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Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice: A Comparative Study of the Competency-Based Approach and the Silent Way Method in Benin EFL Classrooms

Arlette J. Viviane Hounhanou*

English Department, Faculty of Languages, Arts and Humanities (FLASH)/Adjarra, University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC), Benin. Senior Lecturer at CAMES Universities, Benin

**Corresponding author*

Abstract

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Benin has faced persistent challenges despite the adoption of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA). Teachers often dominate classroom discourse, leaving students passive and demotivated, which hinders the development of communicative competence. This study investigates the comparative effectiveness of the CBA and the Silent Way Method (SWM) in fostering learner autonomy and oral communication. A mixed-methods, triangulated design was employed, involving 20 teachers and 130 learners from two public secondary schools, using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Findings revealed that while teachers value the CBA in principle, its implementation remains ineffective, largely due to insufficient training, large class sizes, and resistance to pedagogical change. Students reported low motivation, limited responsibility in their own learning, and rare opportunities to speak English in class. However, both teachers and learners recognized the potential of the Silent Way to reduce Teacher Talking Time, increase Students' Talking Time, and enhance communicative skills. The study argues for the integration of SWM techniques into CBA classrooms as a practical bridge between the reform's theoretical intentions and its classroom realities, and outlines implications for teacher training, classroom practice, and educational policy in Benin.

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Competency-Based Approach; Silent Way Method; EFL learner's autonomy; communicative competence.

Introduction

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has become increasingly significant in the third millennium, as English is now widely recognized as the dominant global lingua franca for education, trade, and scientific exchange (Kundu & Bej, 2025). Teaching is not merely the transmission of knowledge but a dynamic process that involves guiding learners to construct their own understanding, develop autonomy, and acquire communicative competence. In contemporary pedagogy, the teacher is no longer seen as the sole transmitter of knowledge but as a facilitator who creates conditions for

active learner participation. Within this framework, the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) and alternative methods such as the Silent Way Method (SWM) have emerged as strategies for enhancing learners' performance and communicative skills.

The significance of this study lies in the continuing need to improve EFL teaching practices in Benin secondary schools. Since the adoption of the CBA reform in 2001/2002, the stated goal has been to place learners at the centre of the teaching-learning process, fostering autonomy, problem-solving, and the real-life application of knowledge. Two decades on, however,

implementation gaps of this kind remain a recurring finding across similar reforms in the sub-region: comparable competency-based curricula in Kenya, for instance, continue to face resistance rooted in insufficient stakeholder understanding of the reform's objectives (Cheruiyot, 2024), and a 2020 UNESCO synthesis covering seven African countries, including Benin, likewise found that competency-based reforms are frequently adopted on paper well before teachers are equipped to enact them in practice (UNESCO, IIEP & IFEF, 2020). Many Beninese EFL teachers still struggle to implement the CBA effectively, producing passive classrooms in which Teacher Talking Time (TTT) dominates Students' Talking Time (STT). This situation hinders learners' communicative competence and, ultimately, their academic performance. Exploring alternative methods such as the Silent Way is therefore worthwhile, since it emphasises learner discovery, creativity, and problem-solving in ways that align with contemporary, learner-centred educational demands.

In practice, Beninese EFL teachers often fail to fulfil their role as facilitators under the CBA framework. Instead of encouraging active participation, they dominate classroom discourse, leaving students as passive listeners. This imbalance negatively affects learners' independence, autonomy, and communicative skills. The problem this study addresses is therefore the persistent gap between the CBA's intended learner-centred vision and the reality of teacher-centred practice in Benin's EFL classrooms — a gap that, despite two decades of reform, has not been systematically examined alongside a concrete alternative such as the Silent Way. This is the specific gap the present study seeks to fill: rather than treating CBA implementation problems and alternative methods as separate lines of enquiry, it brings teachers' and learners' perspectives on both approaches into direct comparison within the same classrooms.

The main objective of this study is to compare the effectiveness of the Silent Way Method and the Competency-Based Approach in Benin EFL classes. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Identify the challenges faced by EFL teachers in implementing the CBA;
- Explore the potential of the Silent Way Method to enhance learners' autonomy, communicative skills, and academic performance;
- Examine the similarities and differences between the CBA and the SWM, and assess how the two can complement each other in practice.

