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# MEMOIRE DE FIN DE CYCLE

## THEME

LEARNERS' POOR PERFORMANCE IN EFL LEARNING IN  
BENINESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS: CAUSES AND  
SOLUTIONS. THE CASE STUDY OF  
CEG AGBOKOU AND CEG LES COCOTIERS

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research work to my dear parents Jean BOCOVO and Cica TABELLE for their contributions to my education.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**ELT:** English Language Teaching

**CEG:** Collège d'Enseignement Général

**BAPES :** Brevet d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement Secondaire

**CAPES:** Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement Secondaire

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most useful tools for the socio economic development of human beings. It helps us to communicate, to express feelings for each other, to engage in the activities that take place in our society. Thus, language is also very important in the education process. According to ADEA (Association for the Development in Africa)(2005), “Language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education” (p. 5). It plays a crucial role in learning, and if the learner is handicapped in the language of instruction, then learning may not take place at all. The teacher and the learner will not be communicating and it will have the negative impact in learners’ performance. This is quite observed in English language learning in our secondary schools in Benin.

In fact, the English language that has become the most used language all over the world nowadays is taught in our secondary schools as a compulsory subject. Unfortunately, this language is not considered as a priority in Benin in so far as it is a francophone country, and this affects most of the learners. Thus, they do not give the same importance to the English language learning comparatively to the other subjects as the acquisition of this language becomes a serious problem for them. Therefore, Benin secondary school learners are confronted to a poor performance in English as a foreign language learning.

This study looks into the concept of learners’ poor performance in EFL learning in some Benin secondary schools. More specially, it investigates the causes of this poor performance and looks for some solutions for the improvement. The case of two Benin secondary schools will be studied in this research work.

For that purpose, the research work is organized into five main chapters. Apart from the introduction and the conclusion which, respectively, opens and closes this study, the first chapter, entitled “Introduction to the study” deals with the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, and the clarification of concepts. Chapter two, entitled “literature review” is about the previous researches that focus on the topic. At the level of Chapter three, the focus is about the “research methodology of the study” whereas Chapter four, entitled “Data presentation and analysis”, presents the collected data and contains the full analysis of them. Finally, the last chapter, Chapter five, entitled “summary, discussion, and suggestions”, contains a brief summary of the research, discusses the results and makes some suggestions.

# **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

## **TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1. The statement of the problem**

English language is taught in Benin secondary schools as a compulsory subject, not only for the grade but also to help learners acquire a certain number of basis as far as all the four linguistic capabilities or skills ( reading, writing, listening; and speaking ) are concerned. But unfortunately this is not clear enough in our learners' mind.

In fact, EFL learners' level is constantly decreasing despite the considerable and perpetual effort made by the teachers to help them improve it. Before going into the details, I find it necessary to bring out certain experiences of my own witness that has urged me to choose this research topic.

Indeed, during my teaching practices period; I have noticed that pupils have serious problems to acquire the target language. Most of them are no more interested in the courses because they do not understand what have been said so far by the teacher. They are not motivated. Moreover they do not take charge of their own learning and always expect the teacher to deliver everything neatly packaged. Besides, some teaching strategies are not appropriate. The pupils are not taught the four skills appropriately and there is a problem of lack of adequate teaching and learning materials as well. As a result they do not show any improvement and always get bad marks in English tests.

All those problems justify their failure in EFL learning. This drop of level is simply obvious through their poor performance in EFL class activities and the way they use the language for communicative ability in the class and in real life contexts.

## **1-5. Purpose of the study**

The problem of learners' poor performance in EFL learning has become more serious, but seems not to be perceived by everybody.

In order to really focus on this issue of learners' poor performance in Benin secondary schools, the following questions may be very helpful: Is it because the learners do not like English language? Or because they are not motivated? Or because teachers do not effectively use appropriate methods in teaching English language?

In the process of bringing out answers to those questions, it has been essential to investigate the causes of EFL learners' poor performance. Therefore, my objective in dealing with this research work is to draw learners themselves and the academic authorities 'attention on the problem.

Another important objective is to try to find out the different factors which affect EFL learners' performance and to look for some possible solutions in order to improve learners' level.

Moreover, this research work may help the prospective teachers and those who are already teaching to be aware of this problem and be ready in the improvement of their methods of teaching EFL learners.

To achieve those objectives, the study searched to answer the following questions:

- What are the main causes of learners 'poor performance in EFL learning in our secondary schools?
- What are the ways of improving such situation?

### **1-3. Significance of the study**

This research work is important in so far as it raises awareness on the poor performance of Benin secondary schools learners in EFL learning.

Another significant aspect of the study is to look for the factors of the problem and to suggest some solutions to remedy it. Those suggestions will surely help on the one hand, EFL teachers to improve their methods of teaching English language and on the other hand, EFL learners to improve their way of learning English language.

### **1-4. Clarification of concepts**

#### **➤ Learner**

According to *Oxford Advance Learners' Dictionary* (2010), learner is a person who is finding out about a subject or how to do something.

