



VALORISING AND INNOVATING THE EFL TEACHING IN BENINESE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

The context in which this study has been carried out is the perpetual failure of the English language teaching in Beninese schools where learners always fear for using even a bit English. The main objective here is to identify its weaknesses, valorise, and innovate EFL teaching in this country. For reliable and valid data collection, I have used questionnaire, interviews, and classroom observations. Of the questionnaire addressed to 35 EFL teachers and 20 university students on the one hand, and to 133 secondary school students on the other hand, I have collected respectively 47 sheets from EFL teachers and university students, and 129 from secondary school students. From the first respondent category (47), 40 sheets have been selected; from the 129 sheets collected on the other side, 100 have been selected. The interviews have been conducted with 10 EFL teachers and 10 lecturers (20 in total). The data are collected through SMS, phone calls, Whatsapp written and vocal messages, emails as well as face to face exchanges with respondents.

The results obtained have revealed that English is hardly used in Benin despite its importance for the world's development. The frequent poor results of EFL learners in secondary schools where they are unable to make a single correct sentence justify the way the target language is neglected. It is deduced that the process of English teaching in Beninese educational system needs to be daily rethought so as to recognise more the value of this language and proceed to its appropriate innovation.

Key words: value, innovation; English, Teaching, Benin.

RESUME

Le contexte dans lequel cette étude a été entreprise est Est marqué par l'échec perpétuel de l'enseignement de la langue anglaise dans les cours secondaires du Bénin où les apprenants craignent toujours de prendre la parole même pendant un bout de temps. L'objectif principal ici est d'identifier ces défauts, valoriser et innover l'enseignement de l'Anglais dans ce pays. Pour la collecte des données crédibles et valides, j'ai utilisé le questionnaire, des interviews et des visites de classes. Des 55 enseignants d'Anglais et étudiants auxquels le questionnaire a été distribué d'une part, et aux 133 apprenants du secondaire d'autre part, j'ai collecté respectivement 47 réponses des enseignants et étudiants, et 129 des apprenants du secondaire. De la première catégorie de répondants (47), 40 réponses ont été sélectionnées, (des 129 réponses collectées, 100 ont été sectionnées. Les interviews ont été conduites avec 10 enseignants d'anglais du secondaire et 10 du supérieur (20 au total). Les données sont collectées à travers des SMS, appels téléphoniques, des messages écrits et vocaux par Whatsapp, emails aussi bien que des échanges face-à-face avec des répondants. Les résultats obtenus ont révélé que l'Anglais est presque non utilisé au Bénin malgré son importance pour le développement réel du monde. Les faibles résultats fréquents des apprenants du secondaire qui sont incapables de faire une simple phrase correcte, expliquent à quel point la langue cible est négligée. Il est à déduire que le processus de l'enseignement de l'Anglais dans le système éducatif du Bénin, a besoin d'être quotidiennement repensé en vue de reconnaître davantage la valeur de cette langue et procéder à son innovation appropriée.

Mots Clés : valeur, innovation, Anglais, enseignement, Bénin.

INTRODUCTION

Language and education issues in general and especially the EFL teaching and learning issues are of great interest in Africa and in the whole world nowadays because of the position this target language occupies. The rationale for this study is my additional contributions that are worth providing so as to lessen or to struggle noticeably against the difficulties teachers usually face in the teaching of the English language in their classes because these difficulties can be identified and scrutinized in an in-depth manner. Dörnyei, (2005) and Peng & Woodrow (2010) state that “Want To See (WTS) is the intention to communicate given a choice, continues to establish itself as a determining construct in bringing about success or failure in learning a foreign language.

Next, Cao and Philip (2006) have said that “other variables such as group size, familiarity with interlocutors, interlocutors’ participation, familiarity with topic under discussion, self- confidence, medium of communication, and cultural background were also found to affect learners’ Willingness To Communicate (WTC) levels.” In addition, MacIntyre (2003, p. 564) says that “*WTC model does not explicitly deal with situations in which status-based linguistic accommodation and other social pressures might create L2 use against the personal preference of the speaker.*” Through these quotations, it is to understand that EFL teaching and learning must always be considered as extremely prominent. The research problem investigated in the current study is the fact that learners still have difficulty learning the English language due to persistent challenges related to EFL teaching in Beninese secondary schools where learners do not often want to use this language freely inside and outside the classroom for fear of not being taunted. The global objective in this study is to determine the flaws of this teaching process, and to attempt to valorise and innovate EFL teaching and learning in Beninese educational system. The two research questions framed are presented in the following lines:

- How can EFL teachers demonstrate the value of the target language teaching and learning?
- How can EFL teachers innovate their teaching process in Beninese secondary schools?

