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The influence of a previous EFL learning experience on  
secondary school learners' performance: the case study  
of "Complexe Scolaire La Rosette and Robert  
Djidonou"

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research work to my superiors and each member of my Religious Family: the Sisters of Saint Augustine.

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## INTRODUCTION

Language stands as the main tool of communication between human beings. As one of the most important factors of humans' integration and interaction within societies, it is not then surprising that early age children are naturally endowed with marvellous potentials for acquiring such an important medium. Henceforth, their acquisition of their native language or mother tongue and the stages through which it involves appear to be something quite natural and automatic in so far as the child is living in a community.

However, linguistic competencies have ceased to be just a social factor in human life. Language has evolved to be a professional exigency and an asset for successful human relationship in this globalized world which has become a planetary village. So, English as the first spoken language evidently appears as the one embedding such linguistic requirements.

Teaching English to children at early age is a phenomenon that has been attracting a lot of attention for quite some time now. Surely enough, there is a popular belief that children can perform in a foreign language effortlessly, successfully and fast. Parents become much more eager to register their children in nurseries and primary schools where Teaching English as a Foreign Language has been integrated. This has led to new official early language learning programs mushrooming all over the world. However, the high enthusiasm for 'the younger the better' position has recently met with critical overtones voiced by some experts. For example Mihaljević

Djigunović, (2012) points out that early starters are not necessarily faster or more efficient language learners than later starters.

From this perspective, my research interest concerns the actual necessity of this integration of English as a Foreign Language in primary schools curriculum and the impact it entails on learners' performance in secondary school.

This thesis has been developed through five chapters: the first introduces the problem raised by the study, the purpose of the study, and its significance. It also includes the clarification of some main concepts dealt with in the work. The second chapter provides information about previous research related to the field. The third chapter presents the methodology used during the research, the fourth deals with findings and their analysis, the fifth and last chapter focuses on the discussion of these findings and offers a few suggestions and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER I: THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1. Problem statement**

Many private primary schools in Benin have included EFL teaching in their curriculum. Moreover, some parents are proud of the fact that their children attend those schools where English is taught as part of the curriculum. Unfortunately, little is known about the influence of this previous EFL learning experience on the students' performance in the first form of secondary schools. Generally, some of these private schools do not have the secondary level to allow this follow-up to take place.

### **1.2. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study is, therefore, to identify the goal underlying the introduction of EFL in the curriculum in these primary schools. The aim of the study is also to examine the results achieved by those students who have been exposed to EFL in primary school in order to determine whether or not their previous EFL learning experience has an influence on their performance in the first form of secondary school.

To reach this purpose, I have considered the following research questions:

-According to the school principals, what is the necessity of integrating EFL teaching in the primary schools curriculum?

-What is the impact of this early experience on the EFL learners' performance in the first form of secondary school?

### **1.3. Significance of the study**

People's interest in the learning of English as a Foreign Language is actually increasing very rapidly. More and more parents today really want their children to

master English as well as French. Some even want their children to master English more than French because they consider the English language as the most important language in the world. This consideration of English as the prime international language constitutes one of the main reasons which lead them to send their children to nurseries or primary schools where the latter can learn English as a Foreign Language. This early learning of the language may lead to one of these three outcomes: it may have a positive effect on these learners' performances, or a negative effect, or no effect at all.

Therefore, this research work is important since it has tried to identify the real impact of the early exposure of children to EFL learning on their performance later in secondary schools. As a matter of fact, a focus on this impact could be profitable to students' parents since they would then realize the positive and/or negative sides of their decision to make their children learn EFL at an early age. Educational authorities such as TEFL decision-makers, curriculum designers, and school administrators are also concerned by the outcomes of this study in so far as it can lead them to deepen reflections in the field. Out of these reflections would result new effective approaches, methods, and techniques conducive to more success in teaching English to young learners. Eventually, this study would also offer suggestions, and recommendations that could help to enhance the practice of EFL teaching to young learners.

#### **1.4. Limitations of the study**

This research work has mainly focused on the integration of English as a Foreign Language in private schools. As a matter of fact, its scope has not been extended to the situation prevailing in public primary schools for the following reason:

Although the teaching of English as a Foreign Language in primary schools was officially approved, and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) curricula were introduced in 2001, it has not been possible to find any public primary schools where EFL is taught in the city of Porto-Novo, the area of investigation in this study. Actually, none of these schools have included the Teaching of English among their school subjects. The scope of this research work has, therefore, been limited to the study of two private schools namely "La Rosette" and "Robert Djidonou"

### **1.5. Clarification of concepts**

#### **□ Previous EFL learners' experience**

In this study, the term previous English Foreign Language learners' experience does not refer to the language learning children would experience during periods such as holidays or home tutoring. This term refers particularly to the whole teaching process beginner learners have undergone in English as a Foreign Language, starting from nursery to the highest level in primary school. It is a language learning experience which is supposed to be constant and upon which the beginner learners can build the new language information they will receive in their first form at secondary schools.

#### **□ Learners' performance**

According to the *Oxford Advanced 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* (2002) 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 well and quick students understand and react during the language learning process.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter particularly presents an overview of the various theories, strategies as well as techniques that have been developed so far concerning early language acquisition. It focuses on the EFL teaching and learning theories, the practice of teaching English to beginners, the concept of early EFL learning, and the strategies forwarded in teaching early beginners.

### **2.1. EFL teaching and learning theories**

TEFL involves different teaching practices that are used by teachers in classrooms in order to perform an effective teaching process and make learners acquire good communicative skills. In TEFL, there are various approaches and methods, most of which stem from the explosion in linguistic and educational research which began in the 1950's and 1960's. Some are strongly associated with individual theorists, for example:

The Cognitive Code with Noam Chomsky: an approach to second and foreign language teaching which was proposed in the 1960s and which is based on the belief that language learning is a process which involves active mental processes and not simply the forming of habits. It gives importance to the learner's active part in the process of using and learning language, particularly in the learning of grammatical rules.

The Silent Way: a method of foreign-language teaching developed by Gattegno in his book *Teaching Foreign Languages in Schools: The Silent Way* in 1963. It makes use of gesture, mime, visual aids, wall charts, and in particular Cuisenaire rods (wooden sticks of different lengths and colors) that the teacher uses to help the

students to talk. The method takes its name from the relative silence of the teacher using these techniques. *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, (2002).

Audiolingualism: a method of foreign or second language teaching which (a) emphasizes the teaching of speaking and listening before reading and writing (b) uses dialogues and drills (c) discourages use of the mother tongue in the classroom (d) often makes use of contrastive analysis. The audio-lingual method was prominent in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in the United States, and has been widely used in many other parts of the world.

No theory has, so far, offered a complete solution to the problems of teaching languages or fully explained how we learn a language. Each has exponents and each has been fashionable for a brief period.