In this study, the learners are EFL students in beginners and post beginners classes of secondary schools. That is to say the pupils from the first (1<sup>st</sup>) to the fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) forms.

#### **➤ Learners' performance**

According to the *Oxford Advance Learners' Dictionary* (2010), Performance refers to how well or badly you do something; how well or badly something works.

The *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* defines the term as a person actual use of language.

In second and foreign language learning, a learner's performance in a language is often taken as an indication of his or her competence. To put it

simply, the concept is used in this study to refer to how badly pupils understand and react during the language learning process.

## **CHAPTER TWO:** **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are several factors that affect learners' success in English as a foreign or second language in a non- native speaking country as Benin. Those factors may derive from components such as social environmental issues, socio economic situation, difference of culture and, etc. These issues cause learners' poor performance in English language learning. The present literature review has a main purpose to investigate the problems which lead to learners' poor performance in English language learning.

### **2.1 English Language Learning and Teaching in Classrooms**

The teaching and learning process involves two active participants in the classroom: the teacher and the learner, and that language learning should be interactive between these two important actors. This idea is hold by Vuzo (2010, p.18) when he says:

*It is through interactions with each other that teachers and students work together to create intellectual and practical activities that shape both the form and the content of the target subject. However, such situation is not commonly found in secondary schools in all subjects due to the fact that lecture method dominates the teaching and learning process which leads to passive learning.*

This means that the language learning should not fall entirely on the teacher; the students must also assume more responsibility for the learning.

## 2-2. Motivation and language learning

### 2.2.1 Learners 'personal motivation and Language Learning

Motivation is the most used concept for explaining failure or success of a learner. Gardner (2006, p.241) supports this idea, when he argues that “*Students with higher levels of motivation will do better than students with lower levels*”. That is to say if pupils are not motivated, their learning efficiency will be slow such that they may learn virtually nothing, but if they are motivated, this can highly increase their learning. So, motivation is as one of the main factors that influence the speed of success of foreign language learners.

Gardner (2006, p.243 ) further added that “*If one is motivated, he/she has reasons (motives) for engaging in the relevant activities*”. So motivation is as an internal state that arouses to action, pushes us in particular directions, and keeps us to engage in certain activities.

In the same way, Alatis J.E, Alatis P.M and Altman, H.B (1980, p.120) put the idea more strongly when they say: “*the process of learning a second language is one that involves a total commitment from the learner*”. The lack of such commitment from most EFL learning in our secondary schools in Benin is one of the causes of their drop of level.

They further added that:

*Motivation is commonly thought of as an inner drive, impulse, emotion or desire that moves one to a particular action. More specifically, humans universally have*

*needs or drives which are more or less  
innate, yet their intensity is environmentally  
conditioned (p.121)*

Motivation is one of the factors that influence success or failure in learning a language, particularly in second language acquisition. The three authors hold this idea, when they argue: *“It is probably the most frequently used term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex”* (p.122).

For them, it is easy to figure that success in a task is due simply to the fact that someone is motivated. It is also easy in second language learning to claim that a learner will be successful with the proper motivation.

In the same book, the three authors have pointed out six needs for human body that determine the characteristics of the learners’ personal motivation in foreign language learning

- *“The need for exploration, for seeing the other side of the mountain, for probing the unknown.*
- *The need for manipulation, for operating on the environment and causing change.*
- *The need for activity, for movement and exercise, both physical and mental.*
- *The need for stimulation, the need to be stimulated by the environment, by other people, or by ideas, thoughts, and feelings.*
- *The need for knowledge, the need to process and internalize the result of exploration, manipulation, activity and stimulation, resolve contradiction, to quest for solutions to problems and for self consistent systems of knowledge.*
- *Finally, the need for ego enhancement, for the self to be known and to be accepted and approved of by others”* (p.123)

## 2-2-2. Teachers' role in learners' motivation

The majority of the learners do not show their interest for the learning task. Therefore, they need to be informed about the interest, advantages of the language they are learning. All those things have their source in motivation. Then, it is the teacher's responsibility to help them achieve the goal.

There are many suitable ways of maintaining learners' interest in the language learning. How to succeed in finding such motivation ways should be the concern of our teachers of English.

According to Grittner, (1970,p.9) “ *the necessity to find ways of attracting students to our foreign language classes and maintaining their interest once they arrive is a problem that most of our teachers are facing now*”.