RH1: Learners and any other people whom the value of the EFL learning and teaching process is demonstrated to are likely to show more interest in the target language than those who are not informed at all.

RH2: Classical EFL teaching practice is worth creating learners’ boredom and demotivation whereas innovated EFL teaching favours the target language effective mastery.

1. Literature Review

This section is subdivided into four subtitles: cultural influence on language learning; the impact of context changes and learners' perspective; the tangible effects of COVID-19; factors of learners' academic performance and attainment.

1.1. Cultural Influence on Language Learning

The process of the English language teaching and learning is neglected in some countries and this lack of interest affects negatively the development of these countries. It is fundamental to rate each learner and pay attention to him or her in the classroom settings for his or her true learning to take place. And if learners are not engaged, I think that learning cannot really occur in any educational system. That is certainly the main reason why Muller, Herder, Adamson, and Brown, (2012, p.45) have declared:

The second study, by Chutigarn Raktham, investigates the relationship between national culture and Thai students' behavior. Raktham's study looks at Thai university students and asks to what extent national cultural stereotypes manifest themselves in classroom observations. Through pair and group interviews in which students reflect upon their own classroom behavior, in addition to viewing videos of British university students, Raktham's findings reveal that there is great divergence between the actual learner behaviors and national stereotypes of Thai learners, particularly in the absence of deference to authority figures.

These authors seem to be right because there is a "relationship between national culture and Thai students' behavior", and it is obvious that this relationship is not only bound to Thai students' behaviour but also to any societies' learners' behaviour. Next if according to these authors, "Raktham's study looks at Thai university students and asks to what extent national cultural stereotypes manifest themselves in classroom observations", all students' culture must be taken into account in their classrooms in order to interest them and draw their attention to the teaching process. They are right to say that "Through pair and group interviews", "students reflect upon their own classroom behavior". Because when learners are questioned together, they are able to make adequate judgement about their personal behaviours and the ones of their mates. They go further "in addition to viewing videos of British university students, Raktham's findings reveal that there is great divergence between the actual learner behaviors and national stereotypes of Thai learners, particularly in the absence of deference to authority figures." This visualisation of native speakers' behaviours is very important for language teaching and learning because they will imitate these native speakers, which will help them copy native speakers' way of articulating, their lips' movements, the speed of their speech and many other positive aspects.

1.2. *The Impact of Context Changes and Learners' Perspective*

Muller, Herder, Adamson, and Brown, (2012, p. 45) have also stated:

Section A, chapters 1-4, describes changing contexts of Asian EFL teaching. In Teaching the new English curriculum, Xi Fang clearly describes the Chinese public primary and secondary schools and outlines the new English curriculum's (NEC) impact on instruction. Her ethnographic study analyzes teacher's perceptions, experiences, and changes and challenges in NEC's implementation. In the second article, Global cultures and identities, Will Baker argues that English teaching in EFL situations should offer learners ways to acquire multiple, changeable identities in English alongside their identity of first language and culture.

Changing contexts of Asian EFL teaching are described in this citation. The use of English can really change the context of teaching since languages have their particular culture, realities, and contexts. It is obvious that "*the new English curriculum's (NEC) impact on instruction.*" And this impact is worth taking into account while teaching in a given country or area, pointing out main differences and similarities without forgetting appropriate behaviours teachers and learners can have.

It is important to analyse "*teacher's perceptions, experiences, and changes and challenges in NEC's implementation*" because each teacher has his or her teaching styles. Thus, nobody must impose them any styles, perceptions, and experiences or any compulsory ways to overcome their difficulties they come across in their teaching process. Since "*English teaching in EFL situations should offer learners ways to acquire multiple, changeable identities in English alongside their identity of first language and culture,*" learners are able to acquire new culture and identities besides their own ones. This diversity of culture and identities can favour learners' abilities to establish national and international relationships.