The previously mentioned theories characterized the language teaching panorama in the decade of the 70s. However, from that point onwards there has been a recognized approach to language teaching, generally accepted as the norm and viewed as essential in order to be considered a good teacher, which is the Communicative Approach or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Its origins can be traced to the 60s, with the changes that occur in the British language teaching tradition. At this point, the foundations of Audiolingualism begin to be questioned, mainly as a result of Chomsky's cognitivist ideas. Hence, the primary goal of CLT is to develop communicative competence, to move "beyond grammatical and discourse elements in communication" and probe the "nature of social, cultural, and pragmatic features of language" (Brown, 1994, p 77). Classroom language learning is thus linked with real-

life communication outside its confines, and authentic samples of language and discourse or contextualized chunks rather than discrete items are employed. Students are hence equipped with tools for producing unrehearsed language outside the immediate classroom.

Other methods and pedagogical approaches to foreign language teaching continue to proliferate in this post-communicative era. Although they incorporate certain communicative principles - in fact, Rodgers (2001, p. 2) considers many of them "off-shoots" spawned by CLT -, they also look back to previous trends for some of their central tenets. We have as example the Task-based Language Teaching (a teaching approach based on the use of communicative and interactive tasks as the central units for the planning and delivery of instruction).

The Cooperative learning: an approach whereby students work together in structured groups to reach common goals. It aims to foster cooperation rather than competition - each person's success is linked with every other member's success - and to develop critical thinking skills.

Competency-based teaching: an approach to teaching that focuses on teaching the skills and behaviors needed to perform competencies. Competencies refer to the student's ability to apply different kinds of basic skills in situations that are commonly encountered in everyday life.

## **2.2. Teaching EFL to beginners**

According to Shin K. J. (2009) in his article "*Teaching English to young learners*", young learners (or beginners) should have fun with English! From this, it is

relevant to point out that teaching theory and practices should particularly be designed to create a relaxed and enjoyable teaching/learning environment for early language learners.

Teachers must discuss approaches for teaching language within a meaningful context and share effective techniques for making language input comprehensible and encouraging for student participation. Their main focus must, therefore, be on issues like what language do young learners actually need? How to teach them effectively?

For Piaget (1970), Children are active learners and thinkers: Children construct knowledge from actively interacting processes with the physical environment in developmental stages. They learn through their own individual actions and exploration.

Children learn through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962), that is, Children construct knowledge through other people, through interaction with adults. Adults/teachers work actively with children in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): difference between the child's capacity to solve problems on his own and his capacity to solve them with assistance.

Children learn effectively through scaffolding by adults (Bruner, 1983). Here, the adult's role is very important in a child's learning process. Like Vygotsky, Bruner focused on the importance of language in a child's cognitive development. He shows how the adult uses "scaffolding" to guide a child's language learning through finely-tuned talk (Cameron, 2001). These theories on children language development would lead teachers to:

- create interest in the task;

- break the task down into smaller steps;
- keep child "on task" by reminding him of the purpose or goal;
- Point out the important parts of the task;
- control the child's frustration during the task;
- model the task, including different ways to do the task.

(Bruner 1983, cited in "Teaching English to Young Learners", Joan Kang Shin 2009, p 3)

It is evident then that teachers' understanding of children needs in language acquisition is fundamental for the development of effective teaching theories.

Working in the field of ESL, Slatternly and Willis (2001) cited in (ibid.) outlined a set of characteristics of young learners in English as a Second language that could be taken into account when teaching EFL. They summarize those characteristics as follows:

Young Learners (under 7)

- acquire through hearing and experiencing lots of English, in much the same way they acquire L1
- learn things through playing; they are not consciously trying to learn new words or phrases - for them it's incidental
- love playing with language sounds, imitating, and making funny noises

Young learners (7-12)

- are able to read and write in their L1
- are developing language as thinkers
- understand the difference between the real and the imaginary
- can plan and organize how best to

- are not able to organize their learning
- are not able to read or write in L1; important to recycle language through talk and play
- their grammar will develop gradually on its own when exposed to lots of target language e.g. English in context
- carry out an activity
- can work with others and learn from others
- can be reliable and take responsibility for class activities and routines

Effective teachers at the beginners' level should take into account these characteristics, take advantage of the flexibility of young minds and the malleability of young tongues to grow better speakers of English through their teaching.

### **2.3. Early Language learning**

Language learning at a young age has greatly spread nowadays especially in English. In the field of English as a second language learning, many studies have been carried out which constitute an essential contribution to early EFL teaching curriculum in kindergarten and primary schools.

Two main trends of thoughts are forwarded in this approach:

According to insights from the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)-focused studies, children acquire languages with greater ease and higher success because they can rely on natural acquisition processes that are not available to adults. In their language learning children make use of procedural memory (memory of skills and how to do things) and develop implicit competence, while older learners need to resort to

declarative memory (memory of facts and events; it consists of information that is explicitly stored and recalled) and explicit learning processes (Paradise, 2004). In spite of a large body of empirical findings concerning the age factor, the impact of age on language learning is still hotly debated: some experts support the CPH (e.g. DeKeyser and Larson-Hall, 2005; Hyltenstam and Abrahamson, 2001; Long, 2005), while others claim there is no critical period (e.g. Bialystok, 2001; Birdsong, 2005; Moyer, 2004).

Taking into account the impact of age on language learning, some studies have not only offered theoretical insights in teaching young learners, but they have also informed teachers, parents and policy makers about the key issue of age. Harley (1986, p. 4) argues that "*...childhood is the golden age for creating simultaneous bilingual children due to the plasticity and virginity of the child's brain to make for superior ability specifically in acquiring the early sets or units of language.*" This idea was later sustained by Lightbown and Spada (1999). This mental flexibility signifies the privilege attained by children over the adults in learning languages, which is probably also due to the muscular plasticity used in the articulation of human speech by children to produce a native like accent.

Brown (1994) claims that this ability is almost missing after puberty and this may explain the difficulty encountered by some adults in acquiring a native-like accent, regardless of the way in which they learn new languages. Children who acquire a second language after the age of five may have a physical advantage in the phonemic control of that second language. It is no wonder that children acquire authentic pronunciation while adults generally do not, since pronunciation involves the control of so many muscles (Brown, 1994, p. 51).

According to Brown's argument, young children can sound similar to their new-language classmates very quickly and if young enough can become native speakers of the new language, with all the cultural background that this implies. Adults, on the other hand, can rarely gain the depth of cultural background that makes a real native speaker of a language. Ehrman (1996, p.180) refers to the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), which may lead to adult resistance of language learning. According to the CPH, adults no longer have the same plasticity as children that would enable them to cope with new mental activities.

The difficulty faced by adults to attain a native-like fluency could be due to the fact that the developmental changes in the brain that affect the nature of language acquisition after the end of the critical period are no longer based on the innate biological structures claimed by Chomsky (1981) to contribute to FLA (First Language Acquisition) or NLL (New Language Learning) in early childhood. Vygotsky (1978) explains the CPH in a different way. He argues that the adults tend to be more analytical in learning languages unlike children who tend to be more holistic. Children acquire the language as it is formed and produced by others whereas the adults often think of how a construction is formed before using it in conversation. The impact of the CPH on NLL, nevertheless, does not receive the consensus of all linguists and classroom researchers. Lightbown and Spada (1999, p. 60) give the example of a study carried out by Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle on a group of English speakers learning Dutch as a second language.