Based on these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What challenges do EFL teachers face while implementing the CBA in Beninese classrooms?
2. What are the requirements of today's educational system for teaching foreign languages, and how do the CBA and the SWM compare against them?
3. How can the Silent Way Method be combined with the CBA to improve teaching effectiveness and learners' outcomes in Benin EFL classes?

This paper is organised into seven sections. The first introduces the study, its significance, problem statement, objectives, and research questions. The second reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on the CBA and the Silent Way Method. The third outlines the methodology, including the population, sampling, instruments, and data analysis procedures. The fourth presents the findings, the fifth discusses the results, and the sixth offers suggestions for improving EFL teaching practice. The seventh concludes the study by highlighting its implications for teacher training, classroom practice, and educational policy in Benin.

CBLT, the CBA in Benin, and Core Concepts

Competency-Based Language Teaching emerged in 1970s vocational and adult ESL programmes in the United States, judging language ability by what learners can *do* rather than what they know *about* it (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Benin adopted this logic in its own reform trajectory: English is taught as a foreign language within an already French-dominant environment, and instruction long remained teacher-centred. Reforms in the 1990s replaced the Objective-Based Approach with the Competency-Based Approach, and since 2000 the CBA has governed secondary English teaching, aiming to centre learners' needs and contexts (Koussouhon & Iwikotan, 2015).

What recent scholarship consistently shows, however, is that the sticking point is rarely the reform's design but its translation into daily practice under limited teacher preparation and support (UNESCO, IIEP & IFEF, 2020; Cheruiyot, 2024) — a pattern echoed in Tanzania's CBC (Makunja *et al.*, 2025) and traced to governance and accountability failures in South Sudan (Deng, 2026). This design-versus-execution distinction is the hinge RQ1 turns on.

Competence (general ability) and competency (task-specific skill) are often conflated but distinct (Oxford

Learner's Dictionary, 2018; Cambridge Dictionary, 2018), and competencies are typically classified as disciplinary, transversal, or transdisciplinary — a taxonomy that resurfaces in Section 2.3 as part of the standard against which the CBA and Silent Way are measured.

Challenges of Implementing the CBA in Beninese EFL Classrooms

The CBA asks teachers to act as facilitators rather than transmitters of knowledge (Organization of American States, 2013; Dobson, 2014), and learners to take ownership of their own progress (Jungnan, 2011). In practice, this is where implementation breaks down: teachers often keep the floor, default to grammar-heavy instruction, and struggle with thin preparation and difficult working conditions, leaving students largely passive. Administrative pressure pushes many toward finishing the syllabus over ensuring learners absorb it.

This is a regional, not uniquely Beninese, pattern (Cheruiyot, 2024), traced elsewhere to inconsistent governance and uneven teacher-development investment rather than to any flaw in the model itself (Deng, 2026). More encouragingly, deliberate, learner-centred lesson design has been shown to support CBA-style critical-thinking goals even under difficult conditions (Zarei & Fabregas, 2024), suggesting the gap is bridgeable. In short, what holds the CBA back in Benin is not the approach itself but the conditions of its delivery.

Today's Educational System Requirements

A fair comparison needs a fixed reference point: constructivism, socio-constructivism, and cognitive theory, which together describe what contemporary language pedagogy expects — a learner-centred, socially mediated, discovery-driven process rather than rote transmission.

Constructivism holds that learners build on prior knowledge rather than receive it ready-made (Piaget; Smith, 2010); the CBA leans on this through project-based learning, orientation recent research keeps validating — a 2025 Chinese rural-school study found real motivation and achievement gains from project-based instruction (Ma, 2025; Yang & Diao, 2024). Socio-constructivism (Vygotsky) adds the social dimension — learners advance through structured collaboration — which the CBA operationalises via problem situations pitched just beyond current ability.

Cognitive theory (Chomsky, 2008) treats acquisition as active rule-testing rather than habit formation, supporting discovery-based over memorisation-based instruction.