Muller, Herder, Adamson, and Brown, (2012, p. 46) have said:

Section B has studied about perspectives of students' and teachers' about the learning process. Fumiko Murase's Learner autonomy in Asia analyzes student questionnaires and teachers' interviews about opinions concerning learner autonomy in Japan. In Thai national culture and student's behavior, Chutigarn Raktham studies classroom observations, student interviews, and students watching a short film of a British classroom and found a great diversity among them.

They have studied "*about perspectives of students' and teachers' about the learning process.*" It is advantageous to study teachers' and learners' perspectives about the learning process. The identification of teachers' and learners' perspectives can enable education's actors to sensitise governments and other people on how to valorise the process of EFL teaching and learning. It is said "*classroom observations, student interviews, and students watching a short film of a British classroom and found a great diversity among them.*" During classroom observations and students' interviews, learners will be well-prepared and they will become really autonomous while the target language is used effectively. In addition, when they watch short films of these

native speakers, they will witness English realities and acquire a variety of behaviours.

Muller, Herder, Adamson, and Brown, (2012, p. 47) have said:

Section C's articles investigate how Western methodologies have been adapted to Asian contexts. In Strategy teaching in the Asian EFL oral classroom, Wendy Lam researches oral strategy training in a Hong Kong situation with 13- and 14-year-old students. She reports on findings used by lower proficiency with more proficient learners. Philip Shigeo Brown in innovating a vocabulary learning strategies program describes a vocabulary learning program in a first-year, Japanese medical program with intermediate to high-level learners in a 13-week class. Then, Theron Muller and Mark de Boer's Student's use of language scaffolding examine how formulaic language scaffolding and dynamic scaffolding – emerging from student needs – affect language use in tasks in five, second-year Japanese high school classrooms. The next article, Innovating EFL teaching of reading, Hongzhi Yang and Eva Bernat report on classroom observations and interviews of two teachers in a medium-sized, private university in China concerning effectiveness of reading techniques.

It is said in this quotation that *“articles investigate how Western methodologies have been adapted to Asian contexts.”* Whenever foreign methodologies are used and mastered, teachers can develop a variety of methods during their teaching process. When oral strategy training' is developed in EFL teaching, this language learning will be a success in Beninese secondary schools. *“Innovating a vocabulary learning strategies program”* is necessary for EFL teaching and learning. This constant and effective innovation can permit learners to be really interested in the learning process. While teachers examine *“how formulaic language scaffolding and dynamic scaffolding – emerging from student needs – affect language use in tasks in five, second-year Japanese high school classrooms,”* they can make relevant decisions and care for their learners needs and seek ways and procedures to make their learners use the English language effectively. *“Innovating EFL teaching of reading,”* can make teachers seek new teaching materials for themselves and modernise their teaching methods for the adequate learning to take place in their classes.

1.3. The Tangible Effects of COVID-19

According to Karatas, T. Ö. and Tuncer, H. (2020, p. 22),

It is accepted worldwide that one of the best public policy tools for teaching and learning is to go to school. However, with COVID-19, many countries have closed schools, colleges, and universities in order to save lives by reducing physical contact. Schooling at all stages has had to adapt learning, teaching, and assessment practices to quickly changing circumstances.

These authors think that *“it is accepted worldwide that one of the best public policy tools for teaching and learning is to go to school. However, with COVID-19, many countries have closed schools, colleges, and universities in order to save lives by reducing physical contact. Schooling at all stages has had to adapt learning, teaching, and assessment practices to quickly changing circumstances.”* This is innovation and EFL teachers need to find

appropriate ways and means to improve more and daily their teaching process. It belongs to governments to encourage EFL teachers, learners, and parents.