This research was especially valuable because it included learners from all age categories, from six to sixty year olds. Surprisingly, according to this study, the adolescents, not the children nor the adults, were by far the most successful learners. Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle found that young learners had some difficulty in learning tasks that were beyond their cognitive maturity whereas adolescents learned faster in the early stages of second language development. The study eventually signals that adults and adolescents were able to make a considerable progress in NLL when they used the language on a daily basis in social, professional and academic interaction (1999, p. 60).

Insights into early EFL classrooms show that in most situations, ELL is based on form-focused teaching (DeKeyser and Larsen-Hall, 2004) and that young learners are exposed to 'minimal input situations' (Larsen-Hall, 2008). Nikolov (2009) also points to the frequently low inputs of target language proficiency used by teachers to secure effective linguistic levels of their young learners.

Early learning of English as a Foreign Language mainly concerns the process of language acquisition that children are submitted to when they are still at the absolute beginning stage at schools. Language teaching practice often assumes that most of the difficulties that learners face in the study of English are a consequence of the degree to which their native language differs from English (a contrastive analysis approach). A native speaker of Chinese, for example, may face many more difficulties than a native speaker of German, because German is more closely related to English than Chinese is. This may be true for anyone of any mother tongue setting out to learn any other language (called a target language, second language or L2).

Learning English as a Foreign Language at early age would need these insights in ESL studies to develop effective strategies in EFL in so far as children are already confronted with difficulties in another second language like French for example.

#### **2.4. Strategies to teaching EFL to beginners**

*According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (2010), a strategy is a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose; it is also referred to the process of planning something or putting a plan into operation in a skillful way. EFL teaching strategies to beginners then concern the varieties of methodological procedures and techniques specifically designed to make the learning of the language less difficult for children at a lower age who moreover have never been into contact with the English language before.*

In the table on the next page, many fruitful techniques suggested by Joan Kang Shin (2009, p. 7) are revealed:

### 1. Supplement activities with visuals, realia, and movement.

Young learners tend to have short attention spans

and a lot of physical energy. In addition, children • Use brightly colored visuals, toys,

are very much linked to their surroundings and are puppets or objects

more interested in the physical and the tangible. As • Community donations for toys and

Scott and Ytreberg (1990) describe, "Their own objects

understanding comes through hands and eyes and • Create a "Visuals and Realia Bank"

ears. The physical world is dominant at all times."

• Use Total Physical Response (TPR)

by James Asher (1977)

•

### 2. Involve students in making visuals and realia.

Having children involved in creating the visuals

that are related to the lesson helps engage students • Students draw different characters

in the learning process by introducing them to the for a story or make puppets, masks,

context as well as to relevant vocabulary items. play-do sculptures

Students are more likely to feel interested and • Collaborate with the art teacher to

invested in the lesson and will probably take better make the visuals you need for you

care of the materials (Moon 2000).

activities

• Students contribute their own toys

for the lesson ("Show and tell")

### 3. Move from activity to activity.

Young learners have short attention spans. For ages 5-7, Keep activities around 5 and 10 minutes long. For ages 8-10, keep activities 10 to 15 minutes long. Scott and Ytreberg (1990) suggest creating a balance between the activities in the column on the right side.

- Quiet/noisy exercises
- Different skills: listening/talking/reading/writing
- Individual/ pair work/ group work/ whole class activities
- Teacher-pupil/ pupil-pupil activities

4. Teach in themes. A thematic unit, a series of lessons on the same topic or subject, broader contexts in which to teach language, recycle language from lesson to lesson, and allow students to focus more on content and communication than on language structure.

- Common themes for YLs: animals, friends, family, environment, citizenship, shopping, or units revolving around a storybooks, e websites, celebrities, or movies students like
- Themes based on curricula from students' other subjects are also effective (Haas 2000)

8. Bring in helpers from the community

9. Collaborate with other teachers in your school.

10. Communicate with other TEYL (Teaching English to Young Learners) professionals.

(Joan Kang Shin (2009) "*Teaching English to young learners*")

With the same view to providing adequate answers to the important questions concerning EFL teaching in nurseries and primary schools in Benin, some senior teachers have also focused on certain aspects of the issue.

In 2008, Agnihoun conducted a research work entitled "*The Importance of Learning by Doing in English Language Acquisition in Primary Schools: the case study of 'Les Palmiers' and 'Les Bénédiction' private schools in Cotonou.*" In her conclusion, she stated that communicative activities can be used in any class as they involve intensive and useful practice in reading, writing, listening and speaking. She, then, suggested that planners give a definite reorientation to the teaching of English in primary schools. According to her, teachers should keep in mind that only a conducive communicative environment focused on songs, games, plays, stories poems...can lead pupils to a natural acquisition of the English language.

Adjovi (2009), on his part, has focused on the benefits, difficulties and prospects in EFL teaching in primary schools in Benin. In his Thesis: "*L'Enseignement de l'Anglais à l'Ecole Primaire au Bénin: Avantages, Difficultés et Perspectives*", he concludes that the introduction of EFL teaching in primary schools has become a necessity today. This is why Benin has decided to experiment it since 2001-2002. However, things didn't go far in the implementation of this decision. So, he suggests that Benin must put a great effort in making the teaching of EFL a complete success.

## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH**

In this chapter, the research method used during the study is presented as well as information concerning the research setting, the research population and the data collection instruments.

### **3.1. The choice of the research method**

It is necessary to mention that this study is carried out in the framework of qualitative research; the type of research allowing the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data by observing what people do and say. Qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, and characteristics, on the one hand, discovery, description, understanding, and shared interpretation on the other hand.

The nature of this research is exploratory. Participants are asked to respond to general questions in order to identify and define their perceptions, opinions and feelings about the topic under consideration and to determine the degree of agreement that exists among them.

### **3.2. The research setting**

As far as the setting of this study is concerned, it relates to environment in which the collection of data has been carried out. As a matter of fact, two private schools have been concerned by this study: "La Rosette" and "Robert Djidonou" both located in the city of Porto-Novo.

### **3.3. The research population**

The population in focus in the framework of this research includes the authorities of the two private schools, namely the principals. Students are as well considered as participants since they have been involved (indirectly) through their performance in secondary school. Two categories of students are concerned at this level: those who have experienced the early EFL learning at primary school and the others who are freshly exposed to the language. At "La Rosette", the total number of the EFL learners is 30: 18 early English learners and 12 real beginners. As for "Robert Djidonou", the number of the early English learners is to 45 whereas the real beginners are 4. This makes a total of 49 learners in form 1.

This research work has mainly involved two modes of investigation: the collection of data related mainly to learners' performance in the first form of secondary school and a semi-structured interview addressed to the school principals.

