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ASSESSING SPOKEN ENGLISH IN COMPETENCY-BASED EFL
CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS' OPINIONS IN
SOME SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OUEME-PLATEAU

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DEDICATION

This research work is lovingly dedicated to the Almighty God for his love and hand of wonders upon my life, and my dear parents HOSSOU Francis and HOSSOU Jeanne for raising me and showing me that every good thing comes from God and hard work.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Pages
Dedication.....	i
Acknowledgments.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables.....	vi
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms.....	vii
General Introduction.....	1
Chapter one: Introduction to the Study.....	3
1.1 Statement of the Problem.....	3
1.2 Purpose of the Study.....	4
1.3 Research Questions.....	4
1.4 Significance of the Study.....	4
1.5 Definitions of some terms.....	5
1.5.1 Assessment.....	5
1.5.2 Competency-based Approach.....	6
Chapter two: Literature Review.....	7
2.1 Competency-based Education.....	7
2.1.1 Competency.....	7
2.1.2 Competency-based Approach.....	7
2.1.3 Characteristics of Competency-based Education Program.....	8
2.1.4 Assessment in Competency-based Education.....	9
2.2 Assessment and Testing.....	9
2.2.1 Definition.....	9
2.2.2 Purposes of Assessment.....	10
2.2.3 Testing.....	10
2.2.3.1 Types of Testing.....	11
2.2.3.2 Qualities of a Good Test.....	11

2.3 Communicative Language Teaching and Assessment.....	13
2.3.1 Communicative Competence.....	13
2.3.2 Communicative Language Teaching.....	14
2.3.3 Communicative Language Assessment.....	14
2.3.3.1 Principles of Communicative Language Assessment.....	14
2.3.3.2 Characteristics of Communicative Language Assessment.....	15
Chapter three: Research Methodology.....	16
3.1 Design of the Study.....	16
3.2 Setting.....	16
3.3 Participants.....	17
3.4 Research Instrument.....	18
Questionnaire.....	18
3.5 Data Collection Procedure.....	19
3.6 Data Analysis Procedure.....	19
Chapter four: Presentation and Interpretation of Data.....	21
4.1 Teaching Speaking and its Importance for EFL Teachers.....	21
4.2 Importance of Oral Tests for EFL Teachers.....	24
4.3 Strategies used by EFL Teachers to Carry out Speaking Tests.....	25
4.4 Difficulties of Oral Evaluation for EFL Teachers and how they Overcome them.....	27
4.5 EFL Teachers' Perspectives on Introducing Oral Tests in Classrooms Summative Evaluations.....	29
Chapter five: Discussions, Recommendations and Suggestions.....	31
5.1 Discussions.....	31
5.1.1 Importance of Speaking Assessment.....	31
5.1.2 Strategies for carrying out speaking assessment.....	31

5.1.3 Difficulties in Assessing Spoken English	
and how to deal with them.....	33
5.2 Recommendations.....	35
5.2.1 Recommendations to Benin Government.....	35
5.2.2 Recommendations to EFL Curriculum Designers.....	36
5.3 Suggestions.....	36
5.3.1 Suggestions to EFL Teachers.....	36
5.3.2 Suggestions to EFL Students.....	37
General Conclusion.....	39
Bibliography.....	40
Appendix.....	42

LISTS OF TABLES

<u>Tables</u>	<u>Pages</u>
1 Information about the participants.....	17
2 EFL teachers' positions about teaching speaking.....	22
3 EFL teachers' positions about the assessment of speaking.....	24
4 Do EFL teachers carry out speaking tests?.....	25
5 EFL teacher's difficulties in assessing speaking.....	27

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

CBE: Competency-based Education

CBA: Competency-based Approach

CLT : Communicative Language Teaching

BEPC: Brevet d'Enseignement du Premier Cycle

BAC: Baccalauréat

INTRODUCTION

Today, English is one of the most important languages in the world. In the past, it was not like this. Four hundred years ago, during Shakespeare's time, only a few people spoke English, and other European countries as well as other countries around the world didn't think it was important. The English language began to spread in the 17th century when European immigrants, mainly English, sailed to the U.S to live on the east coast. Today, English is spoken in all over the world. It is seen, heard, spoken, read and written everywhere in the world: 75% of the world mail, 60% of the world phone calls, 80% of computer data and Internet, and more, 50% of the world's newspapers are in English. Also, a lot of popular books, movies and music are in English.

Therefore, even though French is the Benin official language, the process of teaching and learning English in Benin is not a matter of pleasure. It is a necessity. It is important to learn and master the English language so as to be able to communicate with English speakers. So, English is introduced in Benin curriculum in order to help Benin people communicate in English everywhere they are.

If English is taught as a way to communicate, there must be applicable ways to assess students' abilities in the language. Thereby, assessment and teaching are not separated entities, but work together to ensure the language acquisition. Assessment should be done taking into consideration all of the aspects of teaching. If we carry out teaching through competencies, assessment should also be done on all of the competencies. But, I notice that in Benin, the speaking skill, which is the first and most important productive skill, is not assessed as the ones of reading and writing.

In order to draw the educational authorities' attention on this fact, I have chosen to carry out a research work on the assessment of speaking in EFL classrooms.

This research work is organised into five chapters. The first chapter is entitled 'Introduction to the study' and includes the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, and the definition of some terms. The second chapter, Literature Review, informs the reader about previous works on the topic. The third chapter presents the research methodology used in this research work. The fourth one presents the data and their analysis. The last chapter includes the

discussion of the findings, as well as the recommendations and suggestions made in the study.

