REPUBLIQUE DU BENIN

****

MINISTERE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE

****

UNIVERSITE D'ABOMEY-CALAVI

****

ECOLE NORMALE SUPERIEURE DE PORTO-NOVO

****

DOMAINE: SCIENCES DE L'EDUCATION ET DE LA FORMATION

MENTION: Professorat de l'Enseignement Secondaire

SPECIALITE: ANGLAIS **GRADE: Licence/BAPES**

MEMOIRE DE FIN DE CYCLE

Thème:

An Exploratory Study of EFL Students' Experienced Difficulties in Speaking Classes: case of CEG Application in Porto-Novo

Présenté par :

Abdoul-Rafihou ALIDOU

Sous la direction de :

Dr. Juvenale AGBAYAHOUN

Maitre-Assistant (CAMES) ENS/UAC

ANNEE ACADEMIQUE: 2016-2017

Dedication

This work is exclusively dedicated to my beloved parents: Lamatou Yacoubo & Moumouni Tcho Alidou for giving me life and making me discover the way to school.

Acknowledgments

"Honor to whom honor is due". First of all, I'm greatly indebted to the Almighty God for helping me complete this research work and for all his help throughout my life.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and my deep sense of indebtedness to my Supervisor Dr. Juvenale AGBAYAHOUN, who critically read through the draft copies and gave me valuable suggestions and constructive comments. Without her sincere and dedicated guidance, this thesis would not have its present form.

I extend my thanks to the school's principal I am working in, my colleagues who offered their support in one way or the other.

I am also thankful to all lecturers in the Department of English at Teachers Advanced Training College of Porto-Novo who did their best to provide us with their experience and the fundamental knowledge in the English language.

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

EFL : English as a Foreign Language

ESL : English as a Second Language

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

L1 : First Language

L2 **:** Second Language

JSS : Junior Secondary School

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing. The basic education aims at making learners gain necessary skills for life by developing their communication skills, self- learning, and the ability to use critical thinking to deal with science and modern technology. Obviously, it is necessary to develop communication skills and speaking is one of the four macro skills necessary for effective oral communication in both first and second language learning contexts. Thus, the mastery of speaking skills is a priority for many EFL learners and they often evaluate their success in language learning of English on the basis how well is their improvement in speaking the language. Therefore, the major goal of all English language teaching should be to give learners the ability to use English as effectively as possible in communication. However, not all language learners, after many years studying English, can communicate accurately and fluently because EFL learners experience a multitude of difficulties. Many EFL students have problems in communicating and sharing their ideas and thoughts orally inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, speaking difficulties can be major challenges to effective foreign language learning.

This research work is organised into five (05) chapters. The first chapter presents information about the background to the study, the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions and the significance of the study. The second chapter deals with the literature review. The third chapter is concerned with the methodology of the research work. The fourth chapter presents and analyses the data, and finally, the fifth chapter presents the summary of the study, discussion of the findings, and their implications.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Background to the study

In the past, oral communication instruction was neglected because of the misconception that oral communication competence develops naturally over time and that the cognitive skills involved in writing automatically transfer to analogous oral communication skills (Chaney, 1998). Thus, for many years, teaching speaking involved providing learners with components of language, in hopes that they would eventually put them all together and speak. Learners supposedly learned to speak by practicing grammatical rules and then later using them in conversation. So, learners might spend several years repeating after the teacher, studying grammar rules, memorizing dialogues and reciting them, and learning vocabulary. Unfortunately, actual conversations don't sound like the text-book dialogues.

During the late twentieth century, language acquisition research made teachers reconsider some long-standing beliefs about how people learn to speak. Several studies led to the conclusion that people don't learn pieces of the language and then put them together to make conversations. Instead, learners acquiring Second language (L2) learn the pieces by interacting with other people. Today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills because, only in that, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance. As a result, a method called communicative language teaching (CLT) arose. Communicative language teaching is essentially learner-centred. This method requires that since students learn through interacting, lessons should consist of opportunities to communicate in the target language. It aims to motivate students to want to learn the target language. "It interests them by focusing on relevant themes and by giving them some choice in producing language" explains Moon (2000:165).

Furthermore, the development of communicative ability has to be related to the needs of learners. According to Harmer (2003), "there are immediate potential communicative needs of the learners". Immediate needs arise in here and now in the classroom as the students share the experiences, interests, and opinions and, as except, their own ideas in the organization and evaluation of learning activities. Communicative needs mean that the students have to be prepared to use the language for real communication outside the classroom, e.g. asking for some information or meeting foreign visitors. Students use the language a great deal during

communicative activities such as games, projects, discussions, problem solving tasks, simulations, and role – plays.

1.2 Rationale for the study

It is generally noticed in Benin secondary schools that, after many years of English learning, students' speaking proficiency is low. Many students who have been learning English for seven (7) years as L2 cannot hold a conversation of five (05) minutes without many grammatical and pronunciation mistakes. What's more, others may not even try to speak. During the different speaking classes, teachers use different activities and strategies to empower learners' speech, brush up their English and enhance them to well pronounce and utter properly; however, teachers still face some students' hindrances. Many students do not participate in speaking activities, do not contribute and do not show any sign of progress, which indicate that there is something wrong somewhere with students. The present study sheds some light on what hinders the students from participating at these speaking classes by exploring the difficulties students experience in speaking classes so as to suggest some adequate solutions to help them acquire good speaking skills and increase their speaking proficiency.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), speaking appears intuitively the most important since people who know a language are referred to as speakers of that language. In English Language classroom, speaking is the most often used skill. Hence the ability of students to communicate naturally in English is one of the long-term goals that language teachers would like to achieve in class. Indeed, it is a demanding task for language teachers to provide sufficient input for students to be competent speaker of English. Usually, students feel insecure about their level of English and they face difficulties communicating as well as expressing themselves in English language. As a result, they rather remain silent as they are afraid of making mistakes and do not show active participation in speaking lessons. The use of language quickly and confidently with limited unnatural pauses, namely fluency, is also observed when evaluating their speaking ability.

There is a general public concern in Benin secondary schools that majority of students lack communicative and linguistic competence and thus cannot sustain conversation in English language without occasionally use their mother tongue during conversation or in group discussions in class. This situation limits seriously

the English speaking environment and reduces the practice of the language to the classroom alone. Practice makes perfect an English proverb says. The lack of daily practice of the language makes them forget about the little they have learnt in the classroom. As a result, after years of learning, a learner should normally be able to communicate successfully orally in that language but unfortunately what we notice with students at CEG APPLICATION is that after years of English learning, they still have problems to speak this language. Although the challenges are found in all language skills, the challenges in speaking are more serious when compared to other skills because of the different challenges that influence teachers' teaching productively and students' speaking performance such as inappropriate teaching methodology , students low limited time of teaching.

1.4 Purpose of the study

In deciding to carry out this research work, I aim at a number of purposes in order to help teachers and learners to improve English teaching and learning. The first purpose of this study is to explore EFL students' experienced difficulties in speaking classes at CEG APPLICATION in Porto-Novo and which prevent students from developing their oral productive competence and which hinder teachers from noticing the efficiency of their teaching as far as the English speaking skills are concerned; and then explore EFL teachers' pedagogical practice or attitudes of teaching speaking in EFL classrooms. Thus, although speaking is considered a main language skill that students should improve, it has been widely noticed that they face many difficulties in speaking English. This study aims to find out what speaking difficulties are encountered by students in Benin secondary schools, particularly at CEG Application in Porto-Novo. It also aims to find out the main factors that contribute to the existence of these difficulties.

Besides, the focus of teaching speaking, of course, is to improve the oral production of the students. Therefore, language teaching activities in the classroom should aim at maximising individual language use. That's the reason why this study aims to make teachers aware of their pedagogical attitudes to an efficient teaching of speaking skills in English. Furthermore, we would like to foster teachers' awareness on how a careful selection of speaking activities can be dealt with in our secondary schools to motivate students and make them more interested in English speaking skill.

1.5 Research questions

In this work, I tend to investigate some difficulties that affect EFL learners' participation in speaking class. The subjects of my investigation would be Junior Secondary School (JSS) students at CEG APPLICATION in Porto-Novo. Hence, through this study, we try to answer the following questions:

1- What are the difficulties that prevent students from participating during the speaking classes at CEG Application in Porto-Novo?
2- Do teachers teach speaking skills efficiently?

1.6 Significance of the study

This research work is relevant in so far it provides a genuine opportunity to expose the serious difficulties of students' poor speaking proficiency which is constantly challenging the educational system of the country in our secondary schools. Therefore, the concern of the students' experienced difficulties in English subject is a great problem and a real world issue which is worrying all actors of education, including the Ministry of Education, the EFL teachers, and the curriculum designers. So writing about the `` EFL Students' experienced difficulties in English speaking classes '' find its raison d'etre.