He further added that:

*If the teacher is to be a catalyst, he must first of all become interested in each student as an individual. This means that he must attempt to tailor-make a program that meets the personal needs and interest of each member of his class. In so doing he will, of necessity select material's and topics that are meaningful to the now generation he will provide an opportunity for each person to progress at his own will and his own pace.(p.10)*

Nevertheless, it is clear that even if the teacher devotes all his life playing this role of catalyst between the motivation and his pupils, and the latter do not make effort to comprehend the lesson, the problem still remains. This means that motivation only cannot make them understand the lesson. Then, it is the learners' responsibility to make a little bit effort to understand the lesson

## **2-3 Learners' attitude and language learning**

### **2-3.1 Definition of attitude**

Researchers in the fields of psychology and education, especially language learning, consider several definitions of attitude which mention different meanings from different contexts and perspectives (Alhmali, 2007). Based on the theory of planned behavior, Montano and Kasprzyk (2008, p. 71) state,

*Attitude is determined by the individual's beliefs about outcomes or attributes of performing the behavior (behavioral beliefs), weighted by evaluations of those outcomes or attributes. Thus, a person who holds strong beliefs that positively valued outcomes will result from performing the behavior will have a positive attitude toward the behavior. Conversely, a person who holds strong beliefs that negatively valued outcomes will result from the behavior will have a negative attitude.*

This means that both negative and positive attitudes have a strong impact on the success of language learning. Thus, EFL learner who has negative attitudes towards learning English language will be more likely to dislike it and this will influence his performance. Learners' attitude could incorporate in language learning because it may influence their performance in acquiring the target language. Therefore, it is clear that the negative attitude of learners towards learning of English language is one the causes of their poor performance in the subject.

### **2-3.2 Importance of attitude in language learning**

Attitudes are very important in the acquisition of the language learning. It is considered as an essential factor influencing language performance. This is clearly stated by Reid (2003, p. 33): “*Attitudes are important to us because they cannot be neatly separated from study.*”

Moreover, attitude is one of the key factors for success in language learning. Hassan (2013, p.1) holds that when he declared:”*Among different factors contributing to foreign language learning, effective variable such as learners’ attitudes is of paramount importance*”.

Furthermore, learners’ attitude is an integral part of learning and therefore become an essential component of second language pedagogy. Hassan (2013, p.2) holds that:

*Attitudes towards learning are believed to influence behaviors such as selecting and reading books, speaking in foreign language etc. especially in education, if the students have positive attitude towards any subject, they can achieve many things in that specific area*

## **CHAPTER THREE:** **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

This chapter presents the description of the methodology and methods applied in the study. It reports on the design of the study, the setting, and the sample population. The chapter also discusses the related research instruments and data collection and analysis procedures used.

### **3-1- Design of the study**

This research work has been conducted through a quantitative and qualitative investigation method.

The quantitative study is used in this research because some of the questionnaires were made up of close-questions followed with a series of answers among which the respondents were asked to choose the answers that fit their opinions.

The qualitative study is also used in this research. The type of research method allows the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. In fact, the participants were asked to answer some semi-structured questions in order to give appropriate answers that will help for further data analysis.

### **3-2-The setting**

The study was conducted in two secondary schools: CEG Agbokou and CEG Les Cocotiers of Porto-Novo, a capital city of Benin.

### 3-3- The sample population

The investigations carried out in order to make this research work successful have included three actors: the learners of beginner classes (first form to fourth form), the EFL teachers, and the authorities, especially the vice-principals of the two schools. In fact, 100 questionnaires have been issued to the pupils and 30 to the teachers. The population to whom I have addressed my questionnaire is composed of 95 EFL students, 25 EFL teachers, and 02 schools' authorities.

At CEG Agbokou, the total number of EFL learners to whom the questionnaire has been addressed was 45, including 25 boys and 20 girls; and the total number of EFL teachers was 15, including 14 male teachers and 01 female teacher.

At CEG Les Cocotiers, the total number of EFL learners was 50, including 15 boys and 35 girls; and the number of EFL teachers was 10, including 08 male teachers and 02 female teachers.

For the school authorities, I issued 02 questionnaires: one to the vice-principal of CEG Agbokou and one to the vice principal of CEG Les Cocotiers.

The charts below are made to clarify the number of persons that took part in this study.

Table a: Number of pupils

Schools	Students		Total
	Boys	Girls	
CEG Agbokou	25	20	45
CEG Les cocotiers	15	35	50
Total			95

Table b: Number of teachers

Schools	Teachers		Total
	Male	Female	
CEG Agbokou	14	01	15
CEG Les Cocotiers	08	02	10
Total			25

Table c: Number of school authorities

Schools	Authorities
CEG Agbokou	01
CEG Les cocotiers	01
Total	02

### **3-4- The research instrument**

The main instrument used in the framework of the investigation for this research work is the questionnaires addressed to EFL learners of beginner classes, EFL teachers and schools' authorities. The copy of these questionnaires can be seen in the appendix.