Chapter one: Introduction to the Study

This chapter mainly presents the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research question, the significance of the study and the definition of some concepts.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The English language has been introduced in the educational system of Benin so that students can really communicate with other people who use it as their official or native language. In order to achieve this communication goal, a special emphasis has been put on speaking, listening, reading and writing in the English curriculum. These are the four skills that English teachers help their learners acquire through their teaching.

To make sure that these skills are really acquired by the students, they should be assessed in all of them. Unfortunately, during my teaching practice in some schools, I have noticed that only reading and writing are the skills assessed. Speaking is almost ignored in the assessment practices. Generally, students take four summative exams in a school year. During these four exams, there is no place for speaking tests in English. Even the quizzes done in the classrooms are always based on grammar or reading. For the national exams (BEPC and BAC), the speaking test is done in English after the students have passed the written test, and there are no guidelines for conducting the so-called oral exam. But the point that shall not be forgotten is that speaking precedes writing everywhere in the world and we can spend a day without writing or reading, but we cannot spend a day without speaking.

In fact, if students are not assessed on speaking, how can we determine their performance in this important skill? How can we assure that students can hold a conversation with an English speaker? How can we know that teaching is effective without assessment? That is mainly the reason why research must be carried out on what English teachers think about assessing spoken English in their classrooms.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyse the opinions of some English teachers as far as the assessment of speaking in competency-based EFL classrooms is concerned. The study also aims to determine how important the assessment of speaking is for EFL teachers, how they carry out speaking tests in their classrooms and to determine the difficulties they come across while planning to assess their students on the speaking skill.

1.3 Research Questions

The main research question directing this research work is the following:

‘‘what do EFL teachers think about the assessment of spoken English in their classrooms?’’

This question addresses some aspects which are worth mentioning:

- Does oral evaluation have any meaning and importance to EFL teachers?
- What strategies do EFL teachers use to carry out oral evaluation in their classrooms, if they do it?
- What difficulties do EFL teachers come across while conducting oral tests?
- What do EFL teachers do to overcome these difficulties?

1.4 Significance of the Study

I strongly believe that no effort should be spared in the process of improving Benin educational system in general and the teaching of English particularly. Each of us, through a research work or any other way, should try to bring our stone to the building site of our educational system. Thus, conducting a research work on

“*assessing spoken English in competency-based EFL classrooms*” is really significant for EFL learners, teachers and other actors of our educational system.

First, for EFL teachers, this study will help them become aware of the fact that speaking, like the other skills should also be assessed in the classrooms. It is only through assessment that teachers could know how well their students are performing in all areas of EFL learning, and how well their teaching is done as far the teaching of the speaking skill is concerned. Moreover, this study provides EFL teachers with some strategies and techniques they could use to perform speaking exams in their classrooms and to overcome any difficulty they could encounter.

Second, for EFL students, this study is a way of motivating them in the process of learning spoken English because, if they know that they will be evaluated in speaking, they will take the speaking lesson as a serious matter. Also, if EFL teachers put into practice the suggestions made in this research work, it will help learners know how well they are performing as far as the speaking skill is concerned, and try to improve their level.

Third, this study is of great interest for the English teaching/learning curriculum designers of Benin. It will remind them of the important and crucial role that assessment plays in the acquisition of the speaking skill. It will also urge them to insert oral evaluation into the process of English teaching/ learning.

1.5 Definition of some Concepts

The two important concepts defined here are: assessment and Competency-based approach.

1.5.1 Assessment

The term “assessment” can be defined as a consideration of someone or something and a judgement about them. In the field of education, it is a method of evaluating student performance and attainment; it is a way of checking how well

students are really learning and how well teachers are really teaching. The assessment of the spoken English in EFL classrooms is thus the way of considering students' performance as far as the speaking skill is concerned and making judgement about it.

1.5.2 Competency-based Approach

It is a teaching method that is centered on the learners and is based mainly on the acquisition of competencies. It consists not only in making learners acquire knowledge but mainly applying this knowledge to real life situations.

This very first chapter deals with the introduction to the study. It presents the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the problem, and the definition of some concepts. The following chapter informs the readers about previous research on the topic. The third chapter explains the methodology of the study. The fourth one presents the data and their analysis. The last chapter includes the discussion of the findings, as well as the recommendations and suggestions made in the study.

Chapter two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews prominent studies to support the present research. It is divided into three main sections. The very first section deals with competency-based education in so far as it is the teaching approach implemented in Benin. The second section informs about assessment and testing. The third section deals with communicative language teaching and assessment.

2.1 Competency-based Education

The competency-based Education is the teaching approach based on competencies. It is thus compulsory to understand what competency means.

2.1.1 Competency

Collins (2006) defines competency as the “ability to do something well or effectively”. So people are said to be competent in a given field when they are able to perform a task or a series of tasks well in the field concerned.

A competency in foreign language learning can be defined as the acquired capability to understand and produce a certain level of foreign language, defined by phonological, lexical, grammatical and socio linguistic constituents.(Decoo & Colpaert, 1997). It is the ability of a student to apply skills or knowledge he/she has acquired in a given context.

2.1.2 Competency based Approach

K. L. Savage (1993, p.556) defined competency-based Education as “a performance-based process leading to demonstrated mastery of basic and life skills necessary for the individual to function proficiently in a society.”. From this definition, competency-based approach is focused on learners' performance. It is a teaching methodology which consists in helping students develop what they can do in real life. In the field of a language teaching, competency-based Education is the approach that makes learners competent in using the target language.

For the Organisation of American States Hemispheric Project (2006), competency-based Education is based on the philosophy that “ almost all learners can learn equally well if they receive the kind of instructors that they need”. This shows the role of the competency-based teacher: it is important for him/her to know each of his/her students' needs and try to satisfy them through competencies.