#### **. Interviews**

The interviews have been a very important tool for the collection of information especially from the principals of both private schools. Thanks to this mode of investigation it has been possible to gather views, perceptions, and feelings of these participants in the field of teaching English as a foreign language at the primary school. The interviews in this study are composed of 9 open-ended questions. They are concerned with the motivations, the fundamental reasons of the introduction of EFL in the primary schools as well as the concrete influence this previous exposure can have on the pupils' learning in primary school and later on their performance in secondary

school. The answers to these different questions will be presented in the following chapter just as they are provided by the different leaders of "La Rosette" and "Robert Djidonou". This serves as data of which analysis will try to respond to the research questions forwarded in the purpose of study.

### **3.4. The collection of students' marks**

The students' performance is fundamental to measure the influence of an early EFL learning experience on some students as compared to the other students who did not go through such an experience. In order to elicit this aspect of the study, the gathering of the students' marks has been essential. At "Robert Djidonou", students' marks have been collected over three terms, whereas the marks of those at "La Rosette" cover two terms. The students' marks include at the level of each term, the average marks of the marks that they got for the quizzes and the marks that they got for the two summative evaluations. The findings collected from this investigation are displayed in the fourth chapter. On the basis of these data, it has been possible to carry out a comparative analysis of the students' level of performance.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

Two important parts have been developed in this chapter. The first part consists in presenting the findings of the research work while the second part focuses on the analysis of the finding or data collected from the investigation.

### **4.1. THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

With a focus on the research questions forwarded at the level of the purpose of my study, the collected data have been analysed accordingly. Therefore, the first research instrument (the interview) which has been involved in this investigation has helped to gather data from the principals of the schools selected in order to answer the first research question: according to the school principals, what the necessity of integrating EFL teaching in the primary schools curriculum?

These findings are displayed as well as their analysis to show whether or not there exists any necessity for integrating EFL teaching in the primary schools curriculum according to them.

The information obtained from the interview addressed to the principals of the two private schools namely "La rosette" and "Robert Djidonou" is presented as follows:

1-The first question focuses on the real motivations for the introduction of English as a foreign language in the curriculum of nurseries and primary schools:

**"La Rosette"**: the real motivation is to broaden the pupils' knowledge of another language apart from French. This will allow them to prepare their future challenges in the field in so far as nowadays English becomes compulsory in any field.

**"Robert Dodjonou":** we believe that it was easier for children to learn EFL at lower age. The language acquisition is less difficult for them at this age as they learn the basic linguistic tool of the English language. This will also be a benefit for them to assimilate the more complicated rules once at secondary level.

2-The second question concerns the necessity to integrate such a foreign language additionally to another official one (French) while at the national level, this is only compulsory at secondary level.

**"Robert Djidonou":** this is essential; the government thinks this is necessary and has even tried to introduce the English language with the help of the USAID. As usual, the real problem is that once the financial means were provided, the project is forgotten. The teachers of "CM1" and "CM2" have been trained and should teach EFL in those classes. Moreover, they should have the Baccalauréat since someone who is under this level does not have the required English abilities in order to teach the language effectively.

**"La Rosette":** yes, this is necessary. At our school, children already master French quite fluently. There, the integration of EFL will not cause a problem for them.

3-at this level the question is about the pressure of this new curriculum on the pupils.

**"Robert Djidonou":** we don't think that the pupils are overloaded with EFL learning. It is quite integrated into their timetable at each level and naturally fits in. Moreover, they learn EFL once or twice in the week and for 30 minutes.

**"La Rosette":** no, on the contrary, children are happy and eager to learn this new language. They always look forward to welcoming their EFL teacher.

4- The focus of this question is the follow-up of the pupils at the higher level namely the beginner's level in secondary schools.

**"Robert Djidonou"**: yes, for example, the beginner learners of the following year (the former pupils of CM2) will be taught by the same teacher who knows the English level of each one very well. Moreover, we organize class meetings at the end of each term when the parents of these students discuss with the whole staff and help us to improve the teaching of in those fields.

**"La Rosette"**: not exactly, nothing is actually done to follow their performance at secondary school. They manage to cope with the new EFL curriculum at beginners' level.

5- Is it obvious that the performance of these learners in form 1 is higher than those who have not been exposed to the early EFL learning?

**"Robert Djidonou"**: they already have the basics in the language. And even if they are considered to have the same level in form 1, it is obvious that those who have the previous experience in the language react more easily during EFL classes.

**"La Rosette"**: actually, many of these children perform quite well in the language.

6- The real impact of this previous experience on the learners at secondary school.

**"Robert Djidonou"**: this impact is positive, as I've put it; they already have the background knowledge in English. This enables them to prove themselves.

**"La Rosette"**: the children already have previous experience in EFL. Therefore, they have less difficulty when being in the contact with the language.

7- In which skill do they perform well?

**"Robert Djidonou"**: in form 1, the stress is put on speaking, writing, and particularly on listening. They listen a lot.

**"La Rosette"**: they perform well in speaking. They speak better than they write.

8- How do you notice this?

**"Robert Djidonou"**: After the test, we notice that their performance in the language is good in those skills.

**"La Rosette"**: they can speak English relatively well, even between themselves.

9- What conclusion do you draw?

**"Robert Djidonou"**: this is a very good experience. I wish this is expanded to all primary schools. It is very motivating for pupils. At secondary school, they no longer fear the contact with the English language. I invite educational authorities to spread this introduction to all schools.

**"La Rosette"**: we must help children to master the English language at early age, and develop their ability to speak English. The early initiation is a good way to reach this goal.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the analysis of data related to the performances of early EFL learners as compared to those who are real beginners in the selected secondary schools. The data which have served for the analysis at this level are the students' marks in form 1. These data have helped to answer the second

research question: what is the impact of the early English learning experience on the EFL learners' performance in the first form of secondary school?

At Robert Djidonou, the data collected represent the average of the marks of each of the three terms of the academic year. The table on next page displays these averages.

Table 1: Students' averages at the private school "*Robert Djidonou*": first, second and third terms of the academic year (2012-2013). The (real) new beginners' averages are in **red**.

N°	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
1	14.83	13.16	13.66
2	12.16	13.66	15.00
3	17.50	15.83	17.33
4	18.66	13.50	15.83
5	16.83	14.66	17.33
6	19.66	17.61	19.33
7	17.66	18.05	18.50
8	12.66	12.72	12.61
9	11.66	12.83	13.00
10	09.33	14.11	12.77
11	12.00	12.72	12.22
12	13.33	13.38	15.05
13	08.00	10.33	06.77
14	11.50	12.44	13.72
15	17.16	15.55	13.94
16	13.83	12.66	14.77
17	14.00	13.33	12.73
18	18.66	16.94	19.33
19	15.50	15.16	16.61
20	08.50	13.50	12.53
21	18.33	17.22	12.33
22	13.33	10.33	09.66
23	11.33	11.38	11.11
24	12.66	11.88	12.11
25	13.16	12.00	16.00
<b>26</b>	<b>15.00</b>	<b>16.50</b>	<b>17.11</b>
27	08.33	10.50	09.66
28	12.00	17.08	17.00
29	18.83	07.83	08.11
30	13.00	12.00	15.33
31	13.66	14.50	14.94
32	19.00	16.00	18.94
<b>33</b>	<b>10.66</b>	<b>13.50</b>	<b>10.16</b>
34	11.16	11.05	11.11
35	14.00	10.16	10.83
36	19.33	18.93	18.61
37	11.16	11.72	11.44
<b>38</b>	<b>17.50</b>	<b>16.83</b>	<b>17.50</b>
39	19.00	17.72	18.38
40	15.83	17.16	16.72
41	12.16	12.72	13.22
42	17.25	16.11	13.72
43	13.33	11.50	11.83
44	17.50	16.66	18.11
45	12.66	13.83	14.22
46	13.33		
47	15.16	14.50	12.66
48	16.83	10.00	11.66
<b>49</b>	<b>14.50</b>	<b>12.61</b>	<b>09.94</b>

The second table shows the number of students who have got the average marks for the three terms at "Robert Djidonou".