Karatas, T. Ö. and Tuncer, H. (2020, p. 25) have added that

According to a recent report by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) [6], currently, 1,575,270,054 learners are excluded from the normal learning process. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has become a major threat for the implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) [5,7,8] which is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” [9]. With the circumstances of the COVID-19 interruption, urgent actions are needed to achieve the objectives of SDG 4 [7]. It is because of the fact that the global lockdown of schools and universities is going to cause major short and long-term consequences for institutions and individuals in terms of learning, teaching and assessment. On the positive side, while the spread of the virus has far-reaching consequences, the closure of schools has led to innovative methods of delivering education ensuring the continuity of studying by learners [10], proving that “Even though schools have closed, learning has not ended” [11] (p. 129).

From this citation above, it is to be noticed that this pandemic has brought new and severe challenges to the process of teaching and learning in general and the one of EFL in particular in Africa and in Benin. New solutions to these problems should also be provided. Governments, EFL teachers, and parents also have new responsibilities to preserve and reinforce the innovative methods of delivering education from now on.

1.4. Factors of Learners' Academic Performance and Attainment

Kassing, R. B. (2011, p. 212) has emphasised and reiterated that

Research studies show that in foreign language learning, a number of factors can contribute to differences in various learners' academic performance and attainment, such as age, gender, attitudes, aptitude, motivation, learning approach, language learning strategies and learning style (Dornyei, 1994; Dornyei & Csizer, 1998; Gardner, Tremblay & Masgoret, 1997; Ghenghesh, 2010; Kormos & Csizer, 2008; Liando, et al., 2005; Oxford, 1994). Among all those contributing factors, motivation has been regarded by researchers working in the field of second/foreign language learning as one of the most vital factors in the process of second/foreign language learning (Dornyei, 2001a; Liando et al., 2005; Oxford, 1994). With the proper level of motivation, language learners may become active investigators of the nature of the language they are studying (Kimura, Nakata & Okumura, 2001).

Foreign language learning is not so simple and easy, and it is not so difficult either. It depends on the ways different parameters are rated and treated for the best teaching and learning. The “various learners' academic performance and attainment, such as age, gender, attitudes, aptitude, motivation, learning approach, language learning strategies and learning style” should be taken into account. This diversity of academic performance and attainment is important because in order to create motivation, strategies and styles need to be considered and differentiated in classes.

2. Research Methodology

As research methodology is known to be the specific procedures or techniques that enable researchers to identify, select, process, and analyse data about a given topic, 40 sheets of teachers' questionnaire have been selected; 100 sheets of students' questionnaire selected and the interviews have been conducted with 10 EFL teachers and 10 lecturers (20 in total).

2.1. Questionnaires

The questionnaire I have addressed to EFL teachers is composed of six (4) main questions split into prompts completed accordingly in addition to five (5) main questions for learners' questionnaire.

2.1.1. Questionnaire Addressed to EFL Teachers

Through these questions and prompts, the twenty (40) EFL teacher respondents selected answered the following questions:

- Are your learners interested in your teaching process?
- Do you make your teaching interesting? How?
- Do you use the same strategies and procedures to motivate your learners in class?
- Do you make efforts to innovate your teaching for learners' effective success

2.1.2. Questionnaire addressed to EFL Students

100 learner respondents selected have provided answers to the following questions.

- Are you interested in the English language learning?
- Do you work with classmates in group inside the classroom?
- Do you speak English outside the classroom with your fellow students?
- Does your teacher make you interested in the English language learning?
- Does your teacher of English use modern tools such as computers and cell phones to teach?

2.2. Interview Conducted with EFL teachers

The 20 EFL teachers and lecturers interviewed have given the reasons why they think EFL teachers'

- Do you think that the process of the English language teaching and learning needs valorising in African educational systems? Justify your position.
- Is it necessary for EFL teachers to raise their learners' interest every time in their classes?
- Can you make your learners easily interested in the English language learning? Say how?

- Do you think it is high time to innovate the process of the EFL teaching and learning in African societies? Why or why not?

3. Presentation and Analysis of the Findings

This section presents the responses of 40 EFL teachers, 100 learners, as well as 20 interviewees. These results are shown and analysed through table 1, table 2, and table 3.