In competency-based Education, the role of the teacher changes from the conventional information-giver to that of a resource person. From then on, the students will have more responsibility for their own learning and progress.

According to the California Competency-based Adult Education (CBAE) Staff Development Project (1983), CBE is a four steps process that comprises:

- 1- assessment of students' needs,
- 2- selection of competencies based on those needs,
- 3- instruction targeted to those competencies, and
- 4- evaluation of student performance in those competencies.

2.1.3 Characteristics of the Competency-based Education Program

The Organisation of American States Hemispheric Project (2006) established ten characteristics that any Competency based teaching program should take into account:

- 1) A variety of teaching methods and aids are used.
- 2) Adequate materials, space and equipment are available.
- 3) An environment that simulates [the real life situation] is available to students.
- 4) Students are informed about criteria and attitude important to the occupation.
- 5) Each student's program should be individualized and self-paced.
- 6) Learning activities are repeated and reinforced until competence is achieved.
- 7) Program completion is based on satisfactory achievement of all specified competencies.
- 8) Continuous and detailed feedback is given to students on their progress.
- 9) Individual student records are maintained and should reflect student progress.

10) Students' rates should reflect the level of competency achieved.

2.1.4 Assessment in Competency-based Education

Assessment in competency-based Education is carried out for two main purposes: to measure competencies and for certification.

✓ CBE for measuring competencies

Measuring competency is one of the main purposes of CBE. Generally, the reason for the implementation of CBE is to determine that learners have sufficient knowledge and skills to contribute effectively to the work force or to perform a given task in a given field (Canning, 2000)

✓ CBE for certification

Competency based Education provides learners with opportunities to achieve qualifications that relate to required performance in the real life workplace (Erridge & Perry, 1994). For instance, a student in a language class would have the opportunities to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in that target language. He/she would then achieve the qualifications and certification that relate to the required performance of a good language user in the real life communication once he/she has completed the assessment needed to be qualified as a good language user at a particular designated level of that language.

2.2 Assessment and Testing

2.2.1 Definition

As defined in the first chapter of this work, assessment, in the field of education, is a method of evaluating students' performance and attainment; it is a way of checking how well students are really learning and how well teachers are really teaching.

According to Harrisson (1987), an assessment is seen as a natural extension of classroom work, providing teacher and student with useful information that can serve each as a basis for improvement.

For da Cruz (2007, p.9), assessment is "any method used to better understand the current knowledge that a student possesses". This definition implies that assessment can be as simple as teacher's subjective judgement based on a single observation of a student performance, or as complex as three-hour summative test. The idea of current knowledge implies that what a student knows is always changing and that we can make judgement about student achievement through comparisons over a period of time.

2.2.2 Purposes of Assessment

Before designing an assessment task there needs to be a clear idea of the purpose of the assessment. This is essential because the same degree of detail is not required in every testing situation. Ramsden (2003) cited by da Cruz (2007) asserted:

Assessment is about several things at once... It about reporting on students' achievements and about teaching them better through expressing to them more clearly the goal of our curricula. It is about measuring student learning; it is about diagnosing misunderstanding in order to help students to learn more effectively. It concerns the quality of the teaching as well as the quality of the learning. (p.117)

All of the purposes cited above can be summed up into two key purposes: to prompt more learning and to certify learners. They are often referred to as formative assessment and summative assessment. Formative assessment provides both teacher and students with detailed information from which they will learn more. Summative assessment is a kind of portraying what a student knows or can do or is equipped for or can be certified for.

2.2.3 Testing

Bachman (1990, p.20) defined a test as “ a procedure designed to elicit certain behavior from which one can make inferences about certain characteristics of an individual’’. It follows from this definition that a test is a measurement instrument designed to elicit a specific sample of an individual’s knowledge or behavior. A test is an instrument of assessment.

2.2.3.1 Types of Tests

Harrison (1987) outlined four types of tests available to language teachers. They are: placement test, diagnostic test, achievement test, and proficiency test.

Placement test is designed to sort new students into teaching groups, so that they can start a course at approximately same level as the other students in the classroom. It is concerned with student’s present standing, and so relates to general ability rather than specific points of learning.

Diagnostic test (Formative or Progress test) checks on students’ progress in learning particular element of the course. In order to know what knowledge has been attained by students and what is yet to be understood, one can draw on diagnostic test.

Achievement test (Attainment or Summative test) is used by teachers to check the progress and what has been attained during and at the end of a particular course. It is intended to show the standard which the student have now reached in relation to other students at the same stage.

Proficiency test aims to assess the students’ ability to apply in actual situations what he/she has learnt. It is dependent of a particular syllabus, and provides a broad view of a person’s language ability.

Oral assessment can be carried out through all of these types of tests.

2.2.3.2 Qualities of a good test

A test is really useful when it takes into account these different qualities:

a) Validity: It is concerned with whether a test measures what it is intended to measure (Weir, 1990). Test designers should ask themselves whether they are actually testing what they think they are testing, and whether what they think they are testing is what they ought to be testing.

b) Reliability: It is the test consistency. Reliability is concerned with the extent to which we can depend on the test results (Weir, 1990). The circumstances in which the test is taken, the way in which it is marked and the uniformity of the assessment it makes are the aspects that should be taken into account as far as reliability is concerned.

c) Practicality: It is concerned with the administration of a test (Harrison, 1987). Tests should be as economic as possible in time (preparation, sitting and marking) and in cost (materials)

d) Authenticity: According to Bachman (1990), authenticity is defined as a quality of the relationship between features of the test and those of the real life context. There are two approaches on authenticity: the real-life approach which tries to develop tests that mirror the 'reality' of non-test language use, and the interactional ability approach in which the test is linked to a given life situation and interaction.

e) Comparison and Discrimination: All assessment is based on comparison, whether between one student and another, or between the student as he/she is now and as he/she was earlier, or between the students' capability and the task the test requires him/her to perform.

f) Backwash effects: It is the effect of assessment on teaching. Backwash can be harmful or beneficial. There is a positive backwash when students are motivated to learn more from the test. Negative backwash is a kind of demotivation.

