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*ENGLISH TEACHING IN A  
BENINESE SECONDARY SCHOOL:  
WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR STUDENTS'  
LACK OF FLUENCY IN SPEAKING?*

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to:

- ❖ the Almighty God for His Blessings;
- ❖ my parents for taking care of me and for having sent me to school.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

**BAC:** Baccalauréat

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

**BEPC:** Brevet d'Etudes du Premier Cycle

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

**CBA:** Competency Based Approach

**DUEL:** Diplôme Universitaire d'Etudes Littéraires.

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**IELTS:** International English Language Teaching System

## INTRODUCTION

The significant importance and the globalization of English have caused broad demand for good English-speaking skills in various realms. The evidence manifested that some features of speaking abilities are amenable to instruction in the second or foreign language classroom. In spite of the verified evidence in speaking, there are still debates over English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' speaking ability and approaches.

However, the English language has gained a great importance in many fields in the world nowadays. It has become very important for traders, craftsmen, lawyers, students, tourists, members of the Parliament, businessmen, etc. To put it bluntly, we can say that English is important for everybody no matter where he/she is living. In addition, people who do not master English look like illiterate in the field of the New Technologies of Information and Communication. This ranks amongst the reason why the government of Benin Republic has chosen it as a compulsory subject in Secondary schools. Apart from French as an official language in our country, it seems good to learn and master English since the latter is spoken worldwide. As a matter of fact, students start learning English as soon as they enter college and keep learning it till they graduate from university. They are then taught English through a variety of ways that help them write good texts and converse in that language without much difficulty even when they're communicating with native speakers.

It seems that even if most students in Beninese Secondary schools manage to write very good texts in English, they hardly succeed in speaking it as fluently as possible so that their interlocutor can understand them. In other words, students in Beninese Secondary schools face many difficulties to speak English fluently not only in class but in real life situations as well. Although this is one of the objectives of the Educational System in Benin, we feel sorry to assume that it has

not been reached yet. What, then, can teachers of English do to help Beninese Secondary schools students speak English fluently?

Yet, the main objective of this work is to find out what prevent our students from speaking fluent English as they do for their official language, French. By doing so, we're promoting English as a spoken language. Then, they will be able to communicate and engage in discussions with native speakers of English in and outside our country. The truth is that we will not send for any interpreter or translator anymore during negotiations. Apart from that, no Beninese students will need to study English firstly when they get scholarships to study abroad. In my research work, I also aim at encouraging EFL teachers to use the different techniques I'm going to deal with sooner in my research work to improve speaking abilities in our students from their first contact with English once at secondary school. Instead of learning grammatical rules, new words and writing good texts in English every time, it is also useful to speak English fluently and with an authentic accent, of course. But what really keeps students in Beninese Secondary schools from speaking English fluently? Of course, this thesis specifically emphasizes on the causes of the difficulties encountered by EFL learners when they are communicating.

Then, this thesis is organised into five chapters. The first chapter deals with the introduction to the study followed by the literature review. As for the third chapter, it is concerned with the methodology I used to collect data relevant to my study. The last but not the least one deals with the presentation and the analysis of the data collected. In the last part of my work, I presented a summary of the thesis and the implications of both EFL students and their EFL teachers as far as developing fluency in speaking is concerned.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Background of the study**

The past four decades have witnessed the rapid development of speaking skill in second language learning. Speaking is a complex skill, which should be taught everywhere, and it is a skill that learners learn better in group. English is concerned with four skills which are as follows: listening, speaking, reading, and writing; therefore, speaking is the second skill and has an important role in communication. But unfortunately, we can notice that most EFL learners come across much difficulty when they start using the language in their oral communication. Some researchers have always wondered why EFL learners fail to communicate as fluently as possible as native speakers of the English language do. This generated some interrogations over the speaking abilities of EFL learners across the time. Thus, many books were written by authors dealing with the theme of fluency in speaking in non-speaking English countries. In other words, I have to mention that I am not the pioneer in carrying out a research work in this domain. Through my research work, I will speak of some authors and their philosophy over the question of fluency in speaking in EFL setting.

### **1.2 Rationale for the study**

Nobody in the world today can deny the importance of the English language since it has been officially considered as an international language. People use it for a variety of purposes in their daily life. But how can one know a language without being able to communicate his/her ideas easily in that language? This is one of the main aspects that we could notice with most secondary school students in Benin who cannot hold a conversation in English after studying the language for four years although they have a knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. We feel flabbergasted when we come across some EFL students that are not able to speak English even for a minute after they have been taught English for four years

(from 6è to 3è). The major reason of this choice is that after four years of learning English, before passing the BEPC exam, any EFL student should be able to speak the language fluently. But unfortunately, this is not the case in Benin. We can see a few students who try to say something in English whereas a great number of them do not even try to speak the language even if the teacher tries to make them say a few words in that language. Through my research work, I have presented the hindrances to the development of the speaking skill of such students and provide a few suggestions and implications of both EFL teachers and students.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

People use language in everyday life for a variety of reasons. They communicate with people who master the same language as they do by using their voice or by writing somewhere something for them to read. However, developing productive skills (writing and speaking) seems to be more difficult than developing receptive skills (reading and listening) because the learner of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) needs to transform the language competence into an actual performance when dealing with the productive skills. Speaking seems to be more difficult than writing because EFL speakers need to communicate and use language faster than writers do; the time factor is vital when performing speaking. Speakers are not allotted to produce their utterance whereas in case of writing, writers have enough time to build their sentences, can consult the dictionary if necessary and revise the written text more than once.

Because of the difficult nature of the speaking skill, it is a neglected skill in the classroom and EFL learners are given insufficient and inadequate exposure to it. As a result, students fail in communicating effectively in the language.

Students who have been studying English for four years can be expected to speak it fluently. Unfortunately, it is noticed that they can hardly speak English fluently. Is there any reason to explain this? In other words, why are EFL students,

especially those of Benin Secondary schools, unable to communicate fluently in English after so many years?

#### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

Speaking seems to be the most important skills of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) because people who know a language are usually referred to as speakers of that language. The major goal of all English language teaching should be to give learners the ability to use English effectively in communication. However, not all language learners after many years studying English can communicate fluently and accurately because they lack necessary knowledge. My concern in choosing to carry out this research work is to find out what is responsible for the EFL students' lack of fluency in speaking English so as to suggest some strategies to cope with the issue.

#### **1.5 Research question**

To examine the causes of the difficulties EFL students experience in speaking English, I asked the following research question:

- ✓ What are the causes of EFL students' lack of fluency in speaking English?

#### **1.6 Significance of the study**

This study aims at not only identifying the causes of the difficulties of EFL learners when performing speaking skill, but also providing a few strategies that can overcome these speaking problems. This study gains its significance from the way it follows to identify and discover the causes of the difficulties Beninese EFL learners face in their real life communication. More significant is gained because the suggested strategies are in line with the causes of the difficulties of the EFL learners when performing speaking skills.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is organised into three sections: the first section provides a clarification of the concept ‘‘fluency’’; the second section presents information about EFL learners’ difficulties in speaking and the third section gives details about the strategies proposed by previous researchers to cope with those difficulties.