This table is presented on the next page.

**Table 2:** Students who have got the average marks

N°	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
1	14.83	13.16	13.66
2	12.16	13.66	15.00
3	17.50	15.83	17.33
4	18.66	13.50	15.83
5	16.83	14.66	17.33
6	19.66	17.61	19.33
7	17.66	18.05	18.50
8	12.66	12.72	12.61
9	11.66	12.83	13.00
10	12.00	14.11	12.77
11	13.33	12.72	12.22
12	11.50	13.38	15.05
13	17.16	10.33	13.72
14	13.83	12.44	13.94
15	14.00	15.55	14.77
16	18.66	12.66	12.73
17	15.50	13.33	19.33
18	18.33	16.94	16.61
19	13.33	15.16	12.53
20	11.33	13.50	12.33
21	12.66	17.22	11.11
22	13.16	10.33	12.11
23	<b>15.00</b>	11.38	16.00
24	08.33	11.88	<b>17.11</b>
25	12.00	12.00	17.00
<b>26</b>	18.83	<b>16.50</b>	15.33
27	13.00	10.50	14.94
28	13.66	17.08	18.94
29	19.00	12.00	<b>10.16</b>
30	<b>10.66</b>	14.50	11.11
31	11.16	16.00	10.83
32	14.00	<b>13.50</b>	18.61
<b>33</b>	19.33	11.05	11.44
34	11.16	10.16	<b>17.50</b>
35	<b>17.50</b>	18.93	18.38
36	19.00	11.72	16.72
37	15.83	<b>16.83</b>	13.22
<b>38</b>	12.16	17.72	13.72
39	17.25	17.16	11.83
40	13.33	12.72	18.11
41	17.50	16.11	14.22
42	12.66	11.50	
43	13.33	16.66	12.66
44	15.16	13.83	11.66
45	16.83		
46	<b>14.50</b>	14.50	
47		10.00	
48		<b>12.61</b>	

Table 3: students' marks under the average.

<b>N°</b>	<b>Term 1</b>	<b>Term 2</b>	<b>Term 3</b>
1	09.33	7.83	9.94
2	08.00		9.66
3	08.50		9.66
4	08.33		08.11
5			06.77

Table 4: The ten highest marks (the top ten) of the three terms are presented.

<b>N°</b>	<b>Term 1</b>	<b>Term 2</b>	<b>Term 3</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>19.66</b>	<b>18.93</b>	<b>19.33</b>
2	19.33	18.05	19.33
3	19.00	17.72	18.94
4	19.00	17.61	18.61
5	18.83	17.22	18.50
6	18.66	17.16	18.38
7	18.66	17.08	18.11
8	18.33	16.94	17.50
9	17.66	16.66	17.33
10	17.50	16.66	17.33

Table 5: The ten lowest marks (last ten) of each term.

<b>N°</b>	<b>Term 1</b>	<b>Term 2</b>	<b>Term 3</b>
1	08.00	07.83	06.77
2	08.33	10.00	08.11
3	08.50	10.16	09.66
4	09.33	10.33	09.66
5	10.66	10.33	09.94
6	11.16	10.50	10.16
7	11.16	11.05	10.83
8	11.33	11.38	11.11
9	11.50	11.50	11.11
10	11.66	11.72	11.44

The total number of students in form one at this school is 49; the early EFL learners are up to 45, which makes 92% of the classroom while the real beginners are just 4 (8%). In the first term, 45 students have got the average marks ranging from 10.66 to 19.66. This also represents 92% of the total number. Among those who have got the average, the early EFL learners are 41 (84%) of the total number of students in the classroom, and 91% of those who have got the average. All the real beginners have the average mark, making 9% of the students having got the average. During this first term, the top ten students have experienced early EFL learning in primary school whereas among the last ten, 9 are early EFL learners and 1 is a real beginner. The highest mark as well as the lowest is obtained by early EFL learners.

Taking into account the second term of the year, the results show that 47 out of 48 have the average mark. This makes 98% of the whole number. Students who have experienced early EFL learning are 43, representing 90% of the entire class; 91% of the averages. On the other hand, the real beginners having got the average represent 8% of the whole class and 9% of the average number. This makes a number of 4 out of the 47. The top ten of the second term consist of 9 early EFL learners and 1 real beginner. All the last ten have experienced EFL learning at primary school. At this level, the highest mark as well as the lowest one is obtained by early EFL learners.

As far as the third term is concerned, the students are 48: 44 early EFL learners and 4 real beginners. 43 students have the average mark: 89.58% of the total of the classroom. Among them, 40 are early EFL learners and 3 are newcomers. The early EFL learners constitute 92% of the class' total number and 93% of those having got the average. The newcomers represent 8% of the whole class and 7% of the total

number for the average mark. 9 early EFL learners are among the top ten plus 1 of the newcomers. The highest mark is obtained by an early EFL learner whereas the last ten of the class include 8 early learners and 2 real beginners. The last mark is obtained by an early EFL learner.

The above mentioned marks constitute the concrete data which reveal the performance of early EFL learners in Robert Djidonou as well as the one of those coming from other primary schools where English has never been taught as a foreign language.

The next part concerns the data collected about the performances of beginner learners of the private school "La Rosette"; these data involve the learners with previous experience in EFL at primary school and the newcomers who have never been into contact with the language before. It mainly takes into account the last two terms of the year 2012-2013, which it has been possible to collect from the school principal. The tables provided on next pages show clearly those data.

Table 6: Shows the students' marks at the private school "La Rosette": second and third term of the year (2012-2013). The (real) new beginners' marks are in **red**.