Having all of this in mind, it is important to know about communicative language teaching and assessment.

2.3 Communicative Language Teaching and Assessment

Talking about communicative Language Teaching and Assessment in this research work is not by chance because we are mainly concerned with the speaking skill. There is necessarily a need for communication in speaking since we cannot speak alone. The teaching and assessment of speaking should thus be carried out communicatively. Accordingly, it is compulsory to grasp what is meant by communicative competence.

2.3.1 Communicative competence

As a basis for investigating communicative competence, I begin by defining what communication is. Morrow (1977) describes seven features which characterize communication. According to him, communication

- is interaction-based
- is unpredictable in both form and message
- varies according to sociolinguistic discourse context
- is carried out under performance limitations such as fatigue, memory constraints, and unfavourable environmental conditions
- always has a purpose (to establish social relations, to express ideas and feelings)
- involves authentic, as opposed to textbook contrived language
- is judged to be successful or unsuccessful on the basis of actual outcomes.

According to Ellis (1994, p.696), communicative competence is "the knowledge that users of a language have internalized to enable them to understand and produce messages in the language". It comprises four areas of knowledge: linguistic competence (knowledge of linguistics forms), sociolinguistic competence (the ability to use language appropriately in contexts), strategic competence (knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communicative strategies) and discourse competence (coherence and cohesion). (Canal and Swain, 1980)

2.3.2 Communicative Language Teaching

According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) starts with a theory of language as communication. The classroom goal of instruction is focused on developing learners' communicative competence. In CLT, meaning is most important. In order to encourage learners to communicate better, errors should be tolerated with little explicit instruction on language rules (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

Naturally, CLT favours small group activities by students to maximize the time each student has to negotiate meaning. CLT employs information-gap activities, problem-solving tasks, and role-plays through pair and group work (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

Another feature of CLT is its "learner-centredness view of foreign language teaching" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). According to Savignon (1991), every individual student possesses unique interests, styles, needs and goals. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers develop materials based on students' demonstrated needs of a particular class.

CLT emphasizes the use of authentic materials in teaching language (Widdowson, 1996). It also encourages giving learners the opportunity to respond to genuine communicative needs in real-life situations. This is to help learners develop strategies for understanding language as actually used by native speakers (Canale and Swain, 1980).

2.3.3 Communicative Language Assessment

Communicative language assessment is used with the goal of measuring language learners' ability to take part in acts of communication or to use language in real life situations. It has some principles and characteristics.

2.3.3.1 Principles of communicative language assessment

Following the model of communicative competence, a team at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) has established four principles of communicative test design (Bailey, 1998).

The first principle is to “start from somewhere.” When designing the test, teachers should state carefully what they expect students to perform when they use the target language in a specific context, which means that test writers must know what they want to test.

The second principle is “concentration on content”. The content here refers to not only topics but also tasks that will be implemented. Appropriate content matches or fits learners' or test takers' age, proficiency level, interests, and goals/needs.

The third principle of communicative test design is “bias for best.” This means that teachers should bear in mind that they should create a test that can exploit test takers' performance at their best.

The fourth principle is “working on backwash”. In order to obtain positive backwash, teachers should create clear marking criteria that will be provided to both teachers and students. Course objectives and test content are also put into consideration in the hope of promoting positive backwash.

2.3.3.2 Characteristics of communicative language assessment

According to Brown (2005), there are five requirements for setting up a communicative test. These include: meaningful communication, authentic situation, unpredictable language input, creative language output, and integrated language skills .

This chapter reviews the literature on the competency based education which is the teaching methodology implemented in Benin. It also discussed some basic points on assessment and testing and the communicative language teaching and assessment. The next chapter focus on the methodology used to examine teachers' opinions about the assessment of speaking in Benin EFL context.

Chapter three: Research Methodology

In this chapter, information is given about the methodology used in the research work. It describes the design of the study, the setting, the participants, the data collection instrument and procedure, and the data analysis procedure. But before starting the description of the methodology, it is important to state once more the research question: “what do EFL teachers think about the assessment of spoken English in their classrooms?”

This question addresses some aspects which are worth mentioning:

- Does oral evaluation have any meaning and importance to EFL teachers?
- What strategies do EFL teachers use to carry out oral evaluation in their classrooms, if they do it?
- What difficulties do EFL teachers come across while conducting oral tests?
- What do EFL teachers do to overcome these difficulties?

3.1 Design of the Study

Qualitative approach was the method used to carry out this research work. Qualitative research method seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. It is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviours, and social contexts of particular populations. So, I think that qualitative research method is really appropriate for this research work because the study aims to investigate on EFL teachers' opinions and perspectives about the assessment of speaking in their classroom.

3.2 Setting

This research work was carried out in OUEME-PLATEAU. In the department of OUEME, Lycée Behanzin, Lycée Toffa 1^{er}, CEG Ouando, CEG Agbokou, CEG Djassin, and CEG Les Cocotiers were the secondary schools taken into consideration. All of these schools are in the town of Porto-Novo. In the department of PLATEAU, I chose to work on CEG Tatonnonkon and CEG1 Ikipinlè in the area of Adja-ouèrè, and CEG Ita-djèbou and CEG2 Sakété in the area of Sakété. The main reason for choosing to work on this setting is that it will be easier for me to quickly gather information from the participants.