### **3-4 .1 Questionnaires to learners**

The questionnaire addressed to learners is composed of fourteen (14) questions which bring beginner learners to mention first of all their interest for English language learning (1 to 3); secondly their documentation (4 to 7); thirdly whether they participate in classroom activities or not (8 to 10), fourthly the opportunities to practice the language (11 to 12), and fifthly when they have started having problem in English and what/ who are responsible of this situation (13 to 14)

### **3-4.2 Questionnaires to teachers**

The EFL teachers' questionnaire is composed of eleven (11) questions classified in the following way:

- How long they have been teaching English language and their motivation (1 to 2)
- Their professional qualifications (3 to 5)
- The teaching and learning materials they use (6 to 7)
- What they think about their learners 'performance (8 to 10)
- What may be the causes of learners' poor performance in EFL learning according to the teachers.(11)

### **3-4.3 Questionnaires to schools' authorities**

The schools' authorities are also supposed to provide me with information about the learning and teaching conditions in their school. In fact, nine (09) questions have been addressed to the vice-principal of each of the schools. The general contents of the questionnaire are summarized in the way below:

- The learners total number
- The number of classrooms available for them
- The real number of pupils per class
- Whether they attend in service training or not
- The number teachers of English available for the whole school, their degrees and their professional qualifications
- The existence of library in the schools

### **3-5. Data collection procedures**

Once the questionnaires have been elaborated, the EFL learners at CEG Les Cocotiers have been the first to whom they were dispatched. Through the teaching practice in the EFL class (form four) of this school, it was the occasion at the end of one class to submit them the questionnaire after an explanation of what they are expected to do.

As far as teachers of English are concerned, as we were having teachers' workshop on Tuesday, this was also the occasion to hand the questionnaire to them; the answers of these questionnaires have been handed back during another meeting at the workshop.

Secondly, it has been the turn of CEG Agbokou where contacts have been made with the vice-principal who, favorably offers his help in achieving the purpose of the investigation as far as the distribution of the questionnaire is concerned. At random, one class of third form was chosen where the questionnaires were distributed to the learners. The distribution of the questionnaire to them was followed by an explanation about how they can answer. Sometimes, an explanation in French is necessary. On the spot, they have been asked to give their answers so that they can hand them back right away.

For the teachers of English of this school, some have been met during the break. They accepted to answer the questionnaires but promise to give them back the next week at the same period.

As far as the school authorities are concerned, the vice-principal of each school was met. As none of them could provide the answers in English, they have to listen to the translation and give the corresponding response in French.

As it has been mentioned previously concerning the details about the population to whom the questionnaires have been addressed, it is now quite normal to give the percentage of the collected data.

In fact, as far as the learners and the schools authorities' questionnaires are concerned, one hundred percent (100%) of the answers has been collected. This means that all the questionnaire sheets addressed to the 95 learners (45 pupils of CEG Agbokou and 50 pupils of CEG Les Cocotiers) and the two school authorities (the vice-principals of the two schools) were answered correctly and returned because these were done on the spot. As far as the teachers' questionnaire is concerned, 20 teachers out of 25 of the schools have filled in correctly the questionnaire sheets. In term of percentage, this means eighty percent (80%).

### **3-6. Data analysis procedures**

This is the last step in the methodology of my research work. This step has consisted in giving the details of the study and the examination of the collected data in order to understand more about the causes of learners' poor performance in EFL learning in the concerned schools, that is to say Agbokou and Les Cocotiers secondary schools. This data analysis will help me to make suggestions in order to improve learners' level in EFL learning in the concerned secondary schools.

The following chapter deals with the presentation and analysis of the collected data.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

This chapter includes the presentation and the analysis of the collected data.

- The information provided by the schools authorities are presented in the chart below

**Table N°O:** The result of the questionnaire addressed to the schools' authorities

	Learner s' total number	Number of available classrooms	Number of learners per class	Number of teachers			Library	In- service training for teachers	Teachers academic degree			Teachers professional qualifications	
				Permanent	Part time	Total			DUEL	LICENCE	MAITRISE	BAPES	CAPEs
<b>CEG Agbokou</b>	<b>3288</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>02</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>02</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>01</b>	<b>01</b>
<b>CEG Les Cocotiers</b>	<b>2314</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>02</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>04</b>	<b>02</b>

As I have mentioned earlier, the same questionnaires have been addressed to the authorities, especially the vice- principals of the two schools. This table shows the two concerned secondary schools with their learners' total number, the number of the classrooms available in each of them, the total number of the teachers of English (the permanent teachers and part- time ones), the existence or non existence of library in each school, the teachers' in-service training, the teachers' highest academic degrees and professional qualifications.

Through the information that this table shows us, we can noticed some irregularities such as: lack of classrooms, problem of class- size, lack of qualified teachers, dominance of part-time teachers etc...All these situations in which learners are learning are some causes of their drop of level in English language learning.

➤ The collected data from the pupils are presented in the charts below:

Table 1: Learners' interests in the English language learning

N°	Questions	Answers	Learners	Percentages (%)
1	Do you like English?	Yes	74	77.89
		No	21	22.11
		Total	95	100
2	If yes, why?	I understand when my teacher speaks it	19	25.68
		I always get good mark in it	55	74.32
		Total	74	100
3	If no, why?	I never understand it	10	47.62
		I never get good mark in it	11	52.38
		Total	21	100

This table n° 1 shows that 74 learners out of 95 (56.84%) like English because of two reasons:

- I always get good mark in it (55 learners out the 74)
- I always understand it (19 learners out of the 74)

Contrary to the 74 learners who like English, 21 out 95 (22.11%) dislike it.

From this information, it can be said that the majority of the concerned learners like the English language. However, the interest they have in this language is superficial, since most of admit that they like the language because they always get good mark in it.