N°	Second Term	Third Term
1	06.44	05.72
2	06.44	07.55
<b>3</b>	<b>09.55</b>	<b>07.72</b>
4	05.33	07.44
<b>5</b>	<b>06.27</b>	<b>07.05</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>10.88</b>	<b>08.27</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>12.00</b>	<b>09.33</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>12.16</b>	<b>09.66</b>
9	12.22	11.61
10	11.77	14.72
11	13.61	11.88
12	17.00	17.83
<b>13</b>	<b>13.44</b>	<b>10.99</b>
14	15.63	17.94
<b>15</b>	<b>15.00</b>	<b>15.66</b>
16	10.66	11.22
17	17.91	17.77
18	14.13	15.55
<b>19</b>	<b>09.72</b>	<b>08.50</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>12.83</b>	<b>11.99</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>09.22</b>	<b>09.61</b>
22	19.02	19.24
<b>23</b>	<b>17.88</b>	<b>12.83</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>15.72</b>	<b>13.88</b>
25	18.44	15.94
26	19.52	16.08
27	17.58	15.16
28	19.50	19.22
29	18.75	17.44
30	19.63	18.94

Table 7: The students who have got the average marks.

N°	Second Term	Third Term
<b>1</b>	<b>10.88</b>	11.61
<b>2</b>	<b>12.00</b>	14.72
<b>3</b>	<b>12.16</b>	11.88
4	12.22	17.83
5	11.77	<b>10.99</b>
6	13.61	17.94
7	17.00	<b>15.66</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>13.44</b>	11.22
9	15.63	17.77
<b>10</b>	<b>15.00</b>	15.55
11	10.66	<b>11.99</b>
12	17.91	19.24
13	14.13	<b>12.83</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>12.83</b>	<b>13.88</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>19.02</b>	15.94
<b>16</b>	<b>17.88</b>	16.08
<b>17</b>	<b>15.72</b>	15.16
18	18.44	19.22
19	19.52	17.44
20	17.58	18.94
21	19.50	
22	18.75	
23	19.63	

Table 8: The students who did not get the average:

N°	Term 2	Term 3
1	05.33	05.72
2	06.44	07.05
3	06.44	07.44
4	09.22	07.55
5	09.55	07.72
6	09.72	08.27
7		08.50
8		09.33
9		09.61
10		09.66

Table 9: Ten highest averages at "La Rosette"

N°	Term 1	Term 2
<b>1</b>	<b>19.63</b>	<b>19.24</b>
2	19.52	19.22
3	19.50	18.94
4	19.02	17.94
5	18.75	17.83
6	18.44	17.77
7	17.91	17.44
8	17.88	16.08
9	17.58	15.94
10	17.00	15.55

Table 10: Ten lowest averages at "La Rosette"

N°	Term 2	Term 3
<b>1</b>	<b>05.33</b>	<b>05.72</b>
2	06.27	07.05
3	06.44	07.44
4	06.44	07.55
5	09.22	07.72
6	09.55	08.27
7	09.72	08.50
8	10.66	09.33
9	10.88	09.61
10	11.77	09.66

The total number of students concerned in the second term is 30; early EFL learners are in number of 18 while real beginners are 12. The former makes 60% of the class and the latter 40%. The number of students having reached the average mark is 23, that is around 77% of the class. Among them, early EFL learners are 15 (50% of the class and 65% of those who have the average). Real beginners represent 23% of the class and 32% of the average mark owners meaning they are in number of 7.

Compared to their specific total number, early EFL learners constitute 83% while real beginners 58%. Top ten students consist of 9 early EFL learners and 1 real beginner. On the other hand, the last ten include 4 early EFL learners and 6 real beginners. The highest mark (19.63) is obtained by an early EFL learner and the lowest (05.33) also for an early EFL learner.

The performances in the third term involve the marks of 30 students as in the preceding term. 20 students have got the average mark (15 early EFL learners and 05 real beginners). So, the early EFL learners make 50% of the whole class (75% of those who have the average) and the real beginners represent 17% (25% of the average mark owners). Considering their particular total number, early EFL learners represent 83% and real beginners 42%. Top ten students are all early EFL learners while last ten include 7 real beginners against 3 early EFL learners. In this term, the highest mark is owned by an early EFL learner as for the lowest.

## **4.2. Analysis of Data**

### **4.2.1. Analysis of the interview**

With a focus on the information provided by the principals of the above mentioned schools, it appears obvious that the decision-makers in those schools are moved by real motivations in their decision to develop EFL skills in children at early age. Both school principals seem to express the same opinions about their decision to introduce the teaching of EFL to young learners as well as how they manage to make this successful. Another point is that they appear really convinced of the outcomes of this previous EFL teaching.

According to them, this is essential since it is what should be officially done even in public primary schools. Taking into account their opinions about these young learners' performances, learners who have been exposed to EFL at early age would be really motivated and have good results at a higher level. They seem to react quite actively during EFL classes at beginners' level in secondary school. For those in Djidonou, they can prove themselves particularly in skills such as speaking writing and listening.

As far as the follow-up is concerned, "Robert Djidonou" states that there exist measures about this aspect while in "La Rosette", such measures do not exist yet.

In their last words, they appear so determined with this decision of early EFL learning and reinforced by students attitudes in learning English language. There was even a call for the educational decision-makers at the national level to generalize TEFL in all primary schools (private and public).

#### **4.2.2. Analysis of the students' marks**

In the light of the data presented previously, it can be pointed out that the performances of the students who have experienced early EFL learning stand fairly above the ones of the newcomers. Taking into account the young learners at Robert Djidonou, one can realize that the real EFL beginners who are in number of 4 out of 49 represent just 8% of the whole class. However, their performances are quite obvious in the class. For the first two terms for example, all the newcomers have the average mark and are not among the last ten; only in the third term, one real beginner failed to reach the average. Focusing on the top ten, it is not also so obvious to notice the clear difference in the performances, for it can be noticed that despite their small number, a newcomer has succeeded in reaching the top ten twice in the year (second term and third term). On the other hand, 2 real beginners appear in the last ten of the third term while in the first and second term all the last tens are early learners. Another point concerns the highest and the lowest marks. In this case, the real beginners appear nowhere: just as the highest mark is granted to an early EFL student, in the same way another early learner's performance has deserved the lowest mark of the class.

Considering the data from the second school namely "la Rosette", too much extent seems to sustain what was stated by the principal of this school in that many of the students who have gone through the early EFL learning actually benefit from this background to enhance performance at beginners' level.

Evidently, the early EFL students have performed better than those newly introduced to the language in form 1. In the first term for example, even though the real beginners are smaller in number (12) compared to the others (18); the data show

that 5 among them did not reach the average level of performance whereas on the other hand, the early learners below the average are just 3. The number of the early learners above the average level is more than the double of the real beginners having reached that average. Yet, two among these early EFL learners, stand at each extreme on the scale; one having got the highest mark and the other the lowest.

For the third term, the situation does not quite change with the early learners. Their performance is still good; but as for the real beginners, things have been worse than the preceding term. Only 05 of them have got the average. This is less than half their number. The remaining 07 who have not got the average are also among the last ones. Moreover, it is noticed that the lowest mark is still the result of an early EFL learner's performance. The top ten averages are also early EFL learners'.

Obviously enough, the performances of early EFL learners at "La Rosette" stand quite above the newcomers. Another thing is also that it is not the real beginners' performances that have been the worst of the class but the ones who have previously gone through the same early EFL learning process.