3.3 Participants

The participants of this research work were thirty (30) EFL teachers from the secondary schools cited in the setting. In each school, three (3) EFL teachers were taken into consideration. The following table gives detailed information about the participants.

Table1: Information about the participants

Schools	Participants	Gender		Teaching Experience	
		F	M	1-5 years	More than 5 years
Lycée Behanzin	3	0	3	2	1
Lycée Toffa 1er	3	2	1	1	2
CEG ouando	3	0	3	0	3
CEG Djassin	3	1	2	1	2
CEG Agbokou	3	1	2	1	2
CEG Les cocotiers	3	2	1	1	2
CEG Tatonnonkon	3	0	3	2	1

CEG1 IKpinle	3	2	1	0	3
CEG2 Sakété	3	0	3	1	2
CEG Ita-Djèbou	3	1	2	2	1
Total	30	9	21	11	19
Percentage	100%	30%	70%	36,67%	63,33%

It can be seen from the table that three (3) EFL teachers participated from each of the ten (10) schools selected. As far as gender is concerned, 09 (30%) female and 21 (70%) male responded to the questionnaire addressed to them. 11 (36,67%) were the participants having a teaching experience of one to five years, and 19 (63,33%) had a teaching experience of more than 5 years. Only EFL teachers were chosen for this research work because they are the ones teaching the English language to students. Their opinions as far as the assessment of speaking is concerned are very important and we can collect useful information from them for this research work.

3.4 Research Instrument

In order to examine the EFL teachers' perspectives about the assessment of speaking in Benin EFL classrooms, a questionnaire was addressed to them.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was the only instrument for gathering data from the participants. It offered me some advantages in this study. For example, it helped me to have access to a greater number of teachers' opinions and attitudes. In addition, it required little time, was low cost and practical, and enabled the researcher to make group comparison easily (Oppenheim, 2001). A combination of both close- ended

and open- ended questions was used in the questionnaire. The close- ended questions were the questions that were answered by yes or no. The open- ended question were the ones that allowed the participants to explain their choices and gave them the freedom to say what they think about the topic being discussed.

The questionnaire was composed of ten questions. Questions 1 to 3 were about the teaching of the speaking skill and its importance in EFL classrooms. Questions 4 and 5 were about to know the importance of the assessment of speaking for EFL teachers. Questions 6 and 7 were for strategies to carry out speaking tests. Questions 8 and 9 concerned the problems of the speaking tests and how to overcome them. The last question was to know the EFL teachers' perspectives about the introduction of oral tests in classrooms summative evaluations, and the ways oral tests are done in Benin national exams (BEPC and BAC).

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

After the questionnaire was designed and validated by my thesis supervisor, I selected the setting. Fifty copies of the questionnaire were distributed directly to EFL teachers who accepted to participate in the study but only thirty were returned. The aims of the study were explained to the participants. Some teachers asked me to wait to collect the questionnaires back at the same time while others asked me to come back for the collection. The distribution and the collection of the copies of the questionnaire took place in one month time.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

In this study, the analysis was done following the order of the different sections of the questionnaire from which data are collected. The first section concerns the EFL teachers' perspectives about the teaching of speaking and its importance for them. The second section deals with the importance of the assessment of speaking for EFL

teachers. The third section takes into consideration EFL teachers' strategies for carrying out speaking tests. The fourth section concerns the problems encountered by EFL teachers while doing speaking tests and how they deal with these difficulties. The last section is about EFL teachers' points of view about the introduction of speaking tests in classrooms summative evaluations.

For the open-ended items (questions for which the participants answer freely and give their points of view), the similar answers were put together. Some terms were induced and conclusions were drawn from the answers to these questions.

For the close-ended items (questions for which the participants answer by yes or no) of the questionnaire, the analysis were done through descriptive statistics. The percentages were calculated for each of the items.

This chapter provides detailed information about the setting, participants, instruments, and the procedure of data collection and analysis. The next chapter presents the data and their interpretations.

Chapter four: Presentation and Interpretation of Data

This is the chapter of the presentation and analysis of the data. The presentation and interpretations are done following the order of the different sections of the questionnaire from which data are collected. The first section concerns the EFL teachers' perspectives about the teaching of speaking and its importance for them. The second section deals with the importance of the assessment of speaking for EFL teachers. The third section takes into consideration EFL teachers' strategies for carrying out speaking tests. The fourth section concerns the problems encountered by EFL teachers while doing speaking tests and how they deal with these difficulties. The last section is about EFL teachers' points of view about the introduction of speaking tests in classrooms summative evaluations.

4.1 Teaching speaking and its importance for EFL teachers

This very first section is composed of the first three items of the questionnaire. The first question is to know the reasons for introducing speaking in English teaching curriculum in Benin. For this item,

-10 (33,33%) participants responded that speaking is introduced in English teaching curriculum in Benin to help students have the ability to speak and to express themselves in English in real world communication,

-10 (33,33%) participants responded that a language is first spoken everywhere in the world and we can't teach English without taking this into account,

-5 (16,66%) participants responded that English is an international and the most spoken language in the world

-4 (13,33%) participants responded that the goal of language teaching can't be achieved without speaking,

-1 (3,33) participant said that for long time, English had been taught through Grammar- based and our students were not able to speak English. So, it is to remedy to this that speaking is introduced in the curriculum.