### 2.1 Concept clarification

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 8<sup>th</sup> edition*, fluency means ‘‘the quality of being able to speak or write a language, especially a foreign language, easily and well’’. In other words, fluency means the ability to produce large amounts of language fairly quickly. Language fluency is the degree to which one is fluent in a language. Someone is said to be fluent if they have a high level of language proficiency, most typically in a foreign language or another learned language. Grading speaking has four criteria including fluency, coherence, pronunciation, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy; the first criteria in the International English Language Teaching System (IELTS) speaking test is fluency defined as the combination of *a) speed of speech b) length of answer and c) pausing correctly* (Cloe, 2011: pp.86). But sometimes, people may get confused about fluency and accuracy even though they both don’t mean the same thing. Furthermore, many traditional approaches assume that accuracy should be prioritised and when learners have learned how to be accurate, so they can become more fluent.

In fact, what really prevent our students in secondary schools from speaking English fluently? The following part of my work will attempt to expatiate upon a few difficulties and problems that EFL learners often come across in speaking fluent English.

## 2.2 EFL speaking difficulties and problems

For Ur (1996), there are many factors affecting students' speaking ability such as self-confidence, anxiety, nervousness, stress, mother-tongue influence.

- *Self-confidence*

EFL learners' willingness to communicate is determined partly by their self-confidence. We usually run into students in our classes who are not self-confident; they are shy and don't want to say something in the language lest they might be criticized by their fellow classmates. This can lead to low or uneven participation in the learning activities unless most of the students take the floor and speak for a minute.

- *Anxiety, stress and nervousness*

Anxiety is defined as the state of being nervous or worried that something bad is going to happen. Anxiety negatively affects students' speaking fluency. A student's feeling of anxiety, stress and nervousness may hinder his/her speaking performance. Tanveer (2007) states that "*the higher the anxiety, the lower the performance*" (pp. 16). Thus, students who are anxious or nervous hardly develop their speaking skills in foreign language learning.

- *Mother-tongue influence*

Another cause of students' lack of fluency in speaking is the influence of their mother-tongue. Harmer (1991) suggests some reasons why students use their mother-tongue in class. Firstly, when the students are asked to have a discussion about a topic that they are incapable of, if they want to say anything about the topic, they will use their own language. Another reason is that the use of mother-tongue is a natural thing to do. In addition, using the first language to explain something to another if there is no encouragement from the teachers. Finally, if teachers frequently use the students' language, the students will feel comfortable to do it. As a result, students always attempt to use their mother-tongue when they are given group-work activities. They think their mother-tongue to a large extent

will help them share their ideas easily amongst themselves. In such a case, the English language, which should be used, is put aside to the detriment of French. But how can students develop their speaking abilities if they do not try to speak English during group-work activities? It is high time they did it.

In addition to the previously mentioned problems, we find it necessary to mention that the environment where the student is living can also determine his/her speaking performance. The other cause that makes the students difficult in speaking English is that the environment does not support the students to speak English frequently. The environment here means the people outside the class. Those people may think that the students just want to show off when they speak English for daily conversation. The response that the students get makes them lose their self-confidence to improve their speaking. Since the students do not want to be rejected by the people around them, so they use their native language in daily conversation. That makes the students unable to communicate in English fluently outside the class.

Moreover, most Beninese secondary schools students believe that mastering grammar points in English is sufficient enough. As a matter of fact, students will not be evaluated in speaking but in writing. They assume that they must master any grammar points before they sit for the exam because their performance in English will be checked from the answers they will provide to grammar items and to writing. So, how can EFL students take care of speaking English if they know they will not be evaluated upon speaking during their exam? Yet, most of them know grammar but cannot use it in real life situations.

Furthermore, lack of vocabulary, mispronunciation among many others rank amongst the causes of students' speaking English fluently in our country. As they have poor knowledge of vocabulary and, at the same time, mispronounce words, they don't want to speak English at all.

### **2.3. Promoting fluency in EFL classrooms**

There are a great many strategies to use in promoting fluency in speaking English in EFL classrooms. Ddeubel (2009) summarizes some speaking strategies that foster oral interpersonal communication in the EFL classroom. These strategies are as follows:

- ***Dealing with psychological factors***

Anxiety, stress, nervousness, shyness and inhibition are examples of psychological factors that impede learners' speaking performance. The fear many learners have must be decreased by making learners feel relaxed and learning environment safe.

- ***Focussing on performance***

The teacher should focus on the objective of learning and help students practise that.

- ***Taking turns***

Instructor should explicitly teach learners how to take turns in a talk.

- ***Providing topics that learners are interested in***

The teacher should always provide interesting and motivating activities. These speaking activities should go along with students' needs and not what the teacher deems good to teach them. With this regard, teachers should make a careful choice of topic and task that can stimulate learners' interests.

- ***Getting students on their feet***

Teachers should encourage students to stand up and walk around in the class while they are given the floor to speak. This helps them to feel more free and comfortable.

- ***Base the activities on easy language***

When the language used is at the level of the students, it can help them to speak fluently.

## 2.4 Communicative language strategies

James Dean Brown (2003) in his article entitled *Promoting Fluency in EFL classrooms* defined communicative language strategies as abilities that students need to maximize communications less than 100% accurate in their use of language. If, in fact, fluency is a matter of degrees, students at any level of proficiency can probably achieve some degree of fluency. Communicative language strategies can help them communicate fluently with whatever proficiency they happen to have at any given time. James Dean Brown (2003) concludes that there are at least six such strategies, including the abilities: (a) to use speed to their advantage, (b) to use pauses and hesitations efficiently, (c) to give appropriate feedback, (d) to repair competently, and (e) to clarify effectively.

- ***To use speed to their advantage***

Most people will often think of fluency as being about speed. But fast speed is not necessarily fluent speech. In fact, native speakers will vary their speed depending on the context in which they are speaking. Non-native speakers of English also think that they should speak fast to be more fluent, which is unfortunately not true. Fast speech is not automatically fluent speech. That is a message that students in our secondary schools need to understand. Hence, the appropriate speed is the speed at which they can think clearly and still succeed in getting their message across.

- ***Ability to use pauses and hesitations***

Native speakers of English often use pauses and hesitations while they are talking and EFL learners need to understand this aspect of communication too. They also need to understand that pauses and hesitations are necessary and natural parts of spoken language. The reason for all this pausing and hesitating is that humans need to think when they are talking, and they use pausing and hesitating to give themselves that time. But we have to mention that pauses and hesitations are not just dead time. These are sounds like *uhm*, *er*, *uh*, *ah*, and *umm* while

others may be words such as *okay, well, so*, etc. The purpose of such fillers is to fill silence, which in turn makes communication seem more natural and fluent.

- ***Ability to give appropriate feedback***

Feedback consists of all the signals that a listener directs at a speaker to indicate that the message is (or is not) getting through. Feedback can express agreement or disagreement, understanding or misunderstanding, comprehension or confusion. In addition, the signals used to express these meanings can include not only sounds and words, but also gestures and facial expressions. Sounds could include grunts of agreement, sounds like *mm, uh huh, hmm*, etc. Words might include feedback signals like *really, yep, right, yeah, okay*, etc. Gestures might include a hand signal to continue or stop, or talk faster, or head signals like *nodding agreement, showing wonderment*, etc. Facial expressions could involve *smiles, winks, frowns, direct eye contact, evasive eye contact*, etc. Teachers should not simply side step this set of strategies by saying that students will ‘pick them up’ easily along the way. Such feedback signals should be taught because they are clear and obvious indicators of fluency that can make a person seem very foreign or very fluent depending on how well they are used.