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

### **5.1. Discussion**

Teaching English as a foreign language to learners at an early age, that is, in primary or nursery schools in Benin still constitutes an important issue. To some extent, it may actually be thought that this is not yet feasible in so far as there exist many problems in the field at the secondary level which still wait to be resolved. It can, therefore, be argued that the introduction of the English Language will be an exacerbation of the problems in TEFL.

The actual point is that the introduction of English as a foreign language has been an official fact for several years now. While in public primary school the implementation of this decision is far from being a reality, in many private schools students have been undergoing the early EFL learning curriculum. No wonder, then that this study couldn't be conducted in any public schools.

Focusing on the level of performance of the students in public schools and those in private schools the evidence is quite clear that there is no comparison. The students in public schools obviously prove a lower performance as compared to their mates in private schools. In fact the public school students are still struggling to master the basic linguistic abilities in French which is their first foreign and official language. The introduction of English in public primary school can't presumably be an adequate decision if teachers already have considerable difficulties trying to make these learners acquire French.

As for the private schools, many private schools have developed appropriate strategies in order to help children acquire basic skills in English probably because the

scope of the implementation of this decision is not the same as for all the primary schools at the national level, but actually, many other reasons sustain the possibility of TEFL to children at early age in private schools.

First, most of the students in these private schools, as is the case in "la Rosette" and "Robert Djidonou", probably come from families with social economic background which allow them to acquire beforehand a considerable level of knowledge in the official language. These children live in a social cultural environment which favors a lot their easy contact with French. Most of them already master the spoken French from home and to some extent have the background to get along with English as a foreign language.

In the course of this study, the performances of two categories of students have been considered. Though they all belong to the same class and follow the same curriculum, many of the early EFL learners have a better performance than the real beginners. This situation relates to the inequality of opportunity towards these newcomers in the schools. As a matter of fact, this inequality evolves in a large scale as far as those in public primary schools are concerned since as mentioned above most of the children from the primary schools who do not have the equal opportunity will continue at secondary level with zero knowledge in the field. If the government has decided to make EFL learning possible in primary schools at the national level, this would be a sort of injustice to leave things continue just as they are now, where only children from families with considerable financial means can actually have the advantage to benefit from this early exposure to English language. It is then the responsibility of the educational authorities who have instituted this situation to

provide equal opportunities to all children by making this a reality in all primary school nationwide.

Considering the learners' performances in those private schools, it can be simply put that though the early EFL experience can serve as a background knowledge which can enable many students to enhance their performance at the secondary school somehow better than the ordinary beginners who have just started learning EFL, this does not put all of them above these ordinary beginners. It is quite easy to notice that some early EFL learners are even worse than those freshly introduced to the English language. Indeed, this could be an indication that even though students are introduced to the language earlier, their performances can still be poorer as compared to real beginners' ones. From this sense, it would be quite sensible to state that it is not only enough to introduce children to English learning at a very early age, but more importantly to establish efficient strategies that can help teachers to keep the children still motivated to learn the language in order to constantly improve their level. On the other hand, the fact that some real beginners do better than early learners and that some early learners are even worse than real beginners could show that the performances in the acquisition of EFL are not as such dependent upon the amount of time spent trying to learn the language but also to a great extent upon the intensity of the learners' involvement and the effectiveness of the teaching/learning processes.

## **5.2. Recommendations and Suggestions**

As mentioned in the significance of this study, educational authorities, teachers as well as students' parents are concerned by the outcomes of the investigation on the

field. The present part of this work is focused proposals forwarded to help improve the success of children in early EFL learning.

### **5.2.1. Recommendations to authorities**

It is a global fact that learning and knowing a foreign language fulfill a person's occupational needs, bring new insights into his/her world view, and make the person open-minded and tolerant. Considering the ever growing benefits of learning English as a foreign language nowadays, the implementation of this important decision of integrating EFL language classes into early phases of primary education must begin to take place in all schools in the country.

It is not just enough to decide to extend EFL into primary educational curriculum. The most essential decision is to make this become a reality in the field. To reduce the gap which already exists between the students in private schools and those in public schools, educational authorities especially TEFL decision makers should insist on the effectiveness of EFL teaching in primary school, starting from 'CE1' or at least in higher classes of 'CM1 and 'CM2'. Therefore, means should be mobilized to give a good training to the primary school teachers involved in this teaching. Curriculum designers should as well conceive effective teachers' and students' books that are adequate for effective EFL teaching at this level. With the help and the collaboration of international institutions in the field of children education such as UNICEF, USAID, PLAN Benin, this could become a reality, so that young children from poor family would be able to benefit from EFL learning in primary as well. Moreover, community and individual needs which derive from the current economic, social, and political situation of the nation should be considered in order to

ensure the success of this early EFL learning for their future integration in their society and for their language awareness in the world. As a consequence of the reform, TEFL should be made compulsory in all primary schools.

### **5.2.2. Suggestions to teachers**

The present suggestions are mainly addressed to the teachers of EFL in those private primary schools in so far as their colleagues in public schools are out of this framework at least in the current situation.

It would be a waste, if we do not realize the child's natural ability to learn during his/her most vital years, when learning a foreign language is as easy as learning mother tongue. It is confirmed by the various theorists and researchers that almost 50 percent of the ability to learn is developed in the first years of life and another 30 percent by age eight. Therefore, it is suggested that early childhood development programs should have the opportunity to encourage early learning and development.

Considering the research on child's language development and foreign language education, Muro and Kottman (1995) point out that, primary school children have the high ability to learn a foreign language; an incredible ability which is most dependent on the environment created for the effective acquisition of any language.

#### **5.2.2.1. Providing a rich literacy environment**

One of the most important ways in which nursery and or primary teachers of EFL can promote children's literacy learning is by creating, with the children a learning environment in which new words are discovered and purposefully used. This involves designing very simple but interesting tasks (broken down to small steps)

which help children to familiarize with rich and contextualized vocabulary based on real world objects. From this, the teachers' use of visuals and realia during lessons is very important. As explained by Shin, J. K. (2009), we help children learn language when what we ask them is meaningful, full of practice, enjoyable, and socially supported (based on the realities of their society).

The extent to which teachers engage children in common topics developing their listening, talking, reading and writing shows the effectiveness of their classes. These topics can be: animals, friends, family, environment, foods, citizenship, etc. or units revolving around a storybooks, celebrities, or movies students like.

Teachers read and use a variety of texts for real purposes with the children and encourage them to use texts in their play. For instance, they might investigate a website with children; follow a recipe to cook, read a picture book for enjoyment or an information text to find out about a topic of interest, or read the instructions on a seed packet to make sure they are planting seeds correctly.