Table N° 2: Documentation

N°	Questions	Answers	Learners	Percentages (%)
4	Do you have your student' book?	Yes	38	40
		No	57	60
		Total	95	100
5	Apart from the students' book, do you have other English books?	Yes	12	12,63
		No	83	87,37
		Total	95	100
6	Does your school get a library?	Yes	95	100
		No	00	00
		Total	95	100
7	Do you visit it frequently?	Yes	16	16,84
		No	79	83,15
		Total	95	100

The table n° 2 shows that 38 learners out of 95 (40%) have their student' book; so 67 out 95 (60%) do not have it. In the same way, 83 out of 95 (87.37%) do not have other English books. In addition, all the learners have recognized

that their schools get a library; but only 16 out the 95 (16.84%) visit them frequently.

From all these information, it can be noticed that the majority of the learners are not documented as far as English books are concerned, they don't have individually the books required by the school curriculum and moreover, they don't have other English document.

As conclusion, it can be said that the pupils of the concerned schools faced a serious lack of English documents. In these conditions, the learners of such schools cannot perform as everybody wants them to do. This situation may be the reason of their failure in the language learning.

Table N° 3: learners' participation in classroom activities

N°	Questions	Answers	Learners	Percentages
8	During the class activities, do you participate?	Yes	49	51.58
		No	46	48.42
		Total	95	100
9	If yes, why?	I always understand every thing	16	32.65
		My friend and my teacher help me to understand and to do the activities.	33	67.35
		Total	49	100
10	If no, why?	I don't always understand	38	82.61
		I'm boring	08	17.39
		Total	46	100

This table n°3 shows that 49 out of 95 learners (51.58%) participate in class activities contrary to 46 (67.35%) who do not participate.

Among the 49 who participate, 16 say that it is because they always understand everything and 33 say that the teacher and their partners help them to understand and to do the activities.

Besides, among the 46 remainder who do not participate, 38 say that it is because they do not comprehend the activities and 08 say that they are boring.

This information help to say that most of the concerned learners participate to class activities because some of them understand the language and those who do not understand say that their partners and the teacher help them to do it. In the same way, those who do not participate have also their reasons and the main one of these is the problem of language understanding without which they cannot move forward.

Table N° 4: The opportunities to practice the English language

N°	Questions	Answers	Students	Percentages (%)
11	Do you have English club in you school?	Yes	00	00
		No	95	100
		Total	95	100
12	Apart from the school, do you have other opportunities to practice the language?	Yes	08	08.42
		No	87	91.58
		Total	95	100

This table n°4 shows that 95 learners out of 95 (100%) say that they do not have English club in their schools. In addition to that, 87 learners out of 95 (91.58%) admit that they do not have other opportunities apart from teacher's contact in class to practice the language. The few remained (08.42%) that say that they have opportunities to practice the language do not even find an appropriate model because some have mentioned that they talk with Ibo people from Nigeria or the "meiguidas" at "Gbègo" market in Porto-novo or with Ghanaian shoemakers. Unfortunately, those people with whom they speak have not studied the language and are not accustomed to formal English.

In the light of these data, it can be argued that there is no appropriate context in which learners may find opportunity to improve their speaking apart from the school. Thus, the lack of English practices opportunities in Benin secondary schools is a reality and has negative impacts on learners' level.

Table N° 5: Problem of English language understanding and the responsible

N°	Questions	Answers	Learners	Percentages (%)
11	When have you started having English understanding problem?	First form (6è)	09	09.47
		Second form (5è)	31	32.63
		Third form (4è)	42	44.21
		Fourth form (3è)	13	13.69
		Total	95	100
12	What or who are responsible for your drop of level in English language learning?	My teachers of English	46	48.42
		The environment and the learning conditions	49	51.58
		Total	95	100

The table n° 5 shows that 09 learners out of 95 (09.47%) started having English understanding problem since the first form (6è); 31 learners out of 95 (32.63%) in the second form (5è); 42 learners out of 95 (44.21%) in third form (4è), and 13 learners out of 95 (13.69%) in the fourth form (3è).

From this information, it can be noticed that most of the concerned learners have not started having problem in English since the first year, but it is when they start moving to higher levels. This may have several sources such the lack of qualified teachers of English, problem of class size etc.... as mentioned in the table n° O.

In the same table, 46 learners out of 95 learners (48.42 %) say that it is their teachers of English who are responsible of their drop of level in English; whereas 49 remained (51.58%) say that it is the environment and learning conditions that are in the source of this problem.

To justify their answers, among those who say that it is their teachers of English who are responsible for their drop of level, some mentioned the problem related to the diversity of pronunciation from the teachers. In fact, the learners say that the teachers do not use the same pronunciation, one teacher will come this year and speak American English and the next year, you may meet another teacher who will speak British English and so on and so forth. From this situation, we acknowledged that it will be very difficult to the learners who are learning English in a non native speaking country like Benin. The learners will be surely confused.