The results of this study can help the Ministry of Education, the EFL teachers, the curriculum designers, and the designers of assessment tools to understand the reasons why our young learners in secondary schools find it difficult to speak in English, and consequently, their plans for change and improvement of the students' speaking skill can produce more effective results when these factors are considered.

The present research may also have its usefulness by contributing in the attempt to solve the problem brought about by the teaching/learning English as foreign language. In addition, this research serves as a medium raising awareness and drawing the attention of teachers so that adequate measures could be taken to remedy somehow the problem of English decline in Benin secondary school.

Besides, this research is significant in a sense that it is destined to diagnose, to analyse and to make suggestions for the remediation of the delusion brought about by the teaching/learning English as a foreign language in our secondary schools in general. So, it is in this respect that I take in consideration all the actors of education

at all levels and chiefly the students and their teachers as the prime target of this research work which is restricted to JSS in Benin Republic.

CHAPTER Two: LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars have been concerned about the issue of students' experienced difficulties in speaking classes. This chapter presents the definition of speaking, the importance of speaking skills, the teaching speaking to EFL students, EFL students' speaking difficulties, the techniques and strategies enhancing EFL students' participation in speaking activities.

2.1 Definition of speaking

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information. Speaking, according to Chaney (1998), is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of context". Its form and meaning are depending on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving. However, speech is not always unpredictable. Speaking requires that learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary ("linguistic competence"), but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language ("sociolinguistic competence") (Nunan,1999:216) . The learning of language involves acquiring the ability to compose correct sentences and it involves an understanding of which sentences or part of sentences is appropriate for a particular context.

Moreover, we do speaking in order to communicate with each other. Better communication means better understanding of others and ourselves. Communication is a continuous process of expression, interpretation, and negotiation. The opportunities for communications are infinite and include systems of signs and symbols (Savignon, 1982:8). Communication requires a sender, a receiver and a medium. It can be said that both hearers and speakers do interactions by giving responds to what they have heard and listened to. Generally, people who encounter others through this oral communication have a certain goal that they want to achieve, the goal that underlies people to do the communication. Spoken language is a primary phenomenon. We speak a great deal more than we write, that is why language should be taught initially through speech. Spoken language is essential to any language learning. Learning to speak a foreign language is a learning that requires knowledge of the language and its application. In mastering the speaking

skill, the teacher must train and equip the learners with a certain degree of accuracy and fluency in understanding, responding and in expressing themselves in the language in speech.

2.2 Importance of speaking skills

In the traditional approaches of language learning and teaching, the Speaking Skill was neglected in many classrooms where the emphasis was mainly on reading and writing. The Grammar-Translation method is one example, Richards and Rodgers (2001) mention that reading and writing are the essential skills to be focused on however, little or no attention is paid to the skill of speaking and listening. In the communicative approach, speaking was given more importance since oral communication involves speech where learners are expected to interact verbally with other people. Moreover, the teachers' talk will be reduced; that is to say learners are supported to talk more in the classroom. Ur (2000: 12) declares also that "of all the four skills [listening, speaking, reading and writing], speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as, speakers of the language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing." Today, many second language learners give the speaking skill priority in their learning because if they master this skill then they will be considered as if they have mastered all of the other skills. Furthermore, the main question often given to foreign language learners is "do you speak English?" but not "do you write English?" We understand that most people take speaking and knowing a language as synonyms. Celce Murcia (2001: 103) argues that for most people "the ability to speak a language is synonymous with knowing that language since speech is the most basic means of human communication."

The importance of speaking is more revealed with the integration of the other language skills. For instance, speaking can help students to develop their vocabulary and grammar and then improving their writing skill. With speaking, learners can express their personal feeling, opinions or ideas; tell stories; inform or explain; request; converse and discuss, i.e. through speaking, we can display the different functions of language. Speaking is very important outside the classroom as well. Many companies and organizations look for people who speak English very well for the purpose of communicating with other people. So, speakers of foreign languages have more opportunities to get jobs in such companies. Baker and Westrup (2003:

05) support that “a student who can speak English well may have greater chance for further education, of finding employment and gaining promotion.”

2.3 Teaching speaking to EFL students

Speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching. Despite its importance, for many years, teaching speaking has been undervalued and English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance.

Now many linguistic and EFL teachers agree on that students learn to speak in the foreign language by interacting. Communicative language teaching and collaborative learning serve best for this aim. Communicative language teaching is based on real-life situations that require communication. By using this method in EFL classes, students will have the opportunity of communicating with each other in the target language. In brief, EFL teachers should create a classroom environment where students have real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. This can occur when students collaborate in groups to achieve a goal or to complete a task. The activities that can be done in the speaking classroom will be discussed later.

In the classroom situation, EFL students should learn the language naturally and teachers should provide them with plentiful opportunity to develop as well. Hayriye Kayi (2006:33) provides some suggestions for English language teachers while teaching oral language:

 Provide maximum opportunity to students to speak the target language by providing a rich environment that contains collaborative work, authentic materials and tasks, and shared knowledge.

 Try to involve each student in every speaking activity; for this aim, practice different ways of student participation.

 Reduce teacher speaking time in class while increasing student speaking time

 Indicate positive signs when commenting on a student's response.

 Do not correct students' pronunciation mistakes very often while they are speaking. Correction should be gentle and not distract student from his or her speech.

 Involve speaking activities not only in class but also out of class.

 Circulate around classroom to ensure that students are on the right track and see whether they need your help while they work in groups or pairs.

 Provide the vocabulary beforehand that students need in speaking activities.

 Diagnose problems faced by students who have difficulty in expressing themselves in the target language and provide more opportunities to practice the spoken language.

Therefore, students can improve their oral skill to express their ideas, opinions, and feelings, describe things, and to make social contact with people, and to make request and complaining.

Moreover, there are four things that students need to do with new language: be exposed to it, understand its meaning, understand its form (how it is constructed) and practice it (Harmer, 1998:52). In the classroom, a major part of the teacher's job is to expose students to language so that they can use it later. Foreign language learners need opportunities to develop the skills especially speaking skill, by being exposed to situations where the emphasis is on using the language for communicating meanings as efficiently as possible. The use of English is limited only in the classroom. The lack of exposure to real English speaking setting can limits the quantity and quality of the input. Therefore, in EFL classroom, teachers need to set the situations like ESL situation. When EFL teachers use only English, the EFL students can get the exposure. Students can be exposed to the language besides from the teacher utterances; they can also listen to tapes, read texts and look at computer printouts. In each case, the students are given chances to see or hear the language before they are asked to produce it themselves. Exposure seems to be the main source of success in foreign language acquisition.

2.4 EFL students' speaking difficulties

2.4.1 Linguistic Problems

According to Thornbury (2005) who states that "being skilful assumes having some kind of knowledge base … Knowledge that is relevant to speaking can be categorized either as knowledge of feature of language (linguistic knowledge) or knowledge that is independent of language (extra linguistic knowledge) ". He emphasizes that linguistic knowledge plays an essential role in speaking skill. If any feature from this knowledge is lacking or poorly performed, students can find problems within their speaking development. These difficulties are due to lack of vocabulary, pronunciation mistakes and grammar mistakes.

2.4.1.1 Lack of vocabulary:

To achieve oral skill students need the appropriate selection of words when they are speaking, and using these words and expression accurately. Thornbury(2005) states that "spoken language also has a relatively high proportion of words and expression" (p.22). Thus, learning foreign languages requires a great knowledge of its vocabulary, the phenomenon in our EFL classes is that many students often find some difficulties when they try to express what they want to say because they find themselves struggling their limited words and expression. Therefore, these limitations of vocabulary affect the amount of their participation in speaking activities.

2.4.1.2 Pronunciation mistakes

Speaking a language, means having a good pronunciation because the way of pronunciation is the first thing upon which students are judged and evaluated. EFL students have to practise their pronunciation and to be aware of the different rules of sounds as stress, intonation … etc. Bada, Genc and Ozkan (2011) assert the importance of pronunciation in speaking skill "in speaking, they compete with limited time to recall words, and also take care of their pronunciation … Speaking is often dealt with at pronunciation level" (p. 122). Usually students have unpronounced speech that reflects lack of experience with English sounds, rhythms and words stress and student's poor listening to native speaker or because of teacher's miss pronunciation as non-native speaker. Therefore, pronunciation mistakes are one of the main factors that impede the students from doing their speaking activities

freely and without any stress. This is the reason that leads to the difficulty of participation.

2.4.1.3. Grammar mistakes

In fact, grammar knowledge is one of the most important aspects of being a professional in speaking skill, EFL learners have to achieve this knowledge to improve their oral ability without any handles. However, students often prefer to keep silent rather than producing ungrammatical structure of expression because they are scared about being ridicule behind their teachers and classmates. As Davies and Pearse (2000) ‘‘many people do not like speaking in front of large groups of people. This is especially true in a foreign language, because we may worry about producing utterances with many errors or oddities in them” (p. 82). Thus, a grammatical mistake is one of the barriers that prevent students of foreign language from speaking in class.