A kindergarten or primary EFL classrooms should be full of print, images and other symbols used for a wide range of purposes that are both adult- and child-initiated, e.g.:

- favorite and new books invitingly displayed
- songs and rhymes written on posters and accessible to children
- children's art work aesthetically displayed with explanatory labels
- plans for the day written with the children and displayed on a wall or easel
- children's collections of objects labelled, e.g. a collection of shells
- shelved equipment and materials labelled

- a clock referred to as part of the daily routines
- personal name-cards easily accessible to the children
- notices and messages written collaboratively with children for families and visitors, incorporating the children's ideas
- signs, labels, menus, tickets, price tags, shopping lists written with the children during their dramatic play
- purposeful signs created with the children during their play, including using construction materials to make signs for outdoor play

Writing materials and cardboard, paper, and so on accessible to children in easily portable boxes to use during play. Queensland kindergarten learning guideline (2011).

*"Supporting language and early literacy practices in kindergarten"*, (p. 12)

As everyday events in nurseries or primary schools, the above diverse tips in early EFL teaching would represent a powerful way of helping children understand the range of purposes for which they are getting into contact with the new language as connected to their society. Teachers could explain:

- How particular words' meaning is shared through realia, pictures, sounds (narration, music) or captions (words that are printed/written underneath pictures or cartoons and that explain or describe them.)
- Use letter names, and explain that particular letters make particular sounds, e.g. to find a repeated word on different pages of a book.
- Written words can be "read out loud" (turned into speech)
- Developing social relationships that draw on children's strengths, interests and prior knowledge

- Focusing on socially appropriate communication in context (pragmatic language use)
- Promoting vocabulary development
- Developing phonological awareness
- Developing alphabetic and letter-sound knowledge (phonics)
- Providing rich literacy environments in which literacy is purposefully used and discussed. *Supporting language and early literacy practices in kindergarten* (2011, pp. 6, 13).

Ideas represented through prints, when developed with children would be essential for supporting young children's language and early literacy development. A balanced language and literacy program could also combine planned learning experiences created in response to observations of children's interests, skills, strengths and needs and spontaneous experiences that arise from children's emerging interests. The combination of planned and spontaneous experiences with children focuses on purposeful language and literacy use supported by caring teachers with whom they have a mutually trusting and respectful relationship.

Kindergarten and primary schools should provide time for children to explore and experiment with language. When the program is balanced and language-rich, children's interests and engagement in learning would be stimulated and they would be more likely to develop positive dispositions to learning.

Considering now the private schools implementing the early EFL teaching at the primary level, the level of first form at secondary schools where students start a new curriculum in the field of EFL to some extent creates a difference between early

English learners and real beginners through their different reactions and performances during test as has been shown through the data. EFL teachers in such a situation should keep in mind this gap between the two categories of students and take necessary measures that could help remediate the newcomers' level and so that they are not left behind among the last ones. Presumably, teachers appear to be interested mostly in students who react well; a situation which would turn out to frustrate new learners and worsen their situation. A particular attention should be given to this category of beginners in order to suppress their shyness and endeavor to arouse their motivation to acquire the new language.

### **5.2.3. Suggestions to parents**

Parents represent very determining actors in the language development of their children. At this period where children can acquire many languages with a relative facility, parents should indeed encourage the early learning of the English language.

The overarching importance of the English language nowadays should be a real incentive for students' parents to be actively involved in the promotion of the teaching of EFL at early age.

Through their different associations in schools, parents could prove to be a force of pressure that would urge the educational authorities at different stages for the concrete implementation of the early EFL learning. Therefore, parents should know their importance in making their children become conscious of the advantages related to English at an early stage.

## CONCLUSION

The socio-economic and educational climate of this 21st century society greatly encourages the rapid growing of English language learning by children at an early age today. Parents' desire to see their children have early abilities in that important language is quite justified: They want to enhance the opportunities for their children to be very competent and competitive in many fields in the future for diverse needs.

In their view to expose their children to English at an early age, the registration of children in private nurseries and primary schools where teaching is taught has become a great trend for parents who have the financial means to afford the schools.

This study has, in the course of the investigation, proceeded to reveal the real motivations that lead the important authorities in two private schools to initiate the integration of the early EFL teaching. Public schools on the other hand are still far from even thinking about taking such an initiative. As noticed through the data collected, the teaching of English to children in primary school has been an official decision for several years now. And considering the effectiveness of this decision on the field, it appears obvious that children are motivated to learn English as their new foreign language.

Taking into account the performances of the students in EFL, the evidence shows that some of the early EFL learners are above the level of the real beginners, but still the difference is not that considerable since many of these early learners are the last ones in the class. In this sense, teachers' attention should be more focused on the attitudes of the real beginners in those schools to ensure the balance between the two

categories of students. On the other hand, it is also necessary to follow the evolution of those who have started learning the language since the primary school and nonetheless do not perform well. A support for the students in such cases would as well help find remedies to their lack of performance.

The last point in the course of this study concerns the gap which actually exists between those children benefitting from the early exposure to English language and the ones who follow the ordinary curriculum in public schools. As a matter of fact, this situation implies that children from rich families would always be the privileged ones who naturally have access to the best quality of teaching in the society. Though the Government itself has officially decided that English language should be taught at primary schools, the evidence is that only some well-known private schools are implementing this decision. This is, therefore, a call for the educational authorities to be concerned about this sort of social injustice and take necessary measures to make the teaching the English as a foreign in all primary schools a reality.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Questions d'interview

- 1- Pouvez-vous me dire les réelles motivations qui vous ont poussé à introduire la langue anglaise dans le programme d'étude à la maternelle et au primaire ?
- 2- Au plan national, l'apprentissage de l'anglais n'est réellement effectif qu'à partir de la classe de 6<sup>e</sup>, pensez-vous qu'il était nécessaire d'intégrer cette deuxième langue étrangère alors que les enfants sont déjà confrontés à l'apprentissage du français en plus de leur langue maternelle ?
- 3- Les enfants ne vous paraissent-ils pas surchargés ?
- 4- Parvenez-vous à suivre leur évolution au secondaire ? Si oui, de quelle façon ?
- 5- Est-il évident que leur performance dans cette langue soit au-dessus de celle de leurs camarades qui n'ont pas suivi le même cursus particulièrement dans les classes de 6<sup>e</sup> ?
- 6- Quel est l'impact réel de cet apprentissage préalable sur l'évolution de vos enfants au secondaire ?
- 7- Dans quelles activités réagissent-ils mieux ?
- 8- Comment est-ce que vous vous en rendez compte ?
- 9- Quelles conclusions en tirez-vous ?

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview guide questions (translation)**

- 1- Could you tell me your real motivations for the introduction of English as a foreign Language curriculum in nursery and primary schools?
- 2- Nationwide, Teaching English as a Foreign Language actually becomes effective only starting from form 1 in secondary schools; do you really think it was necessary to introduce this second foreign language while the children have already been dealing with French additionally to their first language?
- 3- Don't you think the pupils are overwhelmed?
- 4- Do you succeed in carrying out a follow-up in secondary school? If yes, how?
- 5- Is it evident that their performance in the subject is higher than the one of their mates who did not learn EFL in primary?
- 6- What's the real impact of this previous EFL learning on the evolution of your pupils in secondary?
- 7- In which activities do they perform better?
- 8- How do you notice their good performance in the subject?
- 9- What conclusions do you draw?