Those who say that it is the environment and the learning condition justify their answer first of all by saying that, the fact that after the class they do not have other opportunity to practice the language is the great problem. They do not have the opportunity to engage a few minute conversations with their fellow. There is no appropriate context in which they may find opportunity to improve

their speaking. Secondly, the learning condition is not the appropriate one. Apart from the problem of lack of documentation we have noticed, there is another one more serious. In fact, when I ask some learners the language in which they learn in the class, most of them say that their teacher always translate everything he says in English in French to them, if not they could not understand anything. I think that by so doing, learner will never make the minimum effort to understand things. They will always expect the teacher to translate things to them. So, listening is a great problem for them.

On this point, it can be concluded that the problem related to the diversity of pronunciation from the teachers and the environment and the learning conditions are some causes of learners' poor performance in English.

➤ The data collected from the teachers are presented the following charts:

Table A: the length of the service of teachers and their motivation in the English language teaching.

N°	Questions	Answers	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
01	How long have you been teaching English?	One to five years	12	60
		Five years and more than that	08	40
		Total	20	100
02	What is your interest in teaching English language subject?	I'm confident in teaching the subject	14	70
		It is one way to improve my knowledge in English	06	30
		Total	20	100

This table shows that 12 teachers out of 20 (60%) have been teaching for the period between 1-5 years. This means that the majority of the teachers of English were young in the teaching profession. The other remained (40%) are not so young in the teaching profession. Besides, to the question related to their motivation in the subject teaching, 70% of the teachers say that they are confident in teaching the subject whereas, only 30% say that it is one way to improve their knowledge in English. This means that the majority has self confidence in the subject teaching.

Table B: teachers' professional qualifications

N°	Questions	Answers	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
03	Are you trained for the English language teaching?	Yes	04	20
		No	16	80
		Total	20	100
04	If yes, what is your professional qualification	BAPES	03	75
		CAPES	01	25
		Total	04	100
05	If no, why did you choose to teach English instead of the other subjects?	I just like English	05	31.25
		I studied English at university	11	68.75
		Total	16	100

The table B shows that 16 teachers out of 20 (80%) are not trained in English language teaching (E.L.T). So the majority of the teachers are untrained, only the minority is trained (20%).

Besides, among the minority who is trained, three (03) teachers have their BAPES and only one (01) teacher has the CAPES.

Moreover, among those who are not trained for the subject teaching, to justify the reason why they have chosen to teach English instead of other subjects, eleven (11) teachers say that it is because they studied English at university, whereas five (05) say that it is because they just like English language.

As conclusion, the majority of the teachers of English are not trained for the subject teaching. This will certainly have a negative influence on learners' performance.

Table C: teaching and learning materials

N°	Questions	Answers	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
06	Do you use appropriate teaching materials?	Yes	20	100
		No	00	00
		Total	20	100
07	Apart from the teachers and students' book, could you make your own teaching and learning materials?	Yes	07	35
		No	13	65
		Total	20	100

The table C shows that all of the 20 teachers (100%) say that they use appropriate teaching materials. This makes to say that all of them use at least the teachers' book.

Besides, to the second question “apart from the teachers and students' book, could you make your own teaching and learning materials.”, 13 teachers say “No” they couldn't; whereas 07 say they could. This means that the majority of the teachers could not make their own teaching and learning materials to teach, they are still hung to the “Document d'accompagnement”.

With these irregularities, learning cannot be effective, since the majority of the teachers are still hung to the old method of teaching. There is no innovation.

Table D: teachers' perception about learners' performance

N°	Questions	Answers	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
08	Do your learners perform well in your subject?	Yes	08	40
		No	12	60
		Total	20	100
09	If yes, how do you realize it?	Through their participation in class activities	03	37.5
		Through their marks	05	62.5
		Total	08	100
10	If no, have you looked for the reasons of this situation?	Yes	02	16.67
		No	10	83.33
		Total	12	100

This table shows that 12 teachers out of 20 (60%) say that their learners do not perform well in the subject, whereas 08 teachers out of 20 (40%) say their learners perform well in their subject. This means that, the majority of the teachers acknowledged that their learners do not perform well. They are aware of the problem.

Furthermore, the majority (83.33%) of those who say that their learners do not perform well, have not even looked for the reasons of this failure in the subject, only (16.67%) of them have done that.

From this information it can be noticed that, though the majority of the teachers admitted that their learners do not perform well in the English subject, they have not looked for the reasons of this situation. This helps us to come to the conclusion that, the most of the teachers do not mind their learners' poor performance in English language subject.

The last question (question n°11) concerns teachers' opinions about what may be the causes of learners' poor performance in EFL learning. For this question, here is the summary of some EFL teachers' opinions:

- Inadequate teaching and learning materials
- Problem of large class size
- Lack of teachers of English and problem of untrained, under-qualified teachers
- Poor teaching methods due to non- training of some teachers
- Pupils do not have opportunities to practice the language
- Etc....