2.4.2. Psychological barriers

The psychological barriers of EFL students in oral English communication are the psychological negative emotions that prohibit their performance in English as a foreign language. Students may experience different psychological barriers including lack of self-confidence, anxiety, shyness and fear … etc.

2.4.2.1 Lack of self -confidence

In many classes, some students prefer to keep their ideas and opinion to themselves because they are not sure about the strength of their abilities or hesitate to participate in the oral tasks. EFL students are hardly believing in their skill to speak English or even facing their teachers and classmates or simply they have not the confidence in themselves. Thus, lacking self-confidence leads them to say a few words to avoid making mistakes and embarrassment.

2.4.2.2 Shyness

Shyness is purely psychological problem that EFL students are suffering from. Shyness is the most obstacles that students of English as a foreign language face because they feel uncomfortable to speak in front of their classmates and their teachers. Students often do not participate in EFL classroom in natural manner because of shyness, so they are not able to perform in their tasks and achieve their goals. This will affect obviously their participation and lead them to a low participation or even to none.

2.4.2.3. Fear of making mistakes

In EFL classes, students cannot express themselves in foreign language and do not participate appropriately in the oral lessons for the reason that they are worried about making mistakes, fearful about public correction. As Ur (2000) states "Learners are often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom, worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism or loosing face, or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts."(p. 111). Therefore, fear of making mistakes can be considered as another obstacle for students' participation in speaking classes.

2.4.2.4. Anxiety

Anxiety is one of the main handles for many EFL learners. Anxiety is the negative emotion that creates trouble in learning process for the students. Anxious student do not learn well as well as do not communicate effectively in classroom situation. Wrench, Gorham, and Virginia (2009, p.55) support that many students don't learn when they are fearful, anxious, apprehensive, or scared. Students don't communicate effectively with teachers when they are fearful, anxious, apprehensive, or scared to communicate with them. Students don't complete tests well when they are fearful, anxious, apprehensive, or scared of testing situations. Simply put, students don't do well in the classroom environment when they are fearful, anxious, apprehensive, or scared. Anxiety reveals more than when students try to participate in the classroom, so they feel uncomfortable about speaking English in front of their classmates as Littlewood (1981) states that "it is too easy for a foreign language classroom to create inhibition and anxiety" (p. 93).

2.4.3 Poor listening practice

In addition to above main problems, poor listening practice can be added. Many students know all the rules of English language; however, they find many problems when they try to speak and interact with people. These are because they do not understand the other speakers. Listening comprehension plays a major role in understanding the different functions of English language to help students in making further contribution to any discussion and conversation. Listening as a skill is so important for speaking because they are related which means that each skill relies on the other one. Anderson and Lynch (1988) show this significant relationship of speaking and listening skills "A carefully prepared L2 utterance is only a useful aid

to communicate if the speaker can deal effectively with replies he receives. For, the L2 learner, in conversation, needs to be skilled as both speaker and listener" (p. 15). So far, poor listening practice undoubtedly is a serious problem for the students that will lead to a poor speaking competence.

2.4.4 Lack of interest in subject

In foreign language classroom, oral expression module aims to develop the students speaking skill in order to be able to express their thoughts and feeling freely and confidently. In the classroom, discussed subjects are the main stimulation for students to speak and to participate. Thornbury (2005, p.25) supports that familiarity with the topic fosters learners' participation in speaking activities:

"the greater the familiarity, the easier the speaking task … Feeling towards the topic and/ or the participants: generally, if you are well disposed to the topic you are talking about, and/ or the other participants, the easier it is likely to be good participant students in EFL classes have a positive attitude toward the topic and the teacher since he is their guide".

However, many students have nothing to say or simply remain silent because they have no idea about the topic or have bad attitude toward the subject. Thus, non-interesting topics is another factors that stop students from participation.

2.4.5 Classroom atmosphere

The classroom atmosphere can be motivating or demotivating for the EFL learners. When the classroom atmosphere is demotivating, it prevents students' participation and hinders their development of speaking skill. Teachers are mainly responsible for creating a relaxed and friendly atmosphere for the students in order to express themselves well as well as giving them the opportunity to their personalities. Davies and Pearse (2000) suggest some implications for teaching: "try to create a relaxed atmosphere in your classes so that most learners are not frightened of speaking in front of the class. And do as many speaking activities as possible in pairs and groups, so that the learners can speak English without the rest of the class listening" (p. 82). Therefore, motivating atmosphere is important for teaching and learning in foreign language. Littlewood (1981) asserts that the real progress for speaking and developing communicative skills can only take place if the learners have motivation and opportunity to express their own identity and to relate with

people around them (his classmates and his teachers). Students really need motivating atmosphere that gives them sense of security and value as individuals.

2.4.6 Low or uneven participation

This problem refers to the amount of each student's time of talking. There are some students who tend to be dominant and take almost the whole students talk time. However, others prefer to speak only if they ensure that what they will say is correct, and some others keep silent, show no interest or participation all along the course. Harmer (2001) suggests streaming weak participators in groups and letting them work together. In such cases they will not hide behind the strong participators, and the teacher can achieve a high level of participation. Another factor that can create problem of participation is the classroom arrangement that may not help students to perform some speaking activities. Low participation is due to the ignorance of teacher's motivation too. If the teacher does not motivate his learners, the talkative ones also will show no interest. So, increasing and directing student motivation is one of the teacher's responsibilities.

2.4.7 Mother tongue use

Student of the same mother tongue often use it in and outside classroom because they feel comfortable and less exposed to the target language. Learners often use the mother tongue when they could not express themselves in foreign language, so they borrow words from their native language. According to Baker and Westrup (2003), "barriers to learning can occur if students knowingly or unknowingly transfer the cultural rules from their mother tongue to a foreign language" (p.12).Therefore, this use of mother tongue breaks down the students' communication in classroom and lessens their speaking abilities. Students always run away from using the foreign language due to the lack of vocabulary in this language.

2.4.8 Large Classes

Large classes are often perceived as one of the major obstacles for both students and teachers and for the teaching-learning process. In large classes setting, teachers could not manage his classroom as well as EFL students opportunities decreased. Murcia Celce (2001) confirms that "large classes are often the norm of overseas, limiting both student opportunities to talk and teacher opportunity to provide feedback" (p.110). Speaking classes' aim is to encourage the students' participation and to improve their speaking skill; however, large classes prevent EFL

students from getting equal chance of participation during the session. Moreover, in large classes, students fear about speaking, especially asking for more clarification from their teachers. They fear from showing others that they do not understand. For that, large classes are stopping point for the students' participation.

2.4.9 Time allocated

Not only large class is an obstacle for both students and teachers but also time allocated is considered as another obstacle. This latter prevents teachers from giving enough opportunity for their students to participate and speak as well. For that reason, teachers face a negative attitude from their students because they think that teachers are not fair with them. Hence, teachers are also victims of both time limitation and large classes since they do have neither the time nor the space to do their best. As a result, time allocated can be considered as a preventing obstacle of students' participation.

2.5 Techniques and strategies enhancing EFL students' participation in speaking activities

One of the biggest challenges for the teachers of English language is to make all the students participate, especially in speaking activities that aim to provide suitable place for learners to speak. However, many students do not speak during speaking classes. In order to increase students' participation and interest in speaking and communication in the EFL classes, teachers need to know some effective pedagogical techniques that promote participation and collaboration among the students.

2.5.1 Group work

Group work is a classroom situation where the teacher can divide the whole class into small unites or groups. Group work is learner –centred classroom. In this technique the teacher is expected to organize the group effectively. During oral expression lessons, teacher uses group work to support learning and to avoid participation problems. Group work is one of the most ways and techniques that EFL teachers provide in order to encourage the students and get them fully engaged in the classroom activities. In order to make it effective, the purpose of group tasks must be clear to the learners. Students must know what they do, report orally or in written

form. This will allow them to prepare a presentation or discuss an issue and come to group decision. Group work is a meaningful technique for students to exchange ideas and opinion from each other and to work together without any hinders.

In addition to the benefits of groups, Harmer (2001, p. 117) states a number of advantages from this technique:

1- It decreases the amount of teachers' talk and gives much opportunity for students.

2- It encourages broader skills of cooperation and negotiation.

3- It promotes learner autonomy by allowing the students to make their decision.

To summarize, group work is designed by the teachers to decrease many problems of participation and to facilitate learning process because students often prefer to learn from each other.