Against these standards, the CBA holds up well on paper; its gap, as Section 2.2 shows, is between design and delivery. The Silent Way (Gattegno, 1972) — built on silence, Cuisenaire rods, and the Fidel chart — measures up similarly: cognitively, it mirrors Chomsky's rationalist model, with learners testing and self-correcting hypotheses to build what Gattegno called internal criteria; it is simultaneously constructivist (individual mental model-building) and socio-constructivist (structured peer/teacher mediation). Recent theoretical work describes the teacher's silence as sustaining learner alertness, with feedback limited mostly to flagging errors rather than fixing them (recent Silent Way syntheses, 2025). The method also carries a humanistic dimension the CBA does not foreground as explicitly — silence redistributes responsibility to the learner, aligning it with Community Language Learning and Suggestopedia (Richards, 2013; Cook, 2008).

Both approaches, then, are theoretically well matched; they differ in their practical constraint. The CBA's is implementation fidelity; the Silent Way's is resourcing — its reliance on physical materials is a real barrier in under-resourced settings like Benin's public schools (Section 5.4), consistent with continental evidence that low-resource African classrooms lag furthest in adopting materials-intensive pedagogies. On the benefits side, Silent Way classrooms show stronger intrinsic motivation and ownership — including measurable vocabulary gains in a 2022 study (Lestari & Riswanto, 2022) — directly addressing the learner-responsibility gap RQ1 identifies.

Combining the SWM with the CBA

If the CBA's weakness is too much teacher talk and too little learner responsibility, and the Silent Way exists to redistribute exactly that responsibility, the two look like natural complements rather than rivals. This fits a broader case already made in the methods literature: no single method serves all learners, and deliberate combination can lift outcomes across all four skills (Sarifa, 2020). More directly, a 2024 study found that pairing the Silent Way with Total Physical Response and Suggestopedia produced stronger motivation and outcomes than any method alone (Mohammed, 2024) — evidence bearing directly on the CBA–SWM pairing proposed here.

Three areas of [Gattegno's \(1972\)](#) claim are directly relevant to Beninese CBA classrooms: pronunciation, where the method's demand for close attention to sound supports the communicative priority [Harmer \(2015\)](#) identifies; grammar and vocabulary, where discovery-based manipulation complements the CBA's project-based orientation; and autonomy and responsibility, where the method's redistribution of responsibility offers a concrete technique for closing the CBA's most persistent Beninese gap.

The Silent Way's combination of teacher restraint, learner-driven correction, and discovery offers a workable route to less teacher dominance and more peer interaction — reinforcing rather than competing with the CBA's own rationale. Whether this combination works in practice, and how teachers and learners perceive it, remains untested — which is what this study examines.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Three conclusions follow. First, CBA implementation difficulties in Benin are well documented, regionally consistent, and trace to preparation, support, and governance rather than design (RQ1; [UNESCO, IIEP & IFEF, 2020](#); [Cheruiyot, 2024](#); [Hounhanou, 2020](#); [Deng, 2026](#)). Second, against constructivist, socio-constructivist, and cognitive standards, both the CBA and the Silent Way are theoretically sound, constrained respectively by implementation and resourcing (RQ2; [Lestari & Riswanto, 2022](#)). Third, the Silent Way is theoretically positioned to address the CBA's specific weaknesses, and recent combination-method research suggests such pairings can produce measurable results rather than remaining purely theoretical (RQ3; [Mohammed, 2024](#); [Sarifa, 2020](#)).

What the Benin-specific literature still lacks — and what recent regional literature has largely skirted, being occupied with documenting problems rather than testing solutions — is direct evidence of how teachers and learners themselves perceive the CBA–Silent Way relationship. That is the gap this study addresses.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches within a single investigation. A convergent triangulation design was chosen in order to validate the instruments used, reconcile any contradictions between quantitative and qualitative findings, and ensure that participants' perspectives were authentically represented.

Research Design

Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires containing closed- and open-ended questions, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. This combination was intended to provide a comprehensive picture of teachers' practices, learners' attitudes, and the challenges of implementing the Competency-Based Approach relative to the Silent Way Method.

Target Population and Sampling

The study focused on EFL teachers and intermediate-level learners, as they are the main actors in the teaching-learning process. Investigations were conducted in two public secondary schools: CEG Koutomgbé (Porto-Novo region) and CEG Sèmè-Podji (Sèmè-Podji township). Both schools were selected purposively for their comparable public, urban/peri-urban profile, which limits confounding differences in resourcing between sites. Intermediate learners were selected because they had studied English for three to four years, making them capable of providing informed responses about classroom practice over time.