The second question was to know about the reasons why speaking holds the first place in the three disciplinary competencies we have in the English curriculum. For it,

-18 (60%) participants stated that a language is first spoken and speaking is the first productive skill in language teaching and learning.

-3 (10%) participants responded that it is because speaking is the skill most used in real life situations.

-3 (10%) participants responded that without speaking, the teaching and learning process is not completed.

-2 (6,66%) participants asserted that speaking holds the first place because curriculum designers wanted to remedy the problem of students not being able to speak English in and out of the classroom.

-2 (6,66%) participants stated that we know that somebody masters a language through their fluency in speaking, not in writing.

-2 (6,66%) participants gave no answers to this question.

The last question in this item is to know if EFL teachers teach speaking in their classrooms and how they do it.

The following table shows the participants' positions about teaching speaking

Table 2: EFL teachers' positions about teaching speaking

Answers	Participants	Percentage
Yes	25	83,33%
No	05	16,67%

This tables shows that 25 (83,33%) EFL teachers teach speaking in their classrooms while 05 (16,67%) EFL teachers do not teach speaking.

Among the 25 participants who teach speaking, 08 (32%) do it through listening and repeating, pictures descriptions, dialogues, role-plays, short stories, debates, and asking and answering questions; 05 (20%) teach it through visual aids and realia; 05 (20%) teach it through brainstorming, presentation, class project group, individual work, pair-work and group work; and 07(28%) don't mention how they proceed in teaching speaking.

02 of the 05 participants who don't teach speaking stated they don't know how to do it, 02 asserted that they don't have time for it and the remaining one participant gives no reason.

A deep analysis of these data shows that teaching speaking is very important for EFL teachers. They give many reasons why speaking is introduced in Benin EFL teaching curriculum. From their responses, we can assert that speaking is taught to enable Benin students to communicate fluently in English everywhere they are. From their responses to the second question, it can be induced that speaking holds the first place in all of the language skills we have: a language is first spoken before being written and we know that somebody masters a language when they are able to speak it.

However, if we take a look at the data presented, we can notice that this very important skill without which a language can't be mastered is not taught by some teachers in Benin secondary schools. Some of the participants say that they teach speaking but are not able to mention the way they do it. Others cannot make a distinction between strategies and class organisation in a skill teaching. Accordingly, we can assert that one of the reasons why Benin learners, after seven years of learning English are not able to speak this important and international language lies in the fact that the teaching of speaking is not well done or is not done at all.

The next section concerns the EFL teachers' opinions about the importance of the assessment of speaking.

4.2 Importance of oral tests for EFL teachers

This section takes into account the questions 4 and 5 of the questionnaire. The first question in this section is to know about how EFL teachers determine their learners' level of performance in speaking. For this item,

-18 (60%) participants responded the level of their students is determined through their way of speaking English, paying attention to fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation,

-10 (33,33%) participants responded that the level of their students is determined through regular assessment, and

-2 (6,67%) participants give no answer.

The second item of this section is to know if the assessment of speaking is important for EFL teachers. The following table shows their response to the question.

Table3: EFL teachers' positions about the assessment of speaking

Answers	Participants	Percentage
Yes	28	93,33%
No	02	6,67%

The 28 participants for whom the assessment of speaking is important justified their choice. They said that the assessment of speaking help teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching, to check their learners' level of performance in speaking. They also said that it was a way of inciting and motivating students to pay attention to speaking lessons.

The 02 participants for whom it is not important to assess speaking asserted that the assessment of speaking is a way of punishing shy students and demotivating them to learn English.

The conclusion we can draw from these data is that the assessment of speaking is very important for EFL teachers. They give many advantages that come from the assessment of speaking. Teachers can carry out oral tests in order to improve their own teaching, to see how well their learners are learning, to motivate learners to pay attention to speaking lessons and to practise the speaking skill.

This is the response to my first research question which is to know about the importance of the assessment of speaking for EFL teachers. The next section presents the EFL teachers' strategies used to carry out speaking tests.

4.3 Strategies used by EFL teachers to carry out speaking tests

Questions 6 and 7 of the questionnaire addressed to EFL teachers are the ones concerning this section. The first part of the question number 6 seeks to know if EFL teachers carry out speaking tests in their classrooms. The following table describes their responses to this question.

Table 4: Do EFL teachers carry out speaking tests?

Answers	Participants	Percentage
Yes	11	36,67%
No	19	63,33%

This table shows that only 36,67% of the participants carry out speaking tests in their classrooms and 67,33 don't do it.

The second part of the sixth question is to know the strategies through which speaking tests are carried out for the EFL teachers who do it, and the reasons why others don't carry out speaking tests in their classrooms.

From the 11 participants who carry out speaking tests in their classrooms,

- 05 (45,45%) are not able to mention clearly the strategies they use for carrying out speaking tests,
- 02 (18,18%) carry out speaking tests through oral presentation
- 02 (18,18%) carry out speaking tests through debates or discussion on interesting topics,
- 02 (18,18%) carry out speaking tests through oral questions and answers about the functions learnt or after reading or listening to a text.

The 19 participants who don't carry out speaking tests in their classrooms give many reasons why they don't do it.

- 11 (57,89%) of them said that speaking is not generally evaluated in Benin and don't know how they will manage to do it,
- 03 (15,78%) of these participants raised the problem of lack of relevant materials that can be used to carry out speaking tests and the problem of lack of objectivity in grading,
- 03 (15,78%) of them said that our classrooms are overcrowded and speaking will be time consuming, and
- The remaining 02 (10,52%) participants asserted that it is a way of demotivating students who are shy or afraid of oral tests.