2.5.2 Pair works

Pair work is another useful technique used by teachers to organize students when giving them activities. According to Jones, (2007) in a pair work, the atmosphere tends to be more protective and private than in groups. Students often feel less introverted in pairs, and they can talk about more personal feeling or experiences than they would even in small groups. Pair work seems to be more conducive to cooperation and collaboration. Within pair works, students find themselves participating because they must speak with their classmates. Pair work is less threatening because it creates a friendly atmosphere for students and promotes the sense of belonging among them. According to Harmer (2001, p. 116), pair work has many advantages as the following:

1- It increases the amount of speaking for the students.

2- It gives the opportunity for the students to work and interact independently.

3- It allows teachers time to work with one pair and the other students continue working.

4-It promotes cooperative help in the classroom among the students.

5- It is relatively quick and easy to organize.

2.5.3 Problem solving activities

Techniques of attaching problem situation to arrive at solutions, is problem solving methods of teaching. It is used to enhance the understanding level and critical thinking skill of students. Problem solving activities encourage students to talk together to find a solution to various types of problem. Most of the problem solving tasks requires pair or group work but students can work on their own. These activities demand the learners themselves decide upon the items to be ranked. Thus, there is more creative use of the foreign language. Students will have to make suggestions, give reasons and accept, modify or reject suggestions and reasons given by others. The technique has its own stages of problem solving. First, it can be identified, stated and dissected into smaller problems or sub problems. Second must know the problem that they are going to tackle, specify goals or missions that expected to be attained at the end of theprocess.

2.5.4 Role play

One other way of getting students to speak is role-playing. Students pretend they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social roles. In role-play activities, the teacher gives information to the learners such as who they are and what they think or feel. For instance, one student plays a tourist telephoning the police to report his wallet stolen. The other plays the role of a police officer trying to help the tourist file a report. Role plays give learners practice speaking the target language before they must do so in a real environment.

Baranauskien (1996) gives some benefits for using free role – plays in EFL classrooms:

• Role – plays increase motivation. Talking about real life in each lesson can become very dull and the chance to imagine different situations adds interest to a lesson.

• Role – play gives a chance to use language in new contexts and for new topics.

• Students often imagine themselves in different situations and roles when they play games. So by using role – plays in class, we build on something that students naturally enjoy.

• Because they are" acting out" a situation, role – play encourages students to use natural expressions and intonation as well as gestures.

2.5.5 Simulations

Simulations are very similar to role-plays but what makes simulations different than role plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. For instance, if a student is acting as a singer, she brings a microphone to sing and so on. Role plays and simulations have many advantages. First, since they are entertaining, they motivate the students. Second, they increase the self-confidence of hesitant students, because in role play and simulation activities, they will have a different role and do not have to speak for themselves, which means they do not have to take the same responsibility. The idea of simulation is to create the pretence of a real – life situation in the classroom: students "simulate" the real world

2.5.6 Discussions

Many teachers complain that their students "have nothing to say": they complain that their students have no opinion and are not prepared to discuss anything. The problem may rise that students are asked to express themselves fluently on a difficult topic.

Before the discussion, it is essential that the purpose of the discussion activity is set by the teacher. In this way, the discussion points are relevant to this purpose, so that students do not spend their time chatting with each other about irrelevant things. For example, students can become involved in agree/disagree discussions. In this type of discussions, the teacher can form groups of students, preferably 3 in each group, and provide controversial sentences like "people learn best when they read vs. people learn best when they travel". Then each group works on their topic for a given time period, and presents their opinions to the class. It is essential that the speaking should be equally divided among group members. At the end, the class decides on the winning group who defended the idea in the best way. This activity fosters critical thinking and quick decision making, and students learn how to express and justify themselves in polite ways while disagreeing with the others. For efficient group discussions, it is always better not to form large groups, because quiet students may avoid contributing in large groups. The group members can be either assigned by the teacher or the students may determine it by themselves, but groups should be rearranged in every discussion activity so that students can work with various people and learn to be open to different ideas.

Harmer (1991) gives some hints about organizing discussions:

• Put students in groups first. This will allow them to give opinion in a less threatening environment.

• Give students a chance to prepare. If they are to discuss the role of family or the relative merits of radio and television they need a time to prepare their opinions.

• Give students a task. One way of promoting discussion is to give students a list of controversial statements about a topic (Harmer 1991:124). Discussion activities are an important part of communication

2.5.7 Information gap

In this activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that other partner does not have and the partners will share their information using the target language For example, one student has the directions to a party and must give them to a classmate. Information gap activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. Also, each partner plays an important role because the task cannot be completed if the partners do not provide the information the others need. These activities are effective because everybody has the opportunity to talk extensively in the target language.

2.5.8 Picture description

Another way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students just one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. For this activity students can form groups and each group is given a different picture. Students discuss the picture with their groups, and then a spokesperson for each group describes the picture to the whole class. This activity fosters the creativity and imagination of the learners as well as their public speaking skills.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a detailed description of the design of the study, participants of the study, the data collection instruments, the data collection procedures and the data analysis procedures.

3.1 Design of the study

Basing on the core of the research questions, I used both quantitative and qualitative research methods including survey questionnaire and class observation. The design of this study will consist in the analysis of the results of the survey. The expected answers will be interpreted in terms of figures and percentage.

3.2 Research participants

The present study is a case study. The survey of this study has taken into account two kinds of target. The first target is a group of EFL students of CEG Application in Porto-Novo and the second one is made up of EFL teachers of the same school. Such choice has been made because this study is an exploratory study of EFL students' experienced difficulties in speaking classes, which involves not only teachers but also learners. Ninety five (95) EFL students who are chosen randomly and eleven (11) EFL teachers are involved in this investigation.

3.3 Data collection instruments

The data collection instruments I have used to collect data for this study are questionnaires and class observations. Students' questionnaire will help to answer the first research question:

1-What are the difficulties that prevent students from participation during the speaking classes at CEG Application in Porto-Novo?

Whereas both teachers' questionnaire and class observations will help to answer the second research question:

2-Do teachers teach speaking skills appropriately?

3.3.1 Questionnaire

It is designed in order to obtain information about the topic. I have made such a choice because this instrument is more practical to succeed in obtaining good

information and has also been proved to be an instrument that respondents really feel free and more confident to respond. The questionnaire for learners is made of twelve (12) questions and the second one designed for teachers is made of ten (11) questions. Teacher's questionnaire was administered to 11 teachers chosen randomly, investigating various aspects of their pedagogical practices. The students have also been addressed a questionnaire which sought to find out what really constitute their difficulties during speaking lessons. The students' questionnaire was administered to 95 students of junior secondary school at CEG Application in Porto-Novo. I have also used information from the class observations that I carried out in second and third year of training.

3.3.2 Class observations

The questionnaire is an appropriate instrument to collect data. But it is not sufficient enough to reach my goal. That's why I felt obliged to carry out class observations. This instrument enabled me to understand thoroughly how EFL teachers manage their classes so as to discover the problems that hinder English learning in Benin secondary schools by my own. Using this instrument some aspects of teachers' practice of teaching speaking skill in classroom, the challenges of teaching speaking skill, how teachers teach speaking skill, were gathered.

To fulfill this work design, I got along with three teachers of English to go and observe them when they are carrying out their courses. I carried out three observation sessions with each of them. A planning was as well negotiated with them on what to be observed. Teachers who accepted to be observed were very welcoming, that is, whenever I paid them a visit, they gave me a seat at the bottom of the classroom so as to make me feel free and at ease to perform my work. During the lesson, I could see everything going on. At the end of each visit, I spent a few minutes in discussing and exchanging ideas on the issues which were relevant to my research.

3.4 Data collection procedures

The data have been collected through both qualitative and quantitative methods. In the first stage, the participants are given questionnaires containing a certain number of questions. The questions are introduced to the participants until they demonstrate an adequate understanding of the procedure and they are all tested individually. Besides, Classroom observations are also taken as an instrument to investigate what actually happened in the speaking classes, that is, how teachers

conduct their speaking class. Therefore, three teachers are randomly chosen to be observed while presenting the speaking lessons. Each teacher is observed twice referring the principles of teaching speaking which were all concerned with classroom conditions, teachers' and students' role, speaking lesson presentation and, strategies used by the classroom teachers in order to teach speaking skill.

3.5 Data analysis procedures

Firstly, quantitative results will be analyzed in percentage after being calculated. In addition, all the calculated data (in percentage) are presented in tables for better visualization. In other words, the quantitative data derived from the questionnaires are analyzed using the descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages. Secondly, the qualitative data are derived from the class observations. What happened in every class observed is described in detail. I also discussed the strong and weak points of these classes.

The findings of my study are displayed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter presents and analyzes the data obtained through investigating the EFL students' participation difficulties in speaking classes and teachers' classroom practices during speaking class sessions. Each table presents one of the questions answered in the questionnaire. I first proceeded by presenting and interpreting student's answers and then presenting and interpreting the answers provided by teachers.