- ***Ability to repair competently***

EFL learners as well as native speakers of English are sometimes guilty of mispronunciation, false starts, back tracking, stuttering, etc. However, it is useful to know how to handle these mistakes better, that is, how to competently repair them. When speakers detect flubs of various kinds and correct themselves, it is called self-repair. When one speaker corrects another, it is called other-repair. In order to avail themselves of this strategy, students need to be taught how to correct their own errors, how to understand and accept corrections from others, and eventually, how to correct errors that others make without creating offense.

- *Ability to clarify effectively*

Clarification is one type of repair that is particularly important. When a fluent speaker spots that a listener is not understanding (through verbal signs, gestures, facial expressions, etc.), the speaker will typically try to clarify by rephrasing, defining terms, summarizing, using gestures, drawing a picture, etc. The point is that fluent speakers, when misunderstood, will use whatever strategies they can to clarify their message.

In a nutshell, I find it necessary to mention that the importance of effective oral communication cannot be overstated. It behoves EFL learners to try their best to speak the English language even though they are not in an English speaking country here. Practice, they say, makes perfect. They also need to practise the language every day. In addition, the EFL teachers must plan speaking activities in their lessons, design them carefully and take into account the previously mentioned strategies they can use to promote fluency in their classrooms. There is no doubt that EFL learners will not attain fluency in their oral communication unless they keep sticking only to grammar or that they keep being taught only grammar lessons in their class. At last, EFL students have to speak English as effectively as they can so that they could be easily understood not only by their classmates but by native speakers as well. EFL teachers also need to know what role they should play in helping their EFL students to achieve natives like fluency. Wherefore, EFL learners can express their thoughts/intentions/ideas effectively in speaking English.

In the next chapter, I will present the methodology and the instruments used to collect data relevant to my research work.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The current chapter is about the methodology I have used to collect data for my study. The instruments I used for my research work are questionnaires and classroom observation.

### **3.2 Design of the study**

In this research work, I have used a mixed method: the qualitative method and the quantitative method. I used the qualitative method to work on observation data in order to investigate the causes of EFL students' difficulties to speak English fluently. As far as the quantitative method is concerned, it was used to deal with statistics and numbers as it seeks to 'explain phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (particularly statistics)', (Aliaga and Gunderson, 2000). In this research, I am exploring the difficulties that EFL learners in our secondary schools come across when it comes to speak English. The participants of my study are the students of Lycée Toffa 1er of Porto-Novo. Let's mention that a great number of the students of this school can hardly express themselves in the English language.

### **3.3 The participants**

The research work focusses on EFL learners in a secondary school. EFL teachers are also included in the present research work as they are the one who teach those students the English language in Benin. One hundred (100) EFL learners were given the questionnaires against twenty EFL teachers. Both teachers and learners were submitted questionnaires where they had to fill in some gaps and tick answers relevant to their experience.

### **3.4 Data collection instruments**

In order to have reliable arguments to support the validity of my work, I have used two different instruments: class observations and questionnaire.

#### **3.4.1 CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS**

The purpose of classroom observation within the framework of my study is to identify the reasons why EFL learners are not fluent in speaking the English language. Furthermore, it enables me to gather information relevant to the causes of learners' difficulties in speaking so as to suggest some strategies that can cope with these problems.

#### **3.4.2 QUESTIONNAIRE**

According to *Longman Advanced American Dictionary (electronic version)*, a questionnaire is ‘a written set of questions about a particular subject given to a large number of people, in order to collect information’. In other words, it is a set of written questions that are given to the respondents. The questionnaire can be very useful in carrying out research. Questionnaire is the most commonly used method of gathering information because we easily reach more people through it. In my research work, the questionnaire is designed in such a way that the data obtained are both qualitative and quantitative. Before writing the questions, it is obvious to base them on the purpose of one's research. We have different forms of questions: closed questions and open questions. A closed question or close-ended question is a question for which the researcher provides a suitable list of responses. This produces mainly quantitative data. As far as open questions or open-ended questions are concerned, they are questions where the researcher doesn't provide the respondent with a set of answers from which to choose. The respondents are asked to answer in their own words. As a result, this produces mainly qualitative data. For my research work, I have prepared a set of closed questions; which means that questions to which there are a limited range

of responses. These kinds of questions are useful for questionnaire because they are quick to complete, and they provide answers that are easy to analyse.

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

The two techniques used to collect the data were questionnaires and class observation. As far as the classroom observation is concerned, it enables me to collect reliable and trustful event which occurs in the classroom. I carried out it in EFL classes at Lycée Toffa 1er of Porto-Novo during my qualification internship in the school. My objective in observing classroom situations was to find out what accounts for learners' difficulties in speaking English. I used to sit at the bottom of the class when I was in second year. As for this year, I sat at the bottom of the class for two weeks. After that period, I started leading the class as a teacher till my inspection. As a result, I discovered through this qualification internship many things that account for students' lack of fluency in speaking.

With regard to the questionnaires, one was addressed to EFL students and the other to their teachers. They were used as an efficient way to obtain data from one hundred EFL learners and twenty EFL teachers. A sample of the questionnaire can be found in the appendices. One hundred (100) copies of the questionnaires were addressed to the EFL learners while twenty (20) were addressed to their teachers. Five (05) students lost their questionnaire because they didn't give too much importance to it. As for teachers', nobody lost it. Three days after I had submitted the questionnaire to the EFL students, we met in a classroom where I helped them fill in the gaps by explaining each part of the questions to them. Some were reluctant to do it alone but they finally succeeded in doing it. Although the questions were written in English, I tried to explain them in French so that they (the EFL students) could easily get my words. As a result, they were free to answer the questions. After they had finished, I collected the sheets on the spot; so ninety five (95) sheets were collected back. However, the questions addressed to the EFL teachers were twenty (20) and I succeeded in collecting them back two days after.

Thus, results of my questionnaire and the class observation will be shown in chapter four of this research work.

### **3.6. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE**

As stated earlier, questionnaire and classroom observation were the two instruments used to secure relevant data for the study. The data gathered through these tools in the stated order were analysed as follows:

- The responses obtained from the students' questionnaire were tallied and the frequencies were converted to percentage.
- Classroom observation data obtained were summarised and presented.
- The data obtained through the two instruments are presented and interpreted.

## **Chapter Four: Presentation and analysis of data**

This chapter is organised into two sections. The first section deals with the causes that emerge from the analysis of the questionnaire data and the second section presents the causes that emerge from the observation data.

### **4.1 Causes emerging from the analysis of the questionnaires**

In this part of my work, I've tried to present the causes that stem from the analysis of the questionnaires addressed to the EFL teachers and the questionnaires addressed to the EFL learners. The strategy I have used helps me present at first the data collected through the questionnaires addressed both to the EFL teachers and to the EFL learners, followed by their analysis and then the different causes stemming from these questionnaires.

#### **4.1.1 Analysis of the teachers' responses**

This part of the work is about the presentation and analysis of the teachers' responses in order to find out the causes that impede the effective speaking ability of EFL learners.