As for the seventh question of the questionnaire which seeks to know if EFL teachers know other strategies that can be used to carry out speaking tests, the participants propose the following strategies: promotion of English clubs, storytelling, picture description, comparison of things, and listening and repetition.

If we analyse deeply all of the data above, we could notice that there is a serious problem in the field speaking assessment in Benin EFL teaching context. First of all, the data reveal that the majority of Benin EFL teachers don't carry out speaking tests in their classrooms. To justify this, they said that they didn't know how to do it and the Benin EFL teaching curriculum gives no place to speaking tests except during our

national exams (BEPC and BAC). They also raised the problems of lack of relevant materials, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of objectivity in grading

Second, some of our EFL teachers pretend to carry out speaking tests in our classrooms, but they were not able to mention or explain the strategies they use. Others mentioned the following strategies: oral presentations, debate or discussion on interesting topics, and oral questions and answers on a function learnt or after reading or listening to a text. But are these strategies really relevant? Do they really help to reach the goals and purposes of assessment? Discussions will be made on them in the last chapter of this work.

To answer my second research question which the following:” What strategies do EFL teachers use to carry out oral evaluation in their classrooms, if they do it?”, I can simply say that the majority of Benin EFL teachers don't carry out oral evaluation in their classrooms. Those who do it use oral presentation, debate or discussion on topics and interactive questions and answers. The next section is to know about the difficulties encountered by those who carry out speaking tests and what they do to overcome these difficulties.

4.4 Difficulties of oral evaluations for EFL teachers and how they overcome them

This section covers the questions 8 and 9 of the questionnaire. Only the 11(36.67%) participants who carry out speaking tests in their classrooms responded to these questions. The question number 8 is to know what difficulties EFL teachers come across while carrying out speaking assessment. The following table gives precise information about the different problems encountered by EFL teachers while dealing peaking assessment.

Table 5: EFL teacher's difficulties in assessing speaking

Problems	Participants	Percentage
Problems of time management due to overcrowded classrooms	11	100%
Lack of relevant materials	8	72,72%
Lack of necessary vocabulary and grammar for students	6	54,54%
Problems of marking objectively	9	81,81%
Reluctance of students to participate	5	45,45%

All of the 11 EFL teachers who carry out speaking tests in their classrooms have the problems of time management due to the numbers of students they have in their classrooms. They don't know how they will manage to get all of their learners involved in the speaking tests.

8 (72.72%) of the participants raised the problem of lack of relevant materials that can be used to carry out speaking tests.

6 (54,54%) participants have the difficulties of their students lacking necessary vocabulary and grammar to speak English.

9 (81,81%) of them have the problems of marking objectively speaking evaluations.

5 (45,45%) have students who are reluctant to speaking tests.

Actually, it is obvious that Benin EFL teachers point out these different problems especially the ones of overcrowded classrooms, lack of relevant materials and objective marking. But we cannot let down the assessment of speaking because of them. We don't have language laboratories and other materials in our schools. But we can use

others practical materials that we have to assess speaking. Discussion will be made on this part in the next chapter.

The question number 9 of the questionnaire is to know about how EFL teachers manage to overcome the difficulties they come across while carrying out speaking tests.

Among the 11 participants who raised the problem of overcrowded classrooms, 6 (54,54%) didn't mention the way they deal with this problem; 3 (27,27%) said that they carry out oral evaluation in small group and reduce the tasks; and 2 (18,18%) said that they avoid assessing all of their learners the same day.

For the problem of the lack of necessary vocabulary and grammar for students, all of the respondents stated that they motivate learners and provide them with necessary needs so that the message will be conveyed.

The problem of reluctance to participate is dealt with by motivating students to speak.

The respondents didn't mention how they manage to overcome the problems of lack of relevant materials and marking objectively.

This section provides answers to my last two research questions which are about to know the difficulties EFL teachers come across while conducting oral tests and their attitudes towards these difficulties. Discussions will be made on these difficulties and how to overcome them in the next chapter. The last section of this chapter concerns EFL teachers' points of view about the introduction of speaking tests in classrooms summative evaluations.

4.5 EFL teachers' perspectives on introducing oral tests in classrooms summative evaluations

In this last section, only the question number 10, which is the last question of the questionnaire, is taken into consideration. The question seeks to know what EFL

teachers think about introducing speaking tests in our classrooms summative evaluations. For this question, all of the 30 participants responded that it will be a good thing to introduce speaking tests in our summative classrooms evaluations and to review how oral tests are carried out in Benin official national exams (BEPC and BAC). This is a call for the curriculum designers to think about how they will manage so that speaking tests will be officially introduced in our classrooms evaluations.

This chapter presents and interprets the data collected. All of the four research questions guiding this study have been responded to in this chapter. The next chapter which is the last in this work describes the discussions made on the findings, and some suggestions and recommendations made.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Recommendations and Suggestions

In this very last chapter, possible discussions are first made about the data presented and interpreted in the previous chapter. Second, some recommendations are made to Benin authorities and English curriculum designers for the betterment of EFL teaching. Third, there are some suggestions made to EFL teachers and students.

5.1 Discussions

This section is carried out basing on the research questions stated in the first chapter of this work. The first research question is about the importance of the assessment of speaking for EFL teachers. The second one is to know if EFL teachers carry out speaking assessment and the strategies they use to do it. The third question is about the difficulties encountered while carrying out speaking assessment. The last question is to know about the way EFL teachers deal with these difficulties.

5.1.1 Importance of speaking assessment

Basing on the data presented in the previous chapter, we can say that the assessment of speaking is very important for EFL teachers. They know about how important it is to carry out speaking tests in a language classroom. They also point out the positive impacts the assessment of speaking has on both teaching and learning. This is already a step forward because, before putting something into practice, we should recognise its utilities. If teachers are trained and asked to do speaking assessment, they will do it because they already know its importance.