4.1 Learners' experienced difficulties in speaking classes

1. How do you Evaluate your Speaking Abilities?

Table1: Students' evaluation on speaking ability

Options	Responses	Percentages
Very well	05	5.6%
Average	39	41.05%
Low	51	53.68%
Total	95	100%

This question aims to assess the students' speaking abilities. They are asked to evaluate their levels in speaking. Most of students (53. 68%) answer that they have a low level. Whereas, (41. 05%) state they have an average level, and only five students (5. 26%) claim that they speak very well.

2. Speaking is:

Table2: Students' Perception of Speaking

Options	Responses	Percentages
Easy	24	25.26
Difficult	71	74.73%
Total	95	100%

This question aims at knowing the different point of views of the students on speaking English. The table shows that 74. 73% of the students answer that speaking English is a difficult task, while only 25. 26% view that it is easy to speak English.

All this shows that students have many difficulties that prevent them from expressing themselves in English.

3. How often do you participate in the oral speaking lessons?

Table3: Frequency of Students' Participation in Speaking Classes

Options	Responses	Percentages
Always	11	11.57%
Sometimes	56	58.94%
Rarely	28	29.47%
Total	95	100%

This question aims at knowing the frequency of students' participation during speaking lessons. It leads to detect if the students do not participate because of many problems. Most of the students (58. 94%) respond with "sometimes". On the other hand, (29. 47 %) of the students respond by "rarely" which means that they are facing some obstacles which hinder their participation. While, only eleven (11. 57%) students respond by "always".

4. Are you afraid about participation in speaking activities?

Table4: Students' Participation in Speaking Activities

Options	Responses	Percentages
Yes	77	81.05%
No	18	18.94%
Total	95	100%

The question aims at determining whether the students are afraid about speaking and participation during the oral course. Consequently, I obtain the following results which show that (18. 94%) of the students are not afraid to participate. They consider themselves as talkative or able to participate, while the majority (81. 05%) affirm they are afraid to participate. This might be due to several reasons: linguistic problems, psychological problems and other problems.

5. If yes, is it because of:

Table5: Linguistic Barriers

Options	Responses	Percentages
Fear of making grammatical mistakes	13	16.88%
Fear of making pronunciation mistakes	26	33.76%
Lack of vocabulary	38	49.35%
Total	77	100%

In this question we intend to highlight some of the linguistic problems that hinder the students' participation. The results indicate that about half of students (49, 35%) do not participate due to the lack of vocabulary. Then, (33. 76%) do not participate because they are afraid of making pronunciation mistakes; however, the rest of students (16. 88%) have indicated that they are afraid because of the fear of making grammatical mistakes.

6. Or you do not participate because of:

Table6: Psychological and other Barriers

Options	Responses	Percentages
Shyness	15	19.48%
Lack of self-confidence	17	22.07%
Anxiety	26	33.76%
The topic is not interesting	19	24.67%
Total	77	100%

The choices come to discuss why the students do not participate in the classroom, and they are provided with a set of possibilities from which they have to choose the appropriate choice that describe their case. Out of seventy seven students, twenty six students (33. 76%) do not participate because of the anxiety, nineteen (24. 67%) are inactive because the topic that is discussed in the classroom is uninteresting. Whereas (19. 48%) have indicated that they are afraid due to shyness, and the rest of the sample (22. 07%) are lacking the self-confidence.

7. You want to convey a certain message during your turn of speaking and you find a difficulty to make the point. What do you do?

Table7: The Strategies Used by the Learners when Facing Oral Difficulties.

Options	Responses	Percentages
I use French instead	37	38.94%
I use my mother tongue	41	43.15%
I keep quiet and give my turn to another	17	17.89%
Total	95	100%

From the data above, we can see that (37. 94%) of the learners use French when they find a difficulty to convey their message. (43. 15%) of the learners use their mother tongue and (17. 89%) of the learners keep quiet and give their turn to another one. According to these results, we can notice that since the majority of the students share French language and the same mother tongue, they prefer to use them outside and even inside the classroom rather than the target language since they feel more at ease. According to Baker and Westrup (2003: 12) “barriers to learning can occur if students knowingly or unknowingly transfer the cultural rules from their mother tongue to a foreign language.” Therefore, the learners will find it difficult to use the target language correctly if they keep on borrowing words and terms from their mother tongue which is a result of target language vocabulary lacks. Also this will reduce their opportunities to practice the target language.

8. How would you describe the atmosphere of your class?

Table 8: The Classroom Atmosphere

Options	Responses	Percentages
Boring	45	47.36%
Funny and motivating	50	52.63%
Total	95	100%

The results show that the ratio is nearly the same. (52. 63%) of the learners describe the atmosphere of their classroom as funny which means that they have a

positive attitude towards learning conditions (classroom environment/contexts); whereas, the remaining number of learners (47. 36%) perceive it negatively, i.e. they consider it as boring. This latter can be a discouraged factor for the students or none motivating to their participation during lesson time. From the results above we conclude that it is advisable for our teachers to create a positive learning environment in order to meet learners need and realize their perceptions.

9. How often does the teacher give you the opportunity to participate during the lesson?

Table9: Frequency of Giving Students Opportunity to Participate during the Speaking Lesson.

Options	Responses	Percentages
Always	29	30.52%
Sometimes	64	67.36%
Never	02	0.10%
Total	95	100%

The result (67. 36%) shows that teachers sometimes give the opportunity to students to participate in oral course probably because:

-Teacher talk is more than students talk.

- The methodology is not encouraging for the participation.

- The classroom is overcrowded.

-Time is not enough.

-Teacher prefers to deal with specific students, especially those who are fluent speakers.

(30. 52 %) from the total percentage indicates that teachers always give them opportunity to speak during the lesson since teachers' role is to make the learning process enjoyable to improve students' language, especially their speaking skills. Only two students (0. 10%) say that he never gives them the chance to participate and this may be due to the fact that teachers talk too much and do not give learners opportunity.

10. Do you speak English outside classroom with your classmates?

Table10: The Use of English Outside the Classroom

Options	Responses	Percentages
No	79	83.15.89%
Yes	16	16.84%
Total	95	100%

The results denote that (83. 15%) from the sample do not speak English outside the classroom. This is maybe because English is not their mother tongue, so their surroundings do not know and do not speak it. Whereas, 16. 84% presents the students who speak English outside the classroom. They may use it with their classmates or during some English club activities if they belong to one.

11. When (in what situation) are you most willing to speak English?

Table11: Techniques Students Prefer more to Use

Options	Responses	Percentages
When working in groups	47	49.47%
When working in pair	29	30.52%
Total	95	100%

This question was asked in order to distinguish the best group arrangement of learners that can be used as technique when learning speaking in the point of view of learners. The table above summarizes the most frequent techniques that teachers can use in order to carry out a speaking activity. It is noticed in this table that about half of the students (49. 47%) prefer working in groups. (30. 52%) of the students prefer working in pairs. The fact that learners prefer the group-work more than the pair-work may stem from the fact that maybe they are introverted (not open), less confident or less ambitious. When working in groups, there is always a leadership, who present the group opinion after being in consensus, which reduces the fear of being individually criticized. According to Salaberri (1995) “working in groups provides opportunities for real communication which allow greater learners’ participation, collaborative work and learning from others” (p.27).

12. What are the activities you think motivate you to participate?

Table12: Motivation Activities for Students' Participation

Options	Responses	Percentages
Role play and dialogues	44	42.71%
Discussion and debates	36	34.95%
Problem solving	19	18.44%
Information gap activities	04	3.88%
Total	103	100%

The present item of information is intended to ask the students about the activities that motivate their participation. Students' answers are varied; each student has his own favourite activities during the speaking class. Most of students (42. 71%) prefer role play and dialogues as the most preferable activity. (34. 95%) prefer discussion and debates than the other (18. 44%) that prefer problem solving activity. However, the rest of students (3. 88%) choose information gap activity. The most noticeable is that the students do not choose only one activity but they also choose other activities. Hence, they prefer to work with variety kinds of activities.

4.2 Teachers' classroom practices during speaking class sessions

4.2.1 Data from the questionnaire

1. Do you teach the speaking skill to your leaners?

Table13: Teachers' Awareness of the Value of Teaching Speaking

Options	Responses	Percentages
Yes	11	100%
No	/	0%
Total	11	100%

This question is asked to know whether teachers are aware of the teaching of speaking skill or they just teach for teaching sake. As can be seen in the table, all the teachers state that they teach speaking in their English classrooms.

2. Do you try to create a friendly and motivating atmosphere in the classroom?

Table14: Classroom Atmosphere

Options	Responses	Percentages
Yes	11	100%
No	/	0%
Total	11	100%

The results in the table show that all the teachers try to create a friendly and motivating atmosphere in the classroom. They always do their effort in order to make the students feel at ease and comfortable to speak without any problem. The type of atmosphere can play as supportive or hindrance to the students' participation.