The sample included 20 EFL teachers and 130 learners, as summarised in Table 1.

Variables of the Study

This study evaluates the impact of blending Silent Way awareness into a Competency-Based Approach (CBA) in EFL classrooms using data from questionnaires, interviews, and observations:

- ✓ **Independent Variables:** The teaching approach used (CBA-only vs. CBA with Silent Way) and secondary teacher characteristics (experience and qualifications).
- ✓ **Dependent Variables:** Student outcomes—including motivation, learner autonomy, and opportunities for oral communication—alongside the teacher's actual classroom role.
- ✓ **Contextual Variables:** Moderating factors such as class size, materials, and training challenges.

Research Instruments

This study utilizes a mixed-methods triangulation design where quantitative data from questionnaires serves as the primary source, while qualitative interviews and

observations validate and check the plausibility of those findings:

- ✓ **Teacher questionnaires:** 16 questions covering qualifications, experience, classroom environment, communication, collaboration, tech literacy, and CBA challenges.
- ✓ **Learner Questionnaires:** 10 questions (translated into French for clarity) covering English progress, motivation/autonomy, participation attitudes, and CBA perceptions.
- ✓ **Semi-Structured Teacher Interviews:** 8 questions exploring CBA concepts, implementation hurdles, views on the Silent Way, and EFL improvement suggestions.
- ✓ **Classroom Observations:** Direct tracking of lesson organization, student participation, Teacher/Student Talking Time balance, facilitation strategies, and management challenges.

Qualitative themes are integrated directly alongside the quantitative data in Section 4.4 to corroborate the final results.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity of the questionnaires was supported through their alignment with the study's research questions and through review by colleagues in Applied Linguistics prior to administration.

Triangulating three data sources — questionnaires, interviews, and observations — served as the primary safeguard against single-method bias, consistent with convergent triangulation designs in mixed-methods research. A pilot administration and a reliability check (Cronbach's alpha) for the Likert-type items are recommended practice for any future replication of this design.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to data collection, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality. Questionnaires were administered to teachers and learners, interviews were conducted during weekly pedagogical sessions, and classroom observations were negotiated with teachers during lesson time. This triangulated procedure was intended to support the reliability and validity of the data collected.

Methods of Data Analysis

Quantitative data were processed using Excel, with results presented in tables and charts; percentages were

calculated to interpret questionnaire responses, and chi-square goodness-of-fit tests were subsequently run to establish whether key response distributions differ significantly from chance (Section 4.3).

Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analysed thematically and crosschecked against the quantitative findings (Section 4.4), following a sequential explanatory logic.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of the study's purpose before data collection.

Learners' and teachers' identities were not linked to individual responses in reporting, and school names are used only at the institutional level.

Authorisation from school heads was sought prior to conducting observations and interviews during instructional time.

Findings

Teachers' Findings

Finding 1: Structural and Operational Challenges in CBA Implementation

The implementation of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) faces severe operational roadblocks. When asked about specific classroom challenges, there was absolute consensus among the surveyed educators regarding systemic bottlenecks.

The data presented in Table 3 highlights a unanimous consensus among all 20 surveyed teachers regarding the structural hurdles faced in the classroom.

Table 4 shows that 70% of teachers reported that the CBA has failed in practice due to large class sizes, lack of training, insufficient materials, and disruptive learner behaviour.

Finding 2 — Teacher Identity and Methodological Awareness

A core philosophy of the CBA is shifting the teacher's identity from a traditional lecturer to a guide. The data reveals a stark disconnect between this ideological goal and reality.

Table 5 displays the metrics regarding how teachers view their professional identity in the classroom. It reveals that an overwhelming 80% still default to an authoritarian "commander" role in practice.

Figure 2 quantifies their level of theoretical knowledge regarding alternative learner-centered methodologies. 60% of teachers have the theoretical awareness of student-centered frameworks like the *Silent Way Method*.

Learners' Findings

Finding 1: Perceptions of Classroom Autonomy and Facilitation

For a student-centered curriculum to function, learners must view themselves as active participants. The data below shows that students remain deeply conditioned by teacher-centric models.

Half of the learners (50%) considered learning to be solely the teacher's responsibility, 30% viewed it as their own personal responsibility, and only 20% viewed it as a shared responsibility (Table 6).