5.1.2 Strategies for carrying out speaking assessment

First of all, it is important to point out here that the findings show that the majority of Benin EFL teachers don't carry out speaking assessment in their classrooms. This is a serious matter. How can a teacher know if his/her students are doing well as far as the speaking skill is concerned if he/she doesn't assess them from time to time? All of the participants in the research are aware of the benefits that can be drawn from speaking assessment, but they don't do it. We may thus say that, if EFL

learners don't pay a careful attention to speaking lessons, it is because this important skill is not assessed in their classrooms.

Then, it is important to discuss the strategies used by EFL teachers to carry out speaking assessment in their classrooms. The data reveal that oral presentation, debate or discussion on interested topics, and oral questions and answers on a function learnt or after reading or listening to a text are the strategies used by the minority of EFL teachers who carry out speaking assessment in their classrooms.

Oral presentation

This strategy consists in the fact that the teacher gives a passage or a topic to a student or a group of students who work on it at home and come to present it to the rest of the class. If I refer to the characteristics of communicative assessment presented by Brown (2005), I can say that this strategy is not relevant and communicative. Oral presentation does not require meaningful communication because, most of the time, the students just cram their presentation from home, or they just read to the class. They are sometimes unable to explain their work or speak without their documents. Moreover, oral presentation does not put students in authentic and unpredictable situation. Furthermore, we cannot ask beginner students, those who are in the first or second form for example, to prepare something from home and come to present it to the class in English. There will be a problem of communication breakdown because students will lack the words they can use to communicate. So this strategy is not good for the assessment of the oral proficiency of our learners, especially those who are in beginner classes.

Debate or discussion

These are good strategies. But, the problem is how the teacher can organise the debate or discussion done as assessment. Is it done with the whole class or between an individual students and the teacher who assesses? If it is done with the whole class, then the teacher will have problem to mark objectively each student. If it is done between individual students and the teacher, for how long will it take place? Then the teacher will have the problem of time management. It is also important to point out here that

debate or discussion cannot be used as strategies of speaking assessment for beginner students whose vocabulary is naturally poor.

Questions/Answers

This strategy can also be called interview. I think that it is a good strategy through which EFL teachers can carry out speaking assessment in their classrooms. It can be carried out in every class, even in beginner classes. The teacher can ask questions on a passage that he/she reads to students. He/she can also base the interview on functions taught to students. The important point here is that the teacher should try to relate the assessments closely to the speaking lessons that precede them.

5.1.3 Difficulties in assessing spoken English and how to deal with them

The data pointed out the different difficulties EFL teachers encounter while carrying speaking assessment in their classrooms. These are: problems of time management due to overcrowded classrooms we have, lack of relevant assessment materials, lack of necessary vocabulary for students, reluctance of students to participate, and problems of marking objectively.

Problems of time management

Without doubt, one of the biggest difficulties facing English teachers in Benin EFL classrooms is dealing with the overcrowded classrooms, and this also impacts oral assessment. It is certainly a serious matter. Suppose that a teacher has fifty students in his/her classroom, and he/she wants to carry out a five-minute speaking assessment to each of them. He/she needs more than four hours to cover the assessment of all of his/her students. He/she will thus waste more than one week of English teaching only for oral assessment. This example shows that it really difficult for EFL teacher to carry out speaking assessment.

However, this problem should not prevent teachers from doing oral assessments. Teachers are not obliged to devote all of a class section to speaking assessment. Instead of waiting to assess all of the students together, the teacher may decide to devote thirty minutes to the assessment of speaking during each class section. He/she may also

decide to monitor and evaluate each student's classroom work. This can be done by testing several students each week as they do the tasks set in class. The key to dealing with overcrowded problems is the ability to adapt to each individual class, and not trying to implement one standard program.

Lack of relevant assessment materials

Teachers are right when they raise the problem of lack of relevant assessment materials. There are no language laboratories in Benin secondary schools. There is even no electricity in most of Benin villages where there are secondary schools. But EFL teachers don't have to wait for sophisticated materials before starting speaking assessment in their classrooms. With an audiotape and a recorder, they can do speaking tests. Also, they can use their multimedia handsets for it. So there is no reason for letting down speaking assessment because of lack of materials.

Lack of necessary vocabulary for students

If the assessment is closely related to the previous teaching and takes into account the level of the students, I think that students will not lack words to express themselves. Teachers can have this problem when they carry out speaking assessment through oral presentation, debate, and discussion.

Reluctance of students to participate

Lack of motivation may be the source of this problem. If students are really motivated, they will not be reluctant to the assessment of speaking. Also Benin students are always serious when it comes to a test which will be marked. If students are informed that the assessment will be marked, they will automatically get involved in it.

Problems of marking objectively

Naturally, there is much of subjectivity in speaking assessment. This is quite normal because speaking itself is subjective. If, for example, you make a statement for fifty different people, it is fair to assume that how each person interprets the utterance will vary somewhat. But this can be dealt with and this requires more thought and preparation at both the planning and assessment stage. Speaking assessment can be

designed to allow good deal of objectivity. In considering how we may create and evaluate our tests, two factors are crucial:

- that the test has a clearly defined and realistic target or goal in which the learner may demonstrate his/her ability to use the language.

- that there is a set of well defined set of criteria in place for assessing how successful the task has been carried out. (Kim, 2003)

To reduce subjectivity in the assessment of speaking, it is also important to record the task carried out, because spoken words disappear, unless they are recorded.

The next section is