3. At the beginning of the year do you ask your learners about their expectations?

Table15: Learners' Needs Analysis

Options	Responses	Percentages
No	09	81.81%
Yes	02	18.18%
Total	11	100%

This question was asked in order to know if teachers carry out an analysis of learners' needs or not. The results show that only two (18. 18%) teachers declare that they do ask learners about their expectations at the beginning of the year in order to know their personality, their preferences (activities), and their interests. However, the majority (81. 81%) of the teachers reveal that they do not ask their learners about their expectations, which may cause a great damage (inhibition) in the learning process. From the results above, we may say that the teachers do not give importance to needs' analysis in spite of its great significance as being the basic, the central point (stem) on which the lesson plan is structured. So, it is advisable for teachers to do it

if they are willing to encourage their learners and to improve on the learning/teaching process.

4. What are the considerations that you take into account before/when preparing your speaking lesson plan?

From the responses to this question we can notice that the considerations that teachers take into account before/when they prepare their lesson plan can be summarized as the following:

 The learners needs.

 The learners' level

 The learners' learning styles and preferences.

 The familiarity of the topic.

 That allotted time for the task.

 The availability of materials and resources.

 The practicality of the task in the classroom.

 The importance and relevance of the topic to learners' interest (motivating topic).

 The ability to achieve objectives (learning goal) within the limited time and setting.

From those responses and in comparison with the answer of the previous question, we can notice a contradiction. If the majority of teachers do not fulfil the learners' needs analysis at the beginning of the year how can they plan their lessons in accordance to what they have mentioned.

5. Do you give the opportunity to all your students to speak during a speaking class sessions?

Table16: Students' Participation Opportunities

Options	Responses	Percentages
Yes	11	100%
No	/	0%
Total	11	100%

When teachers were asked if they succeed in giving all their students the opportunity to use the target language, all of them responded negatively. This might be related to the class size and the time allocated. Indeed large classes are often perceived as one of the major obstacle for both students and teachers and for teaching-learning process. In large classes setting, teachers could not manage his classroom as well as EFL students' opportunities to speak decrease. Teachers are also victims of limitation of time since they do have neither the time nor the space to do their best.

6. What is your reaction when the students make mistakes during oral work?

Table17: Teachers' Attitude towards Students' Mistakes

Options	Responses	Percentages
keep quiet, smile and encourage them to go on their task	02	15.38%
stop them and correct their mistakes	05	38.46%
get annoyed when students keep making mistakes	/	0%
If students cannot think of what to say, you may prompt them forwards.	03	23.07%
Watch, listen to students and write down points to give feedback afterwards.	03	23.07%
Total	**13**	**100%**

When teachers were asked about how they correct their students' mistakes, their responses were as recorded in the table and which can be described in the following terms: (15. 38%) report that when their students make mistakes during oral work they keep quiet, smile and encourage them to go on their task, (38. 46%) state they stop them and correct their mistakes. Whereas, (23. 07%) notify that If students cannot think of what to say, they may prompt them forwards. Similarly (23. 07%)

of the teachers said that they watch, listen to students and write down points to give feedback afterwards in such situation. However none of the teachers said they get annoyed when students keep making mistakes since their job is to help students overcome those mistakes. The high proportion of stopping students and correcting their mistakes is a major cause of students inhibition since overcorrection is harmful to students' self-confidence, makes them feel embarrassed. During speaking class, it is better to note errors or mistakes on a sheet of papers for later correction rather than overload leaners with excessive correction which is harmful to their self-confidence.

7. When teaching speaking, what do you aim to develop in your learners, fluency practice or accuracy practice?

Table18: Teachers' Preferences between Fluency and Accuracy

Options	Responses	Percentages
Fluency	03	27.27%
Accuracy	06	54.54%
Both	02	18.18%
Total	11	100%

From the results above we can notice that the majority (54. 54%) of teachers aim to develop students' accuracy during communicative activities whereas three teachers emphasize fluency practice. However, only two teachers say their aim during speaking lessons is to develop both students' accuracy and fluency, which sounds appropriate. Thus, in language lessons learners must be given opportunities to develop both fluency and accuracy.

8. After communicative activities which feedback comes first?

Table19: Teacher's Way of Giving Feedback

Options	Responses	Percentages
Content feedback	04	63.63%
Form feedback	07	36.36%
Total	11	100%

When teachers were asked about the type of feedback they provide just after communicative activities four of them state that content feedback comes first whereas the remaining of the sample declare that they provide form feedback just

after communicative activities, which is not the best way of providing feedback since it demotivates students and destroys their self-confidence. Consequently, content feedback should usually come first and the teacher must decide when form feedback is appropriate and when it is not.

9. Which one is dominant?

Table20: Teachers' Preferable Feedback

Options	Responses	Percentages
Content feedback	04	36.36%
Form feedback	07	63.63%
Total	11	100%

From the results above, we can see that most teachers (07) make form feedback dominant whereas only four teachers of the total sample think content feedback should dominate. The first category of the respondents constitutes a danger to students' motivation and their self-confidence. That's why teachers should take great care not to make form feedback dominant after communicative activities.

10. How do you make your students participate?

Table21: Teachers' Ways to Enhance Students' Participation

Options	Reponses	Percentages
Group and pair work	11	55%
Choosing interesting topic	09	45%
Allowing using mother tongue	/	0%
Total	20	100%

There are several ways that language teachers adopt within classroom situation. The most appropriate techniques that all teachers (11) agreed on are group and pair work. Teachers favour these types of techniques because they believe that students feel more comfortable with each other and can exchange information and feel less inhibited with them. Nine teachers select the option "choosing interesting topics". Teachers who opted this way realize that the topics that interest students lead them to more participation and bring them to the classroom activity. However, none of the teachers choose the option "allowing the use of mother tongue" as best techniques to enhance their speaking skill.

11. What are the speaking activities you focus on most to create a successful participation?

Table22: Speaking Activities to Create a Successful Participation

Options	Responses	Percentages
Role play	11	34.37%
Discussion and debates	09	28.12%
Problem solving	01	3.12%
Dialogues	11	34.37%
Total	32	100%

There are several ways for teaching speaking skill. I have suggested four options for teachers .The table above illustrates that all of the teachers (11) focus on dialogues and role play to create a successful participation and to build their confidence. On the other hand (9) teachers prefer debates and discussions as an activity to motivate them to speak. Only (01) teacher tick the option of "problem solving activity" as the appropriate activity to ameliorate their motivation to participate without any difficulties. We can notice that the teachers had more than one choice since they believe in variation of the speaking activities, which is important for motivation.

4.2.2 Data from the classroom observations

The classroom observations I carried out have revealed that teachers teaching methods differs from one teachers to another at CEG Application in Porto-Novo. Two of the teachers I have observed begin their classes directly on what they have to teach. They do not warm-up their learners to arise motivation in them. They do not mind any motivation to reinforce their learners' understanding of the lesson. I also noticed that teachers monopolize speech, that is, their talking time exceeds students talking time, which reduces students' participation opportunities. It was observed that the students only spoke when answering the questions asked by their teachers. Students were not properly given chances to practice their speaking skills.

Whenever the students made mistakes, two of the teachers would stop them and correct the mistakes. I noticed that this teachers' attitude make some students feel embarrassed and not willing to carry on. Some may even decide not to carry on despite teachers' pressure asking them to finish what they have started. This teachers' practice hinders learners' participation and leads to their inhibition since it leads to

the loss of their self-confidence. What also attracted my attention during my observation is that two of the teachers I observed don't show any emotion in class, that is, they don't smile. This is a bad habit that does not promote a safe learning environment. A teacher should be an actor who plays many roles in the learning classroom environment. He might join simulations as participant, sometimes himself playing a role as joker for example. What is even more striking is that one of them uses corporal punishment. After the class I asked to know the motive and he told that we cannot avoid corporal punishment if we really want to solve discipline problems. This attitude can be a discouraged factor for the students or none motivating to their participation during lesson time.

Generally, students were not given enough time to prepare for a speaking task before the task was performed and to perform their task. The students had to do a lot of things in a forty-five minute period. They were always in a hurry because they were given limited time for every task. I also noticed that most teachers delay on form feedback before they come on content feedback, which constitutes a danger for students' motivation and their self-confidence.

During speaking activities teachers use group work and pair work as strategies to get all the students involve in the tasks. Also to create a successful participation they generally focus on activities such as role plays, dialogues, and sometimes discussion and debates. All the teachers do not succeed in giving all the students the opportunity to speak before the end of the class. Furthermore, all the teachers tend to work only with the students who are most active while other may be sitting to their places with their mouths closed till the end of the lesson. The latter category feels ignored and frustrated, which leads to learners' inhibition. It's teachers' job to establish an even participation during oral expression course. In all the lessons observed, the emphasis though was however on listening and the students only spoke when answering the questions asked by their teachers.