3.1. EFL Teachers' Responses

Table 1. Questionnaire Results 1- 40 Respondents- 100%

Items	Positive responses- %	Negative responses-%	Total-40-100%
Learners are interested in the teaching process	13-32.5%	27-67.5%	40-100%
EFL teachers make their teaching interesting	02-05%	38-95%	40-100%
The use of the same strategies and procedures	07-17.5%	33-82.5%	40-100%
Those who make efforts to innovate their teaching	02-05%	38-95%	40-100%

Table 1 shows that thirteen (13) respondents, 32.5% have recognised that their learners are interested in the teaching process but twenty-seven (27) among them, 67.5% have refused. Two (02) EFL teachers, 05% make their teaching interesting against thirty-eight (38) of them, 95% who do not succeed in making their teaching interesting. Seven (07) of them, 17.5% have said that they use the same strategies and procedures whereas thirty-three (33) respondents, 82.5% have refused. This high rate of negative answers justifies the persistent failure of the English language teaching and learning in Beninese secondary schools. Those respondents who are believed to make efforts to innovate their teaching are only two (02) respondents, 05% against thirty-eight (38) respondents, 95%. EFL learners are not always to be blamed since educators also recognise that the teaching job is not really done at one hundred percent.

3.2. Learners' Responses

Table 2. Questionnaire Results 2- 100 Respondents- 100%

Statements	Positive answers-%	Negative answers-%	Total 100-100%
Learners interested in the English language learning	06-06%	94-94%	100-100%
Learners who work with their classmates in group	03-03%	97-97%	100-100%
Those who speak English outside the classroom	01-01%	99-99%	100-100%
Teacher makes learners interested in English learning	04-04%	96-96%	100-100%
Teacher of English uses modern tools	02-02%	98-98%	100-100%

According to Table 2, only six (06) learners, 06% are said to be interested in the English language learning but ninety-four (94) respondents, 94% are not interested. Learners who work with their classmates in groups are only three (03) respondents, 03% against 97 respondents (97%). Those who speak English outside the classroom are not numerous; only one (01) respondent, 01% has given a positive answer against ninety-nine (99) respondents, 99%. These are some of the phenomena that justify the fact that learners do not succeed in using the English language effectively despite the interest many of them have in this language. Four (04) respondents, 04% have said that the teacher makes learners interested in English learning whereas ninety-six (96) respondents, 96% have objected. Two respondents (02) respondents, 02% have accepted that their teacher of English uses modern tools against 98 respondents, 98%. All these results corroborate the poor level of EFL learners in Beninese secondary schools.

3.3. Data Collected during Interview Conducted with the EFL Teachers

Table 3. Questionnaire Results 3- 20 Respondents- 100%

Statements	Positive responses-%	Negative responses-%	Total-20-100%
Necessity of the process of EFL teaching and learning valorisation	20-100%	00-00%	20-100%
Necessity for EFL teachers to raise their learners' interest every time	20-100%	00-00%	20-100%
Possibility to make learners easily interested in EFL learning	20-100%	00-00%	20-100%
It is high time to innovate the process of EFL teaching and learning in African societies	20-100%	00-00%	20-100%

Table 3 enables to notice that the process of EFL teaching and learning valorization is necessary according to all of the interviewees (20) respondents, 100%. The necessity for EFL teachers to raise their learners' interest every time is urgent according to the twenty (20) interviewees, 100%. They all recognise the possibility to make learners easily interested in EFL learning and that it is high time to innovate the process of EFL teaching and learning in African societies.

4. Data Discussion

Through table 1, item 1 it is noticed that very few learners are interested in the EFL teaching process. And this explains the fact that the EFL teaching is still a failure because if learners lose interest in the teaching, they cannot learn the language successfully. In addition, only a few EFL teachers make their teaching interesting. What is obvious to be known is that whenever the teaching process is not interesting,

the teaching itself cannot come effective in any case. I have also noticed through my findings that some EFL teachers use the same strategies and procedures. The following quotation corroborates my findings in such way that teachers not only they have to vary their teaching strategies and procedures in their classes but they should also make enough effort to make their students master these strategies and procedures.

Muller, Herder, Adamson, and Brown, (2012) have said:

“Philip Shigeo Brown describes his implementation of a vocabulary learning strategies program at a medical university in Japan. He explains how he ultimately balanced his desire to pass on as many strategies as possible with the need for his students to have sufficient time to come to understand, use, and hopefully master those strategies.”