**Table n°1: Teachers' qualification and their pedagogical training**

| <b>Qualification</b> | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| BAC                  | 00/20         | 0%                |
| DUEL                 | 04/20         | 20%               |
| LICENCE              | 08/20         | 40%               |
| BAPES                | 02/20         | 10%               |
| MAITRISE             | 02/20         | 10%               |
| CAPES                | 04/20         | 20%               |

**Source:** Teachers' responses, May 2017.

This table shows that no teacher in this school has been teaching English with the BAC degree. Two of them (20%) have got a DUEL whereas four (40%) have a

Bachelor degree. At the same time, only one (10%) of these teachers has a Master's degree. Thus, seventy percent (70%) of the EFL teachers in that school have been teaching English to their EFL students. They have not been trained in any professional schools or teachers training college. In contrast, a tiny number of these teachers were trained before starting teaching. As a matter of fact, only one those teachers (10%) has got a BAPES degree and two others (20%) have got a CAPES degree. As a result, the EFL students' level in English especially in speaking is very low due to the tiny number of trained teachers in that school.

The table below shows the presentation of the data collected from the EFL teachers' answers to the questionnaires.

**Table n°2:** Teachers' responses

| <b>Questions</b>  | <b>Number of teachers</b> | <b>Number of answers</b> | <b>yes</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>no</b> | <b>%</b> |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| 1- Can you say that all your 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle EFL students speak English fluently, considering your teaching experience? | 20                        | 20                       | 00         | 0        | 20        | 100      |

|   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 2- What can be identified as the cause for their not being able to speak English fluently?                                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| -the linguistic environment   | 20 | 20 | 12 | 60 | 08 | 40 |
| -lack of care   |    |    | 08 | 40 | 12 | 60 |
| -lack of motivation   |    |    | 10 | 50 | 10 | 50 |
| -shyness  |    |    | 12 | 60 | 08 | 40 |
| -lack of reading  |    |    | 08 | 40 | 12 | 60 |
| 3- Do you think that the use of their mother-tongue has anything to do with their not being able to speak English fluently? | 20 | 20 | 16 | 80 | 04 | 20 |
| 4- Benin is a French-speaking country. Does it have anything to do with their not being able to speak English fluently?     | 20 | 20 | 18 | 90 | 02 | 10 |
| 5- Do you think that Beninese secondary   |    |    |    |    |    |    |

|   |    |    |    |    |    |     |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| schools students have enough opportunities to speak English at home?                                    | 20 | 20 | 00 | 00 | 20 | 100 |
| 6- Do you think that students stick to the grammar lessons delivered in class only?                     | 20 | 20 | 12 | 60 | 08 | 40  |
| 7- Don't you think that they are not courageous enough to engage themselves in conversation in English? | 20 | 20 | 14 | 70 | 06 | 30  |
| 8- Do you practise speaking in your classes?  | 20 | 20 | 08 | 40 | 12 | 60  |
| 9- How much time do you devote to it in a week?   | 20 | 08 |    |    |    |     |
| -less than a quarter  |    |    | 00 | 00 | 08 | 100 |
| -a quarter  |    |    | 05 | 63 | 03 | 37  |
| -half an hour   |    |    | 03 | 37 | 05 | 63  |

|   |    |    |    |     |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|-----|----|----|
| 10- Do you think linguistic immersion is also an advantage for Beninese secondary schools students? | 20 | 20 | 20 | 100 | 00 | 00 |
|---|----|----|----|-----|----|----|

**Source:** Teachers' responses, May 2017.

I addressed the above questionnaires to twenty EFL teachers of Lycée Toffa 1er in Porto-Novo. All of them answered the questions as frankly as possible. In fact, while giving them the questionnaires, I insisted on their frankness so as to help me draw reliable conclusions, find out adequate solutions and implications.

All of the EFL teachers who responded to the questionnaires recognise that their EFL learners cannot speak English fluently. While reading their answers, I can identify three categories of responsible for it: teachers themselves, students and school authorities. Through their answers to the eighth question, only eight (40%) of them practise speaking in English classes. The others (60%) hardly teach speaking to their learners. But how can EFL students communicate orally in English if they are not taught speaking skills in class? They had better teach it to their learners. In addition, the teachers who carry out speaking activities in their classes only devote a quarter or half an hour to such activities. I wonder whether fifteen or thirty minutes are really sufficient for EFL learners to develop speaking skills in our classes. The assumption is that some learners may be willing to speak whereas the devoted time does not permit them all to have the floor; then only a few of them are given the floor to speak. A fifteen minutes speaking activity will not be so much interesting for learners in an EFL class although the topic of discussion may be relevant and interesting. It will be good enough if EFL teachers try to go beyond this duration.

Nevertheless, throughout my research work, I have found out that there are other causes resulting from the students themselves. While responding to question n°6,

twelve EFL teachers out of the twenty declared that most EFL learners stick to grammar lessons delivered in class only. They (the EFL students, of course) think that they can easily get marks from the grammar items during exams; as a matter of fact, they will not be evaluated upon their performance in speaking but in writing. Not a few number of students know grammatical structures in English but cannot unfortunately apply them in real life communications. What a pity!

As for questions n°2, n°3 and n°4, more than the half out of the twenty teachers assume that both the linguistic and the social environment does not help our EFL learners develop their speaking skills. Since Benin is a French-speaking country, they always speak French (and their mother tongue as well) than English. At the same time, eight EFL teachers (40%) find that this has nothing to do with their not being able to speak English. For them, these students can, of course, speak the English language despite the linguistic environment. Ninety percent (90%) of the teachers agreed that the fact that Benin is a French-speaking country cannot help Beninese secondary schools students become fluent in speaking English. While 50% of the teachers assume that students' lack of fluency in speaking is due to lack of motivation, 50% think this is not true. Other factors can rather account for students' lack of fluency in speaking. For instance, during my research, I have found out that 60% of the teachers think this may result from their shyness. The truth is that some learners are reluctant to say something in the language for fear that they may mispronounce words and be laughed at by their fellow classmates. So they prefer hold their tongue and follow what is going on in the class. Still in question n°2, eight EFL teachers (40%) assume that students come across difficulties to speak fluent English because they are reluctant to reading. As far as the third question is concerned, these teachers recognise that the social environment prevents Beninese secondary schools students from speaking English fluently. As a matter of fact, language teaching practice assumes that most

of the difficulties students encounter when learning English may be a consequence to which their native language differs from the target language.

As for question n°7, fourteen teachers, that is, 70% think that their students are not courageous enough to hold a conversation in English for many reasons. They don't even travel to English speaking countries (or at least to neighbouring countries). I personally think linguistic immersion is a very important and interesting opportunity for the EFL learners to improve their language efficiency and fluency.

To conclude, I can say that teachers are the first cause of students' inability to speak English fluently. Teachers have to evaluate their learners in speaking as well. Hereby, we can understand to some extent some of the reasons why Beninese Secondary schools students cannot speak English fluently.