In addition, 90% of learners reported that their teachers did not facilitate the learning process, undermining the CBA's learner-centred vision (Table 7)

Finding 2: Student Disengagement and Oral Suppression

CBA emphasizes communicative competence, which requires active language production. However, the data highlights an environment where student voices are systematically minimized.

Learners demonstrated low motivation to participate in classroom activities, with 80% reporting demotivation (Table 8)

Only 10% of respondents said they were often encouraged to speak by their teachers, 15% reported being sometimes encouraged, 20% reported rarely, and more than half (55%) reported never being encouraged to speak (Table 9).

Statistical Significance Testing

To move beyond descriptive percentages, chi-square goodness-of-fit tests were run on the three questionnaire items for which full response distributions were

available, testing whether the observed pattern of responses differs from an equal (uniform) distribution across categories. Results are summarised in Table 11.

In Table 11 Frequencies were derived from the percentages reported for each item (n=20 for teachers, n=130 for learners); the speaking-frequency item required rounding to the nearest whole respondent (19.5→20; 71.5→71) so that counts sum to 130. Tests for the two binary items (Tables 4 and 5) were not run, as the pattern in a two-category split is already fully described by the reported percentage.

Qualitative Findings from Interviews and Classroom Observations

Interview and observation data were coded thematically against the categories set out in the interview guide and observation protocol (Section 3.4). Four themes recurred across both sources and align closely with the questionnaire patterns reported in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 (Table 12).

Taken together, the qualitative evidence converges with the questionnaire data on all four points: teachers know what the CBA and the Silent Way ask of them in principle, but large classes and limited materials keep practice teacher-centred, and the resulting pattern of classroom talk leaves most learners with few opportunities to speak.

Challenges to CBA Implementation in Beninese Classrooms

The triangulated data support this conclusion consistently across all three sources. Teacher self-report supplies the headline figure: 70% of teachers stated that CBA implementation has failed in practice, despite broadly acknowledging the approach's value — indicating the challenge is not a lack of buy-in but a failure of execution. Classroom observation corroborates this directly, with Table 12 recording persistently teacher-fronted lessons despite teachers' stated familiarity with CBA principles. Student data close the triangle from the other side: 90% of students reported that their teachers did not facilitate the learning process, meaning the implementation gap teachers admit to in survey form is the same gap students experience daily as its recipients.

The interviews specify what is actually driving this gap: all 20 teachers cited large class sizes as an obstacle, and

a lack of low-cost material alternatives compounded the problem, consistent with regional evidence that these two constraints — rather than curriculum design or teacher attitude alone — are what typically derail competency-based reforms in under-resourced settings (Cheruiyot, 2024; Deng, 2026). A further, more specific finding sharpens this picture at the level of role enactment rather than resourcing alone: 80% of teachers still perceive themselves as commanders and knowledge-imparters rather than facilitators, a self-perception that matches what students report from the opposite side — half of learners considered learning to be solely the teacher's responsibility, with only 20% viewing it as shared. Because this pattern holds across teacher self-report, student self-report, and independent observation, it is unlikely to be an artefact of any single instrument's wording. The central challenges, then, are large class size, material scarcity, and a persistent teacher-centred conception of the teacher's role that survives even where teachers intellectually accept the CBA's premises — a picture consistent with regional findings that sub-Saharan African learner-centred reforms falter less on design than on the classroom conditions surrounding delivery.

Effectiveness of the Silent ways in the Beninese CBA context

The clearest triangulated evidence here concerns classroom talk, since a communicative, learner-centred standard for language teaching implies a specific, measurable distribution of talking time. Fifty-five percent of students reported never being invited to speak, with only 10% reporting frequent opportunities; teacher interviews confirm this is a known pattern rather than an oversight, several attributing it directly to class size; and direct classroom observation substantiates both accounts, recording Teacher Talking Time far in excess of Student Talking Time across sampled lessons. This is considerably more imbalanced than the ratio generally treated as adequate in current ELT practice, where student talking time is expected to make up roughly 70–