It's important for me to mention the impact of large class sizes. In the three classes where I did my observations, the minimum class size was 44 and in some others, almost 55 or beyond was the number of learners in the classroom. I noticed that some teachers in such classes used to address their questions only to the learners who sit in front and those who are not given the floor show a disinterest in the lessons and have an impression that their teacher does not care about them.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

After presenting and analyzing the data collected, I find it useful to summarize and discuss the findings of my study, provide their implications and suggest some solutions for the remedial of some problems that hinder EFL students' participation in speaking classes and the process of teaching-learning English as Foreign Language (EFL) at CEG Application in Porto-Novo.

5.1 Summary of the study

There is a general public concern in Benin secondary schools that the majority of Secondary school students lack communicative competence and thus cannot sustain conversation in English language without occasionally code switching to French or their mother tongue. The present study sought to explore EFL students' experienced difficulties in speaking classes, and see what strategies teachers use to promote speaking skills in the EFL context. I investigated the case of CEG Application in Porto-Novo. Descriptive method was used to establish the existence EFL students' speaking difficulties by explicitly describing them. 11 EFL teachers and 95 EFL students were involved in the study. The data were collected by using two instruments: questionnaires, classroom observations. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were employed to analyse the data. The study shows that there are a number of factors that contribute to students' non participation during speaking lessons. Throughout this study, I come to the conclusion that students do not participate in oral courses due to psychological problems (anxieties, fear, shyness, lack of self-confidence), and linguistic problems; for example, lack of vocabulary, mispronunciation and grammatical mistakes, and also due to bad attitudes towards the topics and the lack of motivation. Furthermore, the data suggest some techniques (group work and pair work) and activities (role plays, dialogues, discussion and debates…) that EFL students need to work with to get rid of these obstacles. The present study also sheds some light on teachers' classroom practices so as to assess their pedagogical practice during speaking class session to see if they teach speaking effectively.

5.2 Discussion of the findings

The data I have collected from the questionnaire that we administered to EFL junior secondary students at CEG Application confirm that many factors affect

students' speaking performance. Basing on the results in the tables above, speaking is the most difficult skill to master for the majority of English learners, and they are still incompetent in communicating orally in English. There are many factors that cause difficulty in speaking English among EFL learners. Some of these factors are related to the learners themselves, the teaching strategies, the curriculum, and the environment. For example, many learners lack the necessary vocabulary to get their meaning across, and consequently, they cannot keep the interaction going. Inadequate strategic competence and communication competence can be another reason as well for not being able to keep the interaction going. Some learners also lack the motivation to speak English. They do not see a real need to learn or speak English since nobody is going to assess them in it.

Actually, motivation is the crucial force which determines whether a learner embarks in a task at all, how much energy he devotes to it, and how long he preservers. The development of communicative skills can only take place if learners have the motivation and opportunity to express their own identity and relate with the people around them. Teaching strategies also contribute to this problem as they are inadequate, and they do not put emphasis on speaking, which results in a meagre development of this skill. EFL teachers pay too little attention to speaking activities and not all of them use the real world activities, which encourage students' free speaking and cause their motivation. Besides, vocabulary items are taught in isolation, and listening materials are not used by the majority of schoolteachers because of the large number of teachers compared with the number of materials available.

Furthermore, all the other subjects are in French, and English is seen as an academic subject only, which means exposure to the English language is insufficient. The lack of a target language environment can be considered another problem, which of course results in a lack of involvement in real-life situations. Not allowing learners to participate in discourse can be another reason for speaking difficulties. Children need both to participate in discourse and to build up knowledge and skills for participation in order to learn discourse skills. Students' language performance emphasizes linguistic competence only rather than communicative competence. Language is best learned when the learners' attention is focused on understanding, saying and doing something with language, and not when their attention is focused explicitly on linguistic features. It is worthy to mention that researchers recognise that learners can improve their speaking ability by developing learning strategies that enable them to become independent. Some teachers use L1 for class management.

Nevertheless, this can be another factor that contributes to the problem of speaking difficulties. This is because using L1 means sacrificing valuable opportunities for well-motivated foreign use. In addition, it tends to devalue the foreign language as a vehicle for communication. Constant interruption from the teacher will destroy the purpose of the speaking activity. Making notes helps teachers not to forget students' mistakes. They watch and listen while students speak and later on clarify positive and negative aspects of the speaking activity. Mistakes could be discussed either with the class, written on the board or given individually for students. Teachers' priority is not to single students out for particular criticism. Majority of teachers must deal with the mistakes they heard without saying who made them. Also, to be competent speakers students need to develop both fluency and accuracy. Hence it is the job of teachers to give students practice with both fluency and accuracy. Students cannot develop fluency if the teacher is constantly interrupting them to correct their oral errors. Teachers need to provide a balance of activities that help learners develop both fluency and accuracy.

5.3. Implications

In light of the above given research findings, it is strongly believed that curriculum developers, educators, and administrators need to make a number of changes in their overall approach to teaching speaking process with a view of creating the ideal learning environment in their schools. Many issues related to teachers, teaching strategies, curriculum, extracurricular activities, and assessment regulation should be considered. EFL teachers must rethink of their use of the language classroom as to whether it constructs or obstructs learners from having opportunities to use the language meaningfully and appropriately. Here are some pedagogical implications with which EFL teachers particularly those engaged in teacher-fronted activities should be concerned with:

- engaging learners in the classroom;
-encouraging interactional adjustment between teachers and learners;
- promoting opportunities for self-expression;
-encouraging regularly students to become more willing to participate in English activities outside the classroom;
- Make inquiry about what they were planning to do outside the class that week; such inquiry became a regular part of the classroom discussion;

- Insure that the discussion topics are creative since the classroom mix of videos, songs, role play, and self-selected presentations promotes regular inclusion and participation;
- Provide students with numerous opportunities of intercultural exploration; when students encounter new cultural aspects or reflect on their own culture through the perception of foreign eyes, it is possible to gain their interest.

The English speaking curriculum design should be meaningful and inspiring for students. In order for the curriculum to provide students with frequent opportunities of speaking, communicative tasks should be included. Those tasks should focus on getting students to convey the meaning rather than the form. This can help students acquire the language better as many researchers declared Involving students in extracurricular activities can provide them with more chances to use the language, and the classroom will not be the only place where they are exposed to the English language. To achieve this, all English teachers, English supervisors, school administrators, and staff of the Ministry of Education should work together. Assessment tool designers and curriculum designers should work cooperatively in order to reach an alignment between what is introduced in the textbooks and how it should be assessed.

EFL teachers can always have the choice to adapt or adjust speaking activities to what could be more appropriate to their learning and teaching contexts. However, prior to teaching speaking, EFL teachers can best serve their students by evaluating their learning scenarios in terms of students' needs, students' language levels, textbooks, course objectives, other teachers' experiences, etc. Similarly school administrators should ensure Examination system emphasizes oral skills in order to enable students take serious the development of their speaking skill proficiency. Furthermore, unless language educators adjust and adapt Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) practices to suit their learners' needs and language proficiencies, learners will never be able to participate in normal conversation.

Finally, to achieve the purposes of language teaching, the English speaking curriculum should be designed with two major principles in mind. The first principle is to expose students to authentic and practical settings for speaking English. The next principle is that teachers should encourage students to be involved and actively participate in English speaking for communication in the classroom. By doing so, communications between the teacher and students and the students and students may be ultimately increased for the benefit of all.

5.4 Suggestions

The achievement of the goals of English teaching-learning depends on the contribution of all actors of education, including teachers, learners, curriculum designers, government, school administrators, and students' parents. That's why the present suggestions will be addressed to all those actors of education to indicate their part to play in the achievement of teaching-learning and acquiring English and to enable learners overcome their difficulties in speaking and teachers overcome the challenges of teaching speaking skill.

5.4.1 Suggestions to the government

The development of any country follows the education and training of her citizens. No progress can be expected from a nation which does not value education. The transmission in the better way of that education can only be assured by trained and qualified teachers. As a matter of fact, the government should give more attention to the training of teachers in general and of EFL ones in particular because of the importance of the English language the present day in the world. The present research revealed that the lack of training or of continuing professional training are the factors that hamper the teaching/learning of English as foreign language in our secondary schools and consequently effecting the proficiency of EFL learners. To solve this problem, the government should always train and employ qualified EFL teachers to handle the courses in all our secondary schools in Benin. Then, proper supervision should be conducted by the government to make sure teachers of English language are actually doing what they are expected to do. The state should provide our secondary schools with adequate instructional media/materials. The government should provide our secondary schools with at least one language laboratory for English language teaching. The state should make sure that the curriculum designers think about learners' need in language learning when they plan to design curriculum. The government should also introduce the teaching of English in our primary schools in order to give learners a strong background in English language before their coming at secondary schools. Moreover, the state should give more attention to the English more than four hours in our secondary schools for the students' effective learning.

5.4.2 Suggestions to the EFL teachers

This study has aimed to find out the most appropriate teaching methods and strategies that enhance learners' speaking skill. For an effective teaching of speaking

in language classroom, I can make the following suggestion for our language teachers:

- Teachers are advisable to give opportunities for their students to speak the target language by providing a rich environment that contains collaborative work, authentic materials and tasks, and shared knowledge;
- Teachers ought to try to involve each student in every speaking activity. For this aim, practice different ways of students' participation;
-Teachers should give students practice with both fluency and accuracy through a balance of activities that help learners develop both fluency and accuracy;
- Teachers should preferably reduce teacher talk time in class while increasing students' speaking time; step back and observe them;
- Teachers ought to show a positive attitude when commenting on students' responses;
-Teachers are advisable to ask eliciting questions, such as "what do you mean?''; "How did you reach that conclusion?" in order to urge students to speak more;
- Teachers should, as far as research is concerned, provide written feedback like "your presentation was really great", "it was a good job";
-Teachers are not advisable to correct students' pronunciation mistakes very often while they are speaking. They need to provide appropriate feedback and correction, but they mustn't interrupt the flow of communication. They should take notes while pairs or groups are talking and address problems to the class after the activity without embarrassing the student who made the error. They can write the error on the board and ask who can correct it.
- Teachers should turn around classroom to ensure that student are on the right track and see whether they need his help while they work in group or on pair and provide the vocabulary beforehand that student need in speaking activities.
- Teachers should diagnose problems faced by students who have difficulty in expressing themselves in the target language and provide more opportunities to practice the spoken language

5.4.3 Suggestions to the EFL learners

As for the students, they should first understand the importance of speaking skills and mainly the opportunities that English language can offer to them in the future. Their awareness of their studies may result in their motivation for learning. Secondly, they should practice speaking English outside the classroom more often

by doing the speaking tasks in the textbook at home with their classmates, joining speaking club where they can use English to communicate and speaking on their own in front of a mirror. In addition, they should use English in the class instead of their mother tongue to make it a habit. They should know that the learning of a language requires from them an extra elaborated effort. Some tools to which they must resort to are documents, mass media and friends. They should know that any success and good performance come from feedback and errors correction.

Moreover, they should know that making mistakes is a natural part of learning a new language. That's why they should put aside their shyness and fear and try to practice the language during any occasion they get to speak since practice makes perfect.

Finally, so as to help teachers create a motivating classroom atmosphere, EFL learners should be organized and show discipline. They should adopt correct attitudes which favor the language learning and encourage their teacher. They should respect the code of conduct they have defined with their teacher's agreement and also respect school rules in order to be in good harmony with the school administration.

5.4.4 Suggestions to parents

Parents can encourage their children to learn English by making sure that they do their homework assignments given by their teacher and encourage them to do well. They can also make their children be aware of the fact that they are learning English for their own good sooner or later. They should try their best to provide their children all the materials inherent to the learning of English, including textbooks, video tapes…

5.4.5 Suggestions to curriculum designers

English curriculum designers should know that the English speaking curriculum design should be meaningful and inspiring for students. The English speaking curriculum should be designed with two major principles in mind. The first principle is to expose students to authentic and practical settings for speaking English. The next principle is that it should encourage students to be involved and actively participate in English speaking for communication in the classroom. This will be possible when the curriculum designers think about learners' needs in language learning when they plan to design curriculum. By doing so,

communications between the teacher and students and the students and students may be ultimately increased for the benefit of all.

5.4.6 Suggestions to school administrators

School administrators should make available teaching materials such as projectors for videos projection needed by teachers to teach effectively. But more importantly, they should review the assessment regulation, that is, school administrators should ensure Examination system emphasizes oral skills in order to enable students take serious the development of their speaking skill proficiency. Actually, because speaking is not tested, it is less emphasized by both teachers and students who gave least attention to speaking tasks in the textbooks because speaking is completely excluded from exams. Continuous assessment of speaking skill consists of one-way speaking assessment, which refers to the individual contributions, and two-way speaking assessment, which refers to students' interaction. Because speaking is not included in the semester and final exams, they are given less attention in the lessons; there is no focus on it. The only method teachers use to assess their students' speaking skill is through their class participation when they answer the teachers' questions or when they practice the dialogues given in the textbook.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, this study aimed to investigate the difficulties that the EFL students at CEG Application experience in speaking lessons and the factors affecting their speaking performance. The results of the study indicate that the students face many problems such as fear of making linguistic mistakes, lack of vocabulary, shyness, lack of self-confidence, anxiety, lack of interest in topic, lack of motivation, non-favorable classroom environment, limited opportunity of speaking environment, and some negative teachers' classroom practices such as teachers' feedback during speaking activities, pressure to perform well and limited time for preparation. Basing on the results of the study, some recommendations were made for all actors of education in order to palliate this alarming situation, including teachers, learners, curriculum designers, government, school administrators, and students' parents. Of all the suggestions I have made I insist on the examination system that should call for a review of the assessment regulation. Indeed, speaking skills should be included in tests and exams because the students will be more motivated to learn speaking skills because they are tested. Also a review of the English curriculum so as to include more communicative tasks that provide students with frequent opportunities of speaking can be a source of motivation and encouragement that are levies to stimulate the teaching/learning English language in our secondary schools. Furthermore, the government should introduce the teaching of English in our primary schools in order to give learners a strong background in English language before their coming at secondary school. All the stakeholders of education in general should take into consideration and implement those different recommendations and suggestions in order to save our national education from collapsing.

Hopefully, this study can contribute to the improvement of English teaching and learning in Benin Secondary Schools.

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Annex page I

STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How do you evaluate your speaking abilities?

a- Very well ☐ b-Average ☐ c-Low ☐

2. Speaking English is

a. Easy ☐ b. Difficult ☐

3. How often do you participate in the oral speaking lessons?

a. Always ☐ b. Sometimes ☐ c. Rarely ☐

4. Are you afraid about participation in speaking activities?

a. Yes ☐

b. No ☐

5. If yes, is it because

a. Fear of making grammatical mistakes ☐

b. Fear of making pronunciation mistakes ☐

c. Lack of vocabulary ☐

6. Or you do not participate because of

a. Shyness ☐

b. Lack of self- confidence ☐

c. Anxiety ☐

d. The topic is not interesting ☐

7- You want to convey a certain message during your turn of speaking, and you find a difficulty to make the point? What do you do?

a. I use French instead ☐

b. I use your mother tongue ☐

c. I keep quiet and give my turn to another ☐

8. How would you describe the atmos[illegible] class?

a. Boring ☐

b. Funny and motivated ☐

9. How often does the teacher give you the opportunity to participate during the speaking lesson?

a. Always ☐

b. Sometimes ☐

c. Never ☐

10. Do you speak English outside classroom with your classmates?

a- yes ☐

b- No ☐

11- When (in what situation) are you most willing to speak English?

a. When working (speaking) in groups.

b. When working (speaking) in pair.

12. What are the activities you think motivate you to participate?

a. Role play and Dialogues ☐

b. Discussion and Debates ☐

c. Problem solving ☐

e. Information gap activities ☐

Annex page II

TEACHERS' QUESTIONNARE

1- Do you teach the speaking?

a- Yes ☐ b- No ☐

2-Do you try to create a friendly and motivating atmosphere in the classroom?

A-Yes ☐ B-No ☐

3-At the beginning of the year, do you ask your leaners about their expectations?

a-Yes ☐ b-No ☐

4-What are the considerations that you take into account before /when preparing your speaking lesson plan?

5-Do you give the opportunity to all your students to speak during speaking class sessions?

a-Yes ☐ b-No ☐

6-What is your reaction when the students make mistakes during oral work?

- Keep quiet, smile and encourage them to go on their task. ☐

- Stop them and correct their mistakes. ☐

- Get annoyed when students keep making mistakes. ☐

- If students cannot think of what to say, you may prompt them forwards. ☐

-Watch, listen to students and write down points to give feedback afterwards. ☐

7-After communicative activities which feedback comes first?

☐

a-content feedback b-form feedback ☐

7-Which one is dominant?

a-content feedback ☐ b- ck ☐

8-When teaching speaking, what do y(elop in your students, fluency practice or accuracy practice?

a. Fluency ☐ b.Accuracy ☐ c.Both ☐

9- What are the strategies you use to foster learners' participation during speaking activities?

a-Using group and pair works ☐

b- Choosing interesting topic ☐

c-Allowing the use of French or mother tongue ☐

11- What are the speaking activities you focus on most to create a successful participation?

a- Role play ☐

b- Discussion and debates ☐

c- Problem solving ☐

d- Dialogues ☐