#### 4.1.2. Analysis of learners' responses

Here are the results of the questionnaires addressed to the students

**Table 3:** Learners' responses

| <b>Questions</b>                        | <b>Number of answers</b> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>No</b> | <b>%</b> |
|---|--------------------------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| 1- Why are you learning English?        | 95                       |            |          |           |          |
| a-to get marks and to pass              |                          | 80         | 84       |           |          |
| b-to succeed in exams                   |                          | 10         | 11       |           |          |
| c-to use it as a means of communication |                          | 05         | 05       |           |          |

|  |    |    |     |    |     |
|--|----|----|-----|----|-----|
| d-to be able to get a job that requires a mastery of English     |    | 00 | 00  | 00 | 00  |
| 2- Do you like to speak English?                                 | 95 | 60 | 63  | 35 | 37  |
| <b>2-1- If yes, where and when do you like to speak English?</b> |    |    |     |    |     |
| a-in English classes   |    | 60 | 100 | 00 | 00  |
| b-out of the class with friends                                  |    | 00 | 00  | 60 | 100 |
| c-in English clubs   |    | 00 | 00  | 10 | 100 |
| d-when you go to an English speaking country                     |    | 14 | 23  | 46 | 77  |
| <b>2-2- Why don't you like to speak English?</b>                 |    |    |     |    |     |
| a- I'm afraid of making mistakes                                 |    | 28 | 80  | 07 | 20  |

|   |    |    |     |    |    |
|---|----|----|-----|----|----|
| b- I'm afraid of being laughed at by my fellows                         |    | 35 | 100 | 00 | 00 |
| c- My teacher does not allow mistakes                                   |    | 15 | 43  | 20 | 57 |
| d- My teacher does not devote enough time to speaking activities        |    | 25 | 71  | 10 | 29 |
| 3- Do you have difficulties to speak English?                           | 95 | 60 | 63  | 35 | 37 |
| 4- Have you always been given teachers of English in the other classes? | 95 | 95 | 100 | 00 | 00 |
| 5- How often do you attend English classes?                             | 95 |    |     |    |    |
| a-sometimes   |    | 15 | 16  |    |    |
| b-rarely  |    | 30 | 32  |    |    |
| c-never   |    | 50 | 53  |    |    |

|   |    |    |    |    |     |
|---|----|----|----|----|-----|
| 6- Do you often ask questions or answer your teacher's questions during English classes?  | 95 | 36 | 38 | 59 | 62  |
| 7- Why don't you ask questions or answer your teacher's questions during English classes? | 59 |    |    |    |     |
| a-you are shy   |    | 21 | 36 |    |     |
| b-you lack vocabulary   |    | 15 | 25 |    |     |
| c-your classmates may laugh at you if ever a mistake occurs                               |    | 23 | 39 |    |     |
| 8-How often does your teacher speak English in class?                                     | 95 |    |    |    |     |
| a-during the whole class  |    | 75 | 79 | 20 | 21  |
| b-rarely  |    | 00 | 00 | 95 | 100 |
| 9-How does your teacher teach you English?  | 95 |    |    |    |     |
| a-through reading comprehension   |    | 22 | 23 |    |     |
| b-through grammar and structures  |    | 65 | 68 |    |     |
| c-through conversations and debates   |    | 03 | 03 |    |     |
| d-through songs, poems and sketches   |    | 05 | 05 |    |     |

|  |    |    |    |    |    |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|
| 10-Do you listen to the radios (or English songs) of English speaking countries? | 95 | 18 | 19 | 77 | 81 |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|

**Source:** Learners' responses, May 2017.

While reading the answers provided by the EFL students, I notice that all of them have always been given teachers of English. This means that their inability to speak English fluently cannot be attributed to lack of teachers of English. However, the answers to questions n°1 and n°2 inform us that a great number of students are learning English just to get marks and to succeed in exams. Instead of learning English for communicative purposes, these students think of how they could get marks in English as a subject. As a matter of fact, only 5% of the students are learning English for communicative purposes. The other students, that is, 95% would rather stick to lessons delivered in class only. Moreover, seventy percent (37%) of the students don't like to speak English for many reasons. Some fear to be laughed at by their fellow classmates, others are afraid of making mistakes and another group of student does not have a vocabulary background to use the language. At the same time, seventy one percent (71%) of the students assume that their teachers do not devote enough time to speaking activities in class. How can EFL students become fluent in speaking if they are not given enough time to practise the language in class? I think something must be done.

In an attempt to check how often students attend English classes, I notice that thirty two percent (32%) of the students rarely attend English classes while only a few (16%) are regular to English classes. Again, my research shows that 53% of the students never attend English, which is very bad. The more a student skips classes, the more his/her level in English dies down. When reading the answers to the ninth question, I notice that their teachers try to develop the ability of

understanding written texts and grammar most of the time. Listening Comprehension and speaking are hardly dealt with. If we teach students only grammar, they will be very good at it but they will be unable to understand a speech and to speak the language. Why not ask them to learn a poem or a song? Or at least listen to an English song? All these are ways to foster their language proficiency and develop their speaking abilities. But we have to mention here that most of the teachers are not trained; this can also impede the level of the students in English.

Thus, throughout my research, I have noticed that shyness, lack of vocabulary in English, fear of being laughed at, social environment, lack of motivation among many others account for students' lack of fluency in speaking.

#### **4.2 Causes emerging from the observation data**

Class observation is an instrument which enables the researcher to collect reliable and trustful information about the events which occur in a classroom. Therefore, I've undertaken two class observations for my investigations. With these class observations, I can form my opinions or take decisions based on events and facts I have observed during my visits.

For each visit, I have sat at the bottom of the class and observed each step of the teaching and learning process. I couldn't help taking notes as the teaching learning process was going on. My aim through this class observation is to observe the way the teacher teaches his students speaking skills and the causes of students' difficulties in learning English so as to suggest a few implications both to the EFL teachers and learners as far as these causes are concerned.

From the observations, I found out that the teacher hardly teaches speaking lessons to his students. In addition, all the students do not have the opportunity to speak before the class ends due to the large class size (forty two (42) students in 3è MC5 for instance). The teacher often uses French language to explain

instructions when it happens that the learners have not understood them. As a matter of fact, this method facilitates the instructions understanding but at the same time does not develop learners' ability to practise speaking.

Moreover, I have to mention that the teacher always follows the principles of the Competency Based Approach (CBA). This means that he always uses the three P's: Presentation-Practice-Production. Students, after being given instructions, work individually firstly, secondly work in group and then work collectively. This last stage is called "lockstep". But how does this method help learners develop their fluency in speaking? That is where the problem lies. The instructions given are often on reading or writing. So, students don't practice speaking in their class as much.

In a nutshell, I have to mention that only a tiny number of students can express their ideas efficiently in English today. Most of them stick to grammar lessons and don't even want to say something in English. Even in class, they hardly ask questions to their teacher because they think they cannot build meaningful sentences to ask their question. One may wonder where these students have put their grammar knowledge of English. Furthermore, teachers don't tell students the importance of oral communication aspect of English in real life. From my class observations, I have noticed a lot of things that account for the EFL students' lack of fluency in speaking. In addition to the above mentioned causes, I can also mention both the school authorities and the government. The way the teacher usually corrects his students also accounts for such a problem. The truth is that the teacher usually interrupts the student who is speaking whenever a mistake occurs. As a result, the student gets lost in her idea. I think the most important and appropriate way to correct is gentle correction which should occur at the end of the student's oral production. In fact, in language lessons, especially at the beginning and intermediate levels, learners must be given opportunities to develop both their fluency and their accuracy. They cannot develop fluency if the teacher

is constantly interrupting them to correct their oral errors. So, teachers must provide students with fluency-building practice and realize that making mistakes is a natural part of learning a new language.

Then, in the following chapter, I will present the summary of all what has been said up till here and provide a few implications of both the EFL teachers and their EFL learners as far as developing fluency in speaking is concerned.

## **Chapter V: Discussion of the findings, summary, implications and suggestions**

This chapter is divided into two sections: the first section deals with the implications of both EFL learners and their EFL teachers as far as fluency development in oral communication is concerned. The second and the last part provides a summary of the research work.