80% of classroom time even in lower-proficiency classes (EFL Cafe, n.d.; The TEFL Academy, 2026). Measured against this standard, the CBA as currently practised in Benin falls well short of what its own constructivist and socio-constructivist foundations require — not because the approach is poorly designed, but because current classroom conditions prevent it from being enacted as intended. The teacher interviews supply the comparative half of this finding directly: 60% of teachers, independently and without prompting from the interview protocol, identified the Silent Way as a potentially effective approach compatible with the CBA. This is a meaningful finding in its own right, since it did not emerge from the researcher's own theoretical argument in Section 2 but from practitioners assessing the two methods against their own classroom experience. Taken together, the CBA meets the standard set by contemporary language-teaching theory in principle but not in current practice, while the Silent Way — judged by the same practitioners against the same standard — is seen as a credible way of closing that specific gap, particularly around redistributing talking time and responsibility from teacher to learner.

Silent Way Techniques to Improve Teaching Effectiveness and Learner Outcomes

The question of *how* the two approaches can be combined is not whether they are compatible in theory (Section 2 already argues they are) but how a combination could realistically work given the conditions Section 5.1 identified. Here the tension is direct: commercially produced Cuisenaire rods and Fidel charts can themselves be a barrier to Silent Way adoption (Section 2.3), and the same teacher interviews that recommend the Silent Way also confirm, via Table 3, that material scarcity is already constraining CBA delivery. Any workable answer has to resolve this tension rather than ignore it, since simply adding a materials-dependent method to an already under-resourced classroom would not constitute a genuine combination.

Table.1 Distribution of the sample by school

Secondary School	Status	Teachers (n)	Learners (n)
CEG Koutomgbé	Public	10	65
CEG Sèmè-Podji	Public	10	65
Total	2 schools	20	130

Table.3 Challenges teachers encountered implementing the CBA (all 20 teachers reported facing every challenge listed)

Reported Challenge	Teachers reporting it (n=20)	Percentage
Large class sizes	20	100%
Lack of training / support	20	100%
Inappropriate / insufficient materials	20	100%
Learners' disruptive behaviour	20	100%

Table.4 Teachers reporting CBA implementation as failing in practice

Teacher's view of CBA implementation	Frequency	Percentage
Reported as failing in practice	14	70%
Not reported as failing	6	30%
Total	20	100%

Table.5 Teachers' self-perceived classroom role

Self-perceived classroom role	Frequency	Percentage
Commander / knowledge-imparters	16	80%
Facilitator / motivator	4	20%
Total	20	100%

Table.6 Learners' perceptions of responsibility for learning

Perception of responsibility for learning	Frequency (n=130)	Percentage
Teacher's sole responsibility	65	50%
Learner's personal responsibility	39	30%
Shared responsibility	26	20%
Total	130	100%

Table.7 Learners' perceptions of teacher facilitation

Learner's view of teacher facilitation	Frequency (n=130)	Percentage
Teacher did not facilitate learning	117	90%
Teacher did facilitate learning	13	10%
Total	130	100%

Table.8 Learners reporting demotivation in classroom activities

Motivation in classroom activities	Frequency (n=130)	Percentage
Reported demotivation	104	80%
Did not report demotivation	26	20%
Total	130	100%

Table.9 Frequency with which learners reported being invited to speak in class (counts derived from the percentages reported for n=130)

Frequency invited to speak English	Learners (n=130)	Percentage
Often	13	10%
Sometimes	20	15%
Rarely	26	20%
Never	71	55%
Total	130	100%

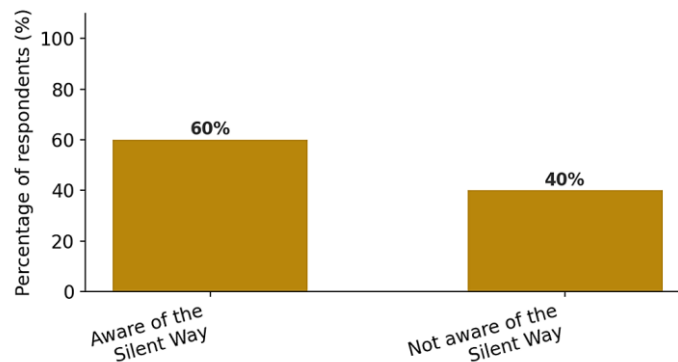
Table.11 Chi-square goodness-of-fit tests against a uniform-distribution null hypothesis

