations, the study provides empirical evidence that integrating the Functional-Notional Approach with reading-based instruction can significantly enhance writing proficiency, even within resource-constrained educational environments.

Conclusion:-

This quasi-experimental study provides robust empirical evidence for the effectiveness of Functional-Notional Approach and Reading Method-integrated instruction in developing EFL writing proficiency among Grade 9 learners in Porto-Novo, Bénin. The significant post-test advantage of the experimental group ($t(58) = 4.37$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.13$), documented across all five rubric domains and corroborated by positive attitudinal and observational data, demonstrates that purposeful, meaning-focused instruction grounded in authentic reading input and communicatively-oriented production tasks is substantially more effective than conventional grammar-translation instruction for writing development. The study contributes to a growing body of evidence on EFL pedagogy in sub-Saharan African contexts and responds to the documented gap between CLT endorsement and CLT implementation in Beninese secondary education. Its findings have immediate practical implications for teacher training, curriculum design, and classroom practice. The theoretical framework proposed—integrating Communicative Competence Theory, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and the Reading-Writing Connection model—offers a principled basis for the continued development of writing pedagogy in EFL contexts where learners have limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

Future research should expand the design to larger, regionally representative samples; investigate the long-term durability of gains beyond the immediate post-test period; examine the differential effects of FNA-only versus RM-

only versus integrated instruction; and explore the role of digital and multimodal reading resources in supporting FNA-and-RM implementation in resource-constrained contexts.

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