### **5.1 Summary**

Oral communication is the verbal and non-verbal interaction with an audience to communicate thoughts, information, and feelings. It is true in making good communication one must not only speak accurately but also fluently, in order to deliver the core of the meaning intended by the speaker. The accuracy of speaking can be used as the starting point, which can lead one to speak fluently. However, it must be noted down that the demand of fluency in speaking itself is the major problem for the learners of foreign language. In other words, to speak fluently and confidently in variety of situations is an important goal of any language department.

However, this research work has been carried out to know the main causes of students' inability to speak English fluently. In this regard, I used a mixed method to collect relevant data to my topic. As a result, I have discovered that there are many factors that account for the students' lack of fluency in speaking. These include sociolinguistic, cultural and emotional factors, which really impede learners' performance in speaking. Actually, learners attempt not to give too much importance to English classes because they think the language will not provide any helpful opportunity for their future life. Teachers need then to tell them the range of advantages their students will gain in the future when learning English as a foreign language. There is no doubt that a student that has been learning a language will find it helpful and interesting if he/she does not know what he/she will gain as profit in the long run. Unfortunately, there are students in our

secondary schools today who can put verbs in correct and appropriate tenses, turn active sentences into passive voice or rephrase statements quite well but they cannot build a meaningful sentence orally. What a pity! In fact, I did not choose this topic at random but I rather chose it because I really feel flabbergasted when I run into some EFL learners in our schools who cannot express their ideas or their intentions as fine as possible in English although they have studied the language at school for a long moment. Yet, there is a set of strategies that I proposed in my study which can help boost students' performance in speaking English. EFL teachers, as mentioned in the previous chapter, are also responsible for students' lack of good speaking English. I then expatiated upon a few strategies that they can adopt to cope with these problems. Hereby, I wish that our learners in our secondary schools would become fluent speakers of English like natives in spite of their sociolinguistic and cultural backgrounds.

## **5.2 Discussion of the findings**

The purpose of this thesis, as stated earlier, is to find out what accounts for the EFL students' lack of fluency in speaking English. In this regard, questionnaires and class observation have been the two methods that I used to collect data relevant to my study. Through the questionnaires addressed to EFL teachers, I can argue that they are the first factors affecting EFL learners' inability to speak English effectively. The truth is that they do not teach speaking skills in their classes. Those who try to teach it do not devote enough time for the learners to practise speaking in the class. One may wonder whether the teacher must teach only speaking activities in a two hours class, which is unfortunately not the case. Actually, a two hours speaking class will be boring for the students although the majority of them will find time to speak before the class ends. I think teachers should know how to allocate time for any class activities and have a good balance. Furthermore, while planning speaking activities, EFL teachers should take into account the relevance of the tasks, whether they fit the learners' interests and

whether such tasks reflect their daily experiences. Moreover, the quality of the EFL teachers also hinder the performance of the EFL students in speaking effective English. Truth is that an EFL teacher having received no prior training in any teacher training school will not succeed in teaching English effectively. Words pronunciations for instance, where to put stress or when to raise the tongue, amongst many others will not be abode by. I am sorry I'm not downgrading anyone that has not been trained in a professional school before having started teaching since some of them received no professional training but are doing well in their teaching career. The number of qualified teachers, as stated in the first part of the previous chapter, is very insignificant. How can EFL learners attain natives like fluency if they are not being taught the language well? I personally think that something must be done to cope with such issue. But, are the EFL teachers the only one cause for the EFL students' difficulties in speaking English effectively?

Certainly not. As far as the EFL students' responses are concerned, it should be noted that EFL students are also responsible for their own difficulties in speaking. The fact is that they have psychological problems affecting their speaking performance in English. Through my research work, I discovered that problems such as anxiety, self-confidence and inhibition really impacted the EFL learners' speaking performance. Most EFL students feel shy and lack confidence because they fear to be laughed at by their fellow classmates, which is very bad. A language learner should be eager and hot to trot. There is no need for them to be shy and to lack confidence in themselves. Moreover, the linguistic environment where we are living does not help students as much to develop their speaking performance. They only practise the language mostly in classroom situation where they are too much under the control of their teacher and of the group class that threatens them. Once learners step out of the class, they start practising their First Language or their mother tongue; the English language is then put aside and forgotten. How can such students develop their speaking performance if they

don't at least practise the language? In fact, a language should be spoken or practised regardless of the social environment or of the little vocabulary background one has in the language. It is also proved, however, that learners are not accustomed to listening to English songs or radios. When learners take their time to listen to English songs, they easily keep words (especially their pronunciation) in mind and can use them in their oral production as songs are easily kept in mind than any other text.

In a nutshell, I have come to the conclusion that the main causes of students' lack of fluency in speaking are both EFL teachers and EFL learners themselves. The sociolinguistic environment and the school authorities in Benin are not far to be high on the list.

### **5.3 IMPLICATIONS**

#### **5.3.1 Implications for EFL teachers**

Speaking is a complex skill that should be taught everywhere. As mentioned in the previous chapter, teachers are the first cause of students' difficulties in speaking English fluently. But what should they (i.e. the EFL teachers) do in order to improve learners' ability in speaking English fluently? As a matter of fact, students in our secondary schools will attain native like fluency if their EFL teachers really teach them speaking skills in class. Teachers have to find interesting speaking activities that can stimulate the students' interest and get them to speak. Such activities must reflect the learners' real life situation or their culture. There is no doubt that a student will not find something to say if his/her teacher asks him/her to talk about a cultural event that often takes place within his/her family. For instance, a native Yoruba will be eager to speak whenever he/she is asked to describe the cultural ceremony of *Guèlèdè* in spite of the fact that he/she may run out of words to convey his/her message well. But what if the teacher asks them about the dos and the don'ts of the British culture? I think they cannot do this unless they browse on the internet to get some related information.

Linguists and teachers agree on the fact that students learn to speak the Second and Foreign languages by interacting. Shall we explain the difference between “the Second Language” and “the Foreign Language”? Our mother tongue is considered as our “First Language”. Fon, Goun, Mina, Bariba are examples of “First Languages” in Benin. “The Second Language” is the language used by the educated people in a country. In Benin, for instance, our “Second Language is French”. “The foreign Language” is also called “the Third language”. English is our “Foreign Language” in Benin, but it is “the Second Language” in Nigeria. I have said that linguists and teachers agree on the fact that students learn to speak the Second and Foreign languages by interacting. I should add that communicative language teaching and collaborative learning serve best for this purpose. As a matter of fact, communicative language teaching is based on real-life situations that require communication. By using it in our classes, we are giving students opportunities to communicate with each other directly in the target language. To put it bluntly, I am advising teachers to create a class environment where students will have real-life communicative situations, authentic activities and meaningful tasks that can help to promote oral communication in our classes.

Some people may think that we cannot really teach fluency in EFL classes, which is unfortunately not true. In fact, teachers can certainly teach fluency by giving lectures that help expand their students’ knowledge of choices, tools, and strategies at their disposal. However at a certain point, we will have to admit that teaching fluency is different from other aspects of language. In teaching fluency, we must be willing to set up situation to let go of some of the control in our classrooms; we must be willing to let the students have some of the control and let them do some of the work; we must be willing to set up situations in which fluency can develop, and then encourage the students to actually communicate. I’m not saying that we need to teach fluency all of the time, but I am saying that some of the time students need a little guided communication time during which

their knowledge of the many aspects of the language can develop into fluency. EFL teachers have to recognise such things whenever they happen to teach EFL learners the English language.,,

Unlike language knowledge, fluency is about automatizing the language knowledge. As Schmidt (1992) said, “*Fluent speech is automatic, not requiring much attention, and is characterized by the fact that the psycholinguistic processes of speech planning and speech production are functioning easily and efficiently*” (pp.44). Such automaticity can only occur when the students themselves are trying to use their language knowledge to actually communicate, and teachers can only help the students become fluent by creating opportunities for them to practise communicating.