Item	n	df	χ^2	p-value	Interpretation
Teachers' awareness of the Silent Way (Figure 2)	20	1	0.80	0.371	Not significant — awareness split is not distinguishable from a 50/50 chance split at this sample size
Learners' responsibility perception (Table 6)	130	2	18.20	<0.001	Significant — responses are not evenly spread across the three categories; the teacher-only response dominates
Frequency invited to speak (Table 9)	130	3	63.42	<0.001	Significant — 'never' is reported far more often than would occur by chance across the four categories

Table.12 Thematic categories from interviews and classroom observations, aligned with the interview guide and observation protocol

Theme	Interview Evidence (Teachers)	Observation Evidence (Classroom)
Teacher-Centered Talk	Default to explaining/correcting under syllabus time pressure.	Long teacher explanations; brief, closed-question exchanges.
Large Class Sizes	Main constraint; limits group work due to monitoring difficulties.	Group work was brief and limited to front rows.
Silent Way Openness	Positive views on learner autonomy, but uncertain about sourcing materials.	No Silent Way tools or techniques were observed in use.
Learner Passivity	Teachers call on the same confident students to keep the pace.	Speaking turns concentrated among a minority of learners.

Figure.2 Teachers' prior awareness of the Silent Way Method (n=20)



The practical answer this study proposes is that the Silent Way's core mechanisms do not require its original materials, only functional equivalents. Cuisenaire rods can be substituted with locally available objects of consistent length and colour — cut sticks, coloured bottle caps, strips of card — used purely as pointing and counting aids, where what matters pedagogically is consistent representation of a sound or word rather than the object's manufacture.

A Fidel or sound-colour chart can be drawn once on the blackboard and reused at negligible cost. Teacher silence itself requires no materials at all: withholding verbal correction in favour of gesture or pointing to prompt learner self-correction is arguably the single most transferable Silent Way technique for a Beninese classroom.

The large class size that all three data sources converge on as the central obstacle (Section 5.1) can be addressed specifically through peer-led correction groups: learners organised into small fixed groups, one member briefly trained to lead pointing/silence drills using the blackboard chart, with the teacher circulating between groups rather than managing 60-plus individual turns alone. This does not remove the burden large classes place on teachers, but it distributes the facilitator role the CBA already expects teachers to play, without requiring additional staff or imported materials. A natural next step, beyond this study's scope, would be piloting this combination in a small number of classes with pre/post lesson observation, to test whether these low-cost adaptations reproduce the motivational and autonomy gains reported for the Silent Way in better-resourced settings.

Summary of Findings, Suggestions, and Implications

Together, the three research questions point to one connected conclusion, confirmed across teacher self-report, student self-report, and observation: CBA implementation in Benin is undermined by large class sizes, material scarcity, and persistent teacher-centred habits despite theoretical buy-in. Current practice falls short of the communicative standard the CBA requires, while teachers themselves independently identify the Silent Way as a credible complement — one whose core techniques can be adapted to low-resource, large classes without imported materials.

Authorities should prioritise practice-oriented training and low-cost materials over curriculum redesign; teachers should adopt adaptable Silent Way techniques

— local manipulatives, blackboard charts, gesture-based correction, peer-led groups — to shift talking time toward learners; learners should take greater ownership of participation, treating English as a communication tool rather than an exam subject.

Since the gap is one of delivery, not design, training and resourcing offer the fastest path forward, and the model is transferable to similar Francophone West African contexts. The main limitation — no tested intervention yet — points to the natural next step: a small-scale trial measuring talking time and learner output before and after implementation.

In conclusion, this study set out to answer three questions about EFL teaching in Beninese secondary schools: what challenges teachers face in implementing the CBA, how the CBA and the Silent Way Method compare against the demands of contemporary language teaching, and how the two might be combined to improve outcomes. Triangulated evidence from teacher interviews, student questionnaires, and classroom observation converged on a consistent answer: implementation is undermined by large class sizes, material scarcity, and a teacher-centred conception of role that persists despite teachers' theoretical acceptance of the CBA. Measured against the communicative standard the CBA is meant to embody, current practice falls short — yet teachers themselves, independently, identified the Silent Way as a credible complement, and its core techniques can be adapted to Benin's resourcing constraints without imported materials.

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