To improve this situation, some measures should be taken. The last chapter of this research work will deal with that.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND SUGGESTIONS**

This chapter gives a brief summary of the research work, discusses the results and makes suggestions in order to improve Benin secondary schools learners' level in English. Hopefully, these suggestions will contribute to a better performance of EFL learners.

### **5-1. Summary**

The objective of this research work is to investigate the causes of EFL learners' poor performance in some Benin secondary schools and to look for some solutions for better EFL teaching and learning.

Two schools were selected for the research: CEG Agbokou and CEG Les Cocotiers. The research methods used were qualitative as well as quantitative. Some questionnaires were addressed to the three actors involved in the study such as: EFL learners at beginners' level, EFL teachers and the schools' authorities (the vice- principals of the two schools). The collected data were presented and analyzed in Chapter Four.

### **5-2: Discussion**

From the investigation that was conducted, it can be concluded that the majority of the learners like English, but the environment and the learning conditions decrease the motivation they had at the beginning to learn the language. Moreover, the involvement of the EFL teachers, the schools leaders and the educational authorities were as well taken into account. Therefore, The findings have shown that the problem of large class size, poor conducive teaching and learning environment, lack of appropriate teaching and learning

materials and shortage of teachers play an important role in learners' performance and need to be taken into account. Besides, untrained, unqualified teachers who were teaching the subject, could be using teaching strategies that are not as effective as required, this, most probably, can be considered as a determinant factor of learners' poor performance. Then, it can also be concluded that the presence of those precedent factors cited above play a determinant role in the pupils' poor performance in the subject. Additionally, the collected data show that there is the absence of teachers' in-service training to better the quality of teaching. This also contributed to the learners' failure in the subject. This means that teachers were not frequently trained in order to cope with recent methods of teaching English that would also improve learners' performance.

The study found out that teachers had interest to teach the subject because they would have a chance to gain knowledge and improve the language teaching methods but unfortunately they are confronted to learners' low level of understanding the language that leads to their failure. That is to say, if learners do not have a strong foundation in the subject, it would be difficult for them to perform well.

The finding also showed that the learners do not have opportunities to practice the language in order to improve their speaking skill. English clubs which could also enable the learners to be familiar with each other, build a certain kind of self-confidence and practice the language do not exist in none of the two concerned schools. There were no ways they could master the language fully because language learning requires repeated practice and exposure. Therefore, it can be also concluded that the lack of opportunities to practice the language leads to learners' poor performance.

To improve this situation, some suggestions are made in the next step.

### **5-3. Suggestions**

Throughout the results and analysis obtained from this research work, the following suggestions could be considered as useful in order to find solutions to learners' poor performance.

#### **❖ Teaching and learning materials**

The ministry of education should endow each school with adequate, sufficient and authentic teaching and learning materials. Apart from that, teachers also should be resourceful. They should be able to invent their own teaching and learning materials. By so doing, the learning should be more interesting, what will make learners more motivated to learn English.

Additionally, the curriculum makers could review the content and the design of the curriculum in order to meet more the need and interest of the learners.

#### **❖ Teachers of English training and recruitment**

Learners' performance in a language requires them to really master all the four language skills: the listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as being able to use the language in different contexts. Therefore, the Ministry of Education should make sure that, in our secondary schools, teachers are properly trained for the teaching job. Additionally, they would be equipped with proper content subject matter knowledge as well as methods and strategies of teaching the subject. That will play an important role in learners' high performance in English subject. Therefore, there is a need to recruit trained, qualified EFL teachers who would be able to impart the real knowledge of the subject matter to the learners on one hand; and on the other hand, to improve learners' performance in the subject.

## ❖ Promotion of English speaking

Language learning requires repeated practice and exposure. Therefore, it is very important for the teachers to make all the learners understand the advantages of learning English as the most spoken language all over the world. In this context, the teachers of English should not only create the pleasant atmosphere for learners in the classroom but also oblige them to always practise English language whenever they are in an English class. They should also do with learners some speaking activities such as: discussions, storytelling, information gap, story completion, brainstorming, etc..... to promote speaking in their classes . These strategies should certainly have a positive effect on the learners' performance both in the classroom and outside. The teachers are also suggested to create in their schools some English clubs, which will help learners to practise the language apart from classroom context. Moreover, it will be very interesting if the teachers in collaboration with the schools authorities could organize an excursion to an English speaking country to the learners.

## ❖ Suggestions to the schools' authorities

The schools' authorities should:

- Hire as part-time teachers, those coming from the teachers' training schools.
- Require a continual in service- training for teachers who are not trained for the teaching job.
- Make the learning environment more pleasant for learners and teachers by building more classrooms in order to solve the problem of overcrowded class.
- Organize, in collaboration with teachers of English, some competition during which, learners will do some activities such as: sketch in English,

reading, storytelling, bee spelling etc... at the end, the best pupils will be rewarded. This may motivate the others to work harder.