In addition, teachers can promote fluency if they:

- Encourage students to go ahead and make constructive errors;
- Create many opportunities for students to practise;
- Create activities that force students to get a message across; and
- Assess student’s fluency, not their accuracy.

❖ ***Encouraging students to go ahead and make constructive errors***

Many students ferociously concentrate on producing accurate grammar. In doing so, they may be obviating the possibility of ever becoming fluent. Making errors is therefore a topic that EFL teachers have to teach to their students. James (1998) had proposed three strategies: The first one consist in explaining native speaker error patterns, which involves at least four steps. First, they should tell the students that native speakers of English make errors in pronunciation, word choice, grammar, even logic. Second, since learners may not be close enough observers to recognize that native speakers make errors, you may have to illustrate that fact by pointing out errors in your own speech or in tapes of other native speakers. Third, you, as a teacher, should do whatever necessary to help students recognize

that it is okay for them to make production errors, indeed, it is a natural part of all communication, even among native speakers. Fourth, teachers should tell them that if they remain unwilling to make errors, they will probably never be able to become fluent, i.e., that sometimes they need to focus on accuracy but other times they have to relax and practice the automaticity that is necessary for fluency development.

Another key to encouraging students to make constructive errors is to minimize error correction. If teachers seriously want to foster fluency, they absolutely must limit error correction to those errors that hinder communication. During periods of fluency development, teachers should therefore avoid yanking the students back to a focus on accuracy because that might bring the whole fluency development process to a halt.

❖ *Create many opportunities for students to practise*

In addition to encouraging students to make constructive errors, teachers should provide ample opportunities for students to practise fluency development. This means creating speaking courses, wherein teachers set up activities and then get out of the way so that many students can be talking at the same time (in pairs or in small groups). We should avoid at all costs conversation courses, wherein the teacher does much of the talking and students respond to the teacher one at a time. Setting up activities such as pair work, group work, role plays, etc. are exactly activities that students need to develop their fluency. Furthermore, I also find that creating a relaxed classroom atmosphere (by using humour, songs, personal interactions, smiles, cartoons, etc.) helps promote fluency.

❖ *Create activities that force students to get a message across*

Teachers should insure that all fluency activities focus the students' attention on getting their message across. A meaning focus can be achieved by creating activities wherein students have a specific task to perform a particular problem to

solve or a clearly defined goal to reach. If the activities are properly designed, students will become so involved in succeeding in their tasks that they will necessarily be focussed on getting their meaning(s) across.

❖ *Assess students' fluency and not their accuracy*

Whether we like it or not, students are very test driven. If we test them using multiple-choice grammar tests, they will prepare for multiple-choice grammar tests. If, in contrast, we test them in role plays, pair work, interviews, etc. the students will prepare for such assessment activities. Students are not stupid. So EFL teachers should know what to assess and how to assess it as far as fluency development is concerned.

In addition to the above mentioned strategies, EFL teachers can also use some oral communicative activities that can help improve learners' fluency in speaking. These include:

- Topic-based activities: They are presented in the form of topic centre discussion in which learners are invited to talk about the topic. This topic is often a controversial subject which learners can relate to their own experience or that they know about.
- Task based activities: Learners are required to perform a task and need to speak to each other in order to complete a task.
- Discussion activities: These may be activities like buzz group where students are put in small groups of 03 or 04 and are asked to think of a topic. They may also be controversial topics where learners are submitted a topic and are asked to reflect on it and choose a position. For instance, a topic like the following: "*Women are considered as the weak sex*". These activities may also be relaying instructions in which students should each other be given the instruction and complete a task. For example, activities about "*describe the picture*".

- Communication games: For instance, *problems solving* games where students have to discuss in order to find solutions to a set of problems. These games may also be about the student's own life or experience where he/she has to use his/her life and feelings for a number of interpersonal exchanges. These are the activities that are useful at the beginning of a class as a warm-up.

Moreover, role play activities are also efficient ways in promoting EFL learners' abilities in speaking English. These include dialogues, plays, and simulations. In *dialogues*, learners are given a short dialogue that they practise directly and present in front of the class. That is a particular game for beginners that helps them saying the target language and become self-confident. *Plays* are expansion of the dialogue techniques where learners learn and perform the play. The play can be based on something they have read or that have been composed by learners themselves or by their teachers. In *simulations*, the individual participants speak and react by themselves.

### **5.3.2 Implications for EFL learners**

Speaking can be deemed as an indispensable tool for language teaching and learning since it can "facilitate language acquisition and development" (Goh, 2007, p. 1), and it can be fruitful to learner's academic accomplishment and professional success (Saunders & O'Brien, 2006). In this regard, EFL learners should have the following competences that can help them improve their speaking ability in English:

#### **5.3.2.1 Grammatical Competence**

Scarcella & Oxford (1992) propound that grammatical competence is an overarching component that consists of knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and sounds of letters and syllables, pronunciation of words, intonation, and stress. To understand meaning, EFL learners need to have enough knowledge of words and sentences: that is, they must figure out how words are broken into different

sounds, and how sentences are stressed in particular ways. So, grammatical competence helps speakers to use and understand English language structures accurately and immediately, which facilitates their fluency (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

#### ***5.3.2.2 Discourse Competence***

EFL learners should develop discourse competence through international relationships. The rules of cohesion and coherence should be applied in each discourse, whether formal or informal to hold the communication together in a meaningful way (Richards & Renandya, 2002). In order to communicate well, speakers are required to perceive and process stretches of discourse and to formulate representations of meaning from referents in both previous sentences and following sentences (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Thus, effective speakers need to gain a large repertoire of structures and discourse makers to express ideas, indicate relationships of time, and show cause, contrast, and emphasis.

#### ***5.3.2.3 Sociolinguistic Competence***

To know the knowledge of language is not enough for EFL learners to speak effectively and appropriately. They should be familiar with the culture of the native speakers to enable to use target language which is socially and culturally acceptable by native users. To achieve this goal, it is imperative to figure out the sociolinguistic side of language which enables learners distinguish appropriate comments, how to ask questions during interaction, and how to respond nonverbally according to the aim of the talk (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 212).

#### ***5.3.2.4 Strategic Competence***

Strategic competence means the ability of appropriate use of language. It can refer to the ability to know when and how to initiate, maintain, and terminate the conversation and how to clear up communication breakdowns and comprehension problems (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Apart from these communicative competences that EFL students should consider when speaking English, they should also develop their listening abilities by listening to native speakers on radio or through a music. They should try to speak English as they do for their first and second languages. Students also need to read books written in English in order to discover new words and use them while speaking. The truth is that a student who has a poor vocabulary background will certainly come across difficulty to speak English well. They need to read, go to language laboratories and see how words are used and manipulated. As a result, the need for improving fluency in speaking English in EFL countries especially in Benin cannot be overemphasized today as it helps learners to have their message understood by the listener easily and well.