This author explains that it is important to use many strategies taking into account the needs of students and these learners have to get enough time to understand what they are taught. When they are given enough time to understand this variety of strategies, they can use, and master those strategies for the adequate learning sake.

In relation to the first research question that inquires the opinion about the crucial role of EFL teachers to demonstrate permanently the value of the target language teaching and learning, this monotonous teaching is worth making learners bored and they will then lose interest in the language learning. If learners are not interested, and EFL teaching and learning failure occurs, people and especially the governments will not take this teaching seriously. Consequently, the role of EFL teachers is multidimensional and enormous in education. The first hypothesis conjectures that learners and any other people whom the value of the EFL learning and teaching process is demonstrated to are likely to show more interest in the target language than those who are not informed at all. The degree of truth in this opinion is much higher than the opposite side. When people really know the value of something, this valorization usually raises their interest and motivation. Furthermore, EFL teachers who make efforts to innovate their teaching are also very few; and this lack of innovation in the process of language teaching yields very poor results at the level of learners.

As far as table 2 is concerned, only six (06) learners are interested in the English language learning and this argument joins what I have discussed above. Next, many learners do not really work with their classmates in group. Most of them are used to joking or disturbing the members of the group. What is unbelievable is that EFL learners hardly speak English outside the classroom. And it is difficult to master a language without speaking it with people since the effective mastery of a language is through its adequate oral use. Many teachers do not make their learners interested in English learning because they do not use modern tools in their classes. This lack of modern tool utilisation can slow down the process of EFL teaching and learning.

In relation to the second research question which wonders how EFL teachers can innovate their teaching process in Beninese secondary schools, Table 3 reveals that it is necessary to valorise the process of EFL teaching and learning and the necessity for EFL teachers to raise their learners' interest every time, occurs in language classes especially in EFL ones. All respondents have said that it is possible to make learners easily interested in EFL learning. This auguries that those who do not make their learners interested in this language learning behave intentionally. Beside this misbehaviour of not making learners interested in EFL learning, several teachers do not innovate the process of EFL teaching and learning, which affects the target language learning. The second hypothesis conjectures that classical EFL teaching practice is worth creating learners' boredom and demotivation whereas innovated EFL teaching favours the target language effective mastery. Many phenomena justify this opinion and the rate of learners who may succeed with classical practice cannot be high. But modern or innovated teaching practice yields effective results for EFL learners.

5. Implications and Suggestions

The first implication is the lack of EFL teachers' effective engagement in the target language teaching in every educational system. Next, teachers' demotivation has noticeably affected their teaching process. In addition to these unpleasant aspects, learners' lack of personal effort and the latter in its turn implies teachers' frustrations, perpetual complaints, and total negligence. In the same course of ideas, Ali (2016) has written "scholars point out that the focus of many students is the grades; therefore; little or no effort is made from the part of students to revise their assignments; a factor that results in teachers' disappointment due to wasted time and effort (Higgins et al., 2001; Crisp, 2007, Bailey & Garner, 2010, Orsmond & Merry, 2011; cited in Henderson & Phillips, 2015)."

I suggest that EFL teachers renew continuously their good will and love to do their job conveniently no matter the level of obstacles they come across in their teaching process. They need to get really engaged and trigger or create their own motivation for the success of this tremendous occupation. EFL learners should avoid laziness and make daily efforts for the success of their learning without forgetting the continual and real practice of English beyond its use in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The research problem investigated in the current study lies on the continual difficulty encountered in the process of EFL teaching and learning where learners are still unable to use the language effectively. The main objective in this study is to identify some pitfalls to this teaching process, and create opportunities to valorise and innovate EFL teaching and learning in Beninese educational system. EFL

teaching and learning must be valorised and innovated so as to raise learners' true motivation. Learners' academic performance and attainment are very important and must not be neglected.

The results obtained have revealed the high place that valorization and innovation occupy in EFL teaching and learning. I suggest that EFL teachers, learners, and parents play their roles adequately so that the governments encourage them. Best EFL researchers need promoting through effective sufficient investments in order to encourage the world of research. In addition, training excellent learners of English must be the permanent concern of any country's educational system. In Beninese context, this effect of promoting is worth making and strengthening for the development of the country.

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