### ❖ **Some key strategies for better EFL teaching and learning**

- Teachers have the responsibility to remind their learners the various advantages of acquiring and mastering English language
- They should implement the appropriate methods and activities of teaching effectively in order to motivate learners to learn English
- The teachers' role during class activities

Teachers carry a big responsibility in their classrooms; it is their role to create friendly and supportive atmosphere. Therefore, the following points could help them perform their roles:

- A teacher as a controller: it is a teacher who conducts the whole lesson. It is his/ her responsibility to organize what learners do, when they should speak and what language they use. This controlling role occurs during lockstep activities, presentation stage, listen and repeat.
- A teacher as an assessor: another important part of teacher's job is to assess their learners, to give them a feedback on their performance. The teacher should evaluate how good learners are.
- A teacher as an organizer: is one of the most important roles of the teacher since the whole success depends on the teacher's organization skills. He has to explain what the learners are going to do, give clear instructions, and at the end of the lesson, he must give a feedback.
- A teacher as a prompter: is a teacher who encourages his learners and offers suggestions about activities that are being done by them. He ought to support his learners during each stage so that they can be more successful.

- A teacher as a participant: a teacher can participate as an equal in activities but they must beware of leading in these activities. His participation can also improve the classroom atmosphere.
- A teacher as a resource: such teacher can facilitate his learners by giving advice and is available when the learners need to consult some problems.

### ❖ **Suggestion to learners and their parents**

Learners should take the English language learning as seriously as possible. Therefore, they should always make effort to speak only the language once they are in English class and seize any opportunity to speak the language anywhere. Additionally, English language learners should read a lot, listen to radio and watch TV English programs.

As far as parents are concerned, they should provide their children with what they need to succeed in English learning. So, parents are invited to buy to their children the books they need to learn English and dictionaries. Moreover, they are the first responsible for the children's performance at school, therefore they have to regularly support and motivate them in the acquisition of English as a Foreign Language.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

To sum up, English is the most spoken language all over the world. Therefore, the acquisition of that language has become necessary for everybody. Indeed, the introduction of English as a foreign language in Benin educational system has serious problems as far as our secondary schools learners' performance is concerned. Despite the opportunities that, this language offers today, learners do not take its learning seriously. Their level is getting lower and lower; the consequence is that they fail in the EFL learning.

This situation has its sources in both learners and teachers. Moreover, the schools' authorities, the government, and the parents had to be taken into account.

Several causes of the learners' poor performance in EFL learning had been enumerated after the analysis of the collected data. Among those causes the most important are: the presence of under qualified, and untrained teachers in the schools, The absence of teachers' in-service training to raise the quality of teaching , the problem of large class size, lack of opportunities for learners to use English in the home environment and the community, lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials.

For these causes of EFL learners' poor performance some suggestions have been made in order to improve the problem. It would be very beneficial if those suggestions are taken into account by the learners, teachers and the educational authorities for the improvement of English as a foreign language learning conditions in the secondary schools in Benin.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire to schools' authorities

1- How many learners do you have in your school?

.....

2- How many classrooms are available for them?

.....

3- What is the average number of learners per class?

.....

4- How many teachers of English do you have in your school?

.....

5- How many of them are permanent teachers?

.....

6- How many of them are part time teachers?

.....

7- As far as professional qualifications are concerned, how many of them have:

BAPES?

CAPES?

8- How many of the teachers attend in- service training?

.....

9- Does your school get a library?

Yes

No

## Questionnaire to EFL teachers

1- How long have you been teaching English?

1 to 5 years

5 and more than that

2- What is your motivation in teaching English language subject?

I am confident in teaching the subject

It is one way to improve my knowledge

3- Are you trained for the English teaching?

Yes

No

4- If yes, what is your professional qualification?

BAPES

CAPES

5- If no, why did you choose to teach English language instead of other subjects?

I just like English

I studied English at university

6- Do you use appropriate teaching and learning materials to teach?

Yes

No

7- Apart from the teachers and students' books, could you make your own teaching and learning materials?

Yes

No

8- Do your learners perform well in your subject?

Yes

No

9- If yes, how do you realize that?

Through their participation during class activities

Through their marks

10- If no, have you looked for the reasons of this situation?

Yes

No

11- What may be the causes of learners' poor performance in EFL learning according to you?

.....

.....

.....

.....

## Questionnaire to EFL learners

1- Do you like English language?

Yes

No

2- If yes, why?

I understand English language very well

I always get good marks

3- If no, why?

I never understand

I have never gotten good marks in it

4- Do you have your student's book?

Yes

No

5- Apart from the student book do you have other English's documents?

Yes

No

6- Does your school get a library?

Yes

No

7- Do you visit it frequently?

Yes

No

8- During the class activities, do you participate?

Yes

No

9- If yes why?

I always understand everything

The teacher and my friend help me to do it

10- If no why?

I don't always understand?

They are boring to me

11- Do you have an English club in your school?

Yes

No

12- Apart the class, do you have other opportunities to practice the language?

Yes

No

13- When have you started having English understanding problem?

First form (6è)

Second form (5è)

Third form (4è)

Fourth form (3è)

14- Who or what are responsible for your drop of level in English language learning?

My teachers of English

The environmental and learning conditions