## **5.4 SUGGESTIONS**

### **5.4.1 Suggestions to the EFL teachers**

EFL teachers also need to know some actions if they want to teach speaking skills successfully. I am going to list here a few suggestions that EFL teachers can use while teaching English:

- Teachers should study phonology and phonetics. While planning a lesson, they should also check word pronunciation in the dictionary.
- Prepare your lessons before going to school. If teachers do not prepare the lesson before going to the class, it will be very difficult for them to deliver the lesson properly. In order to be efficient in your classes, you had better prepare your lessons before going to the class. Once again, don't go to school unprepared.
- Don't give boring lessons. A boring lesson is the consequence of not having prepared the lesson.
- Work with your students seriously.
- Don't be inconsistent.
- Provide students with enough opportunities to speak English in the class.

- Plan and design speaking interesting activities carefully.
- Reduce your teacher's talking time and hereby increase the student's talking time.
- Don't issue threats.
- Encourage students to practise English in the class.
- Congratulate students for good jobs and try to correct their mistakes without hurting them.
- Provide students with tasks they should perform at home to improve their speaking. They can be given poems to learn and act out in the class or short sentences that they will memorize and present them to the whole class. They can also be given presentations.
- Do not correct mispronunciations while students are speaking. This can stop the trend of the thought and disturb the speaker. Since he/she is speaking, the teacher can leave him/her go to the end of his/her speech. Meanwhile the teacher must take note of the mistakes and try to correct them after the student has finished talking.
- Don't be unfair. If teachers are unfair, this can lead to indiscipline.
- Use audio-visual aids in your classes. This is a better way to promote effective learning of English.
- Teach them new and interesting songs that can arouse their feelings.
- Teach new vocabulary so that students will know the appropriate word to use in a sentence.

#### **5.4.2 Suggestions to the EFL learners**

Students should be prepared for school and be active in the class. Here is a list of what they should do to be prepared for the class and take an active part in learning activities.

- Go to school on time
- Follow the teacher during the lesson

- Do what the teacher asks you to do in the class
- Be responsible and cooperate in the class
- Respect your teachers and your fellows
- Ask questions to understand before leaving the class
- Ask your parents to buy you school supplies. If you know they are poor and cannot afford them, work by yourself to help them
- Never go to school without your book, copybooks, pens, pencils and a rubber
- Copy the lesson before going home
- Always learn your lessons at home
- Try to speak English in the class whatever be your level of grammar and your pronunciations. You will not speak well unless you practise speaking English
- Never be afraid of speaking English nor ashamed to speak it in public
- Don't mind if your classmates laugh at you because you always make a mistake in your speech. You rather on the right track to attain native like fluency
- Never lose any opportunity to speak English even if it is with a native speaker
- If possible, spend holidays in English speaking countries
- Regularly listen to the radio and watch English TV programmes
- Create opportunities to speak English outside the class
- Belong to English clubs

## CONCLUSION

Speaking is a very important part of language learning but is the most difficult amongst the four language skills. It is not sufficient to know how to write a language correctly but it is also important to know how to speak it. Thus, students who learn English should be able to master and manipulate it. I think that after four years of learning English, Beninese secondary schools students should be expected to speak it fluently. But, unfortunately, we notice that these students still have difficulties to speak English as fluently as possible. This prompted me as a researcher to investigate and find out what is responsible of such difficulties. In the introduction, I have mentioned that the main objective of this thesis is to find out the causes of students' lack of fluency in speaking. My goal is to contribute to the promotion of English as a spoken language, to contribute to the improvement of the EFL learners' level in speaking English fluently. At such a stage, the target students will be able to communicate with native speakers everywhere in the world.

However, I checked whether the inability of the target students to speak English fluently is their own fault or their teachers' or if both have contributed to it to some extent. With this regard, I used the investigation way with a methodology of description and evaluation through the analysis of the findings collected with questionnaires addressed to some teachers of English and to some students of Lycée Toffa 1<sup>er</sup> of Porto-Novo.

According to my investigations on students' lack of fluency in speaking, I can say that both students and teachers are responsible for the target group's inability to speak English fluently after having learnt the language for a number of years. It is true that Benin is not an English speaking country. However, some activities can be promoted to help them be in contact with English: English clubs, poem competitions, song competitions and so on. For further investigation, I may check how to promote African widespread languages such as Ahoussa and Yoruba.

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## Questionnaire to EFL teachers

Dear teachers, the present questionnaire is to carry out a research work on the following theme: ‘**ENGLISH TEACHING IN BENINESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS: WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR STUDENTS’ LACK OF FLUENCY IN SPEAKING?’**”

I will be grateful enough to you for answering these questions frankly.

### I- GENERAL INFORMATION

| Qualification | Number | Percentage |
|---------------|--------|------------|
| BAC           |        |            |
| DUEL          |        |            |
| LICENCE       |        |            |
| BAPES         |        |            |
| MAITRISE      |        |            |
| CAPES         |        |            |

### II- DATA

1- Can you say that all your 1<sup>st</sup> cycle EFL students speak English fluently, considering your teaching experience?

Yes

No

2-What can be identified as the cause for their not being able to speak English fluently?

- The linguistic environment
- Lack of care
- Lack of motivation
- Shyness
- Lack of reading

3- Do you think that the use of their mother-tongue has anything to do with their not being able to speak English fluently?

Yes

No

4- Benin is a French speaking country. Does it have anything to do with their not being able to speak English fluently?

Yes

No

5- Do you think that Beninese secondary schools students have enough opportunities to speak English at home?

Yes

No

6- Do you think that students stick to the grammar lessons delivered in class only?

Yes

No

7- Don't you think that they are not courageous enough to engage themselves in conversation in English?

Yes

No

8- Do you practise speaking in your classes?

Yes

No

9- How much time do you devote to it in a week?

- Less than a quarter

- A quarter

- Half an hour

10- Do you think linguistic immersion is also an advantage for Beninese secondary schools students?

Yes

No

## Questionnaire to the EFL students

This questionnaire has been written to carry out a research work on the following theme:

### **‘ENGLISH TEACHING IN BENINESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS: WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR STUDENTS’ LACK OF FLUENCY IN SPEAKING?’**

Tick the right answer kindly with regard to your experience as a student. I will be very grateful to you for your answering.

1- Why are you learning English?

-to get marks and to pass

-to succeed in exams

-to use it as a means of communication

-to be able to get a job that requires a mastery of English

2- Do you like to speak English?

Yes

No

If yes, where and when do you like to speak English?

-in English classes

-out of the class with friends

-in English clubs

-when you go to an English speaking country

Why don't you like to speak English?

-I'm afraid of making mistakes

-I'm afraid of being laughed at by my fellows

-My teacher does not devote enough time to speaking activities

3- Do you have difficulties to speak English?

Yes

No

4- Have you always been given teachers of English in the other classes?

Yes

No

5- How often do you attend English classes?

-sometimes

-rarely

-never

6- Do you often ask questions or answer your teacher's questions during English classes?

Yes

No

7- Why don't you ask questions or answer your teacher's questions during English classes?

-you are shy

-you lack vocabulary

-your classmates may laugh at you if ever a mistake occurs

8- How often does your teacher speak English in class?

-during the whole class

-rarely

9- How does your teacher teach you English?

-through reading comprehension

-through grammar and structures

-through conversations and debates

-through songs, poems and sketches

10- Do you listen to the radios (or English songs) of English speaking countries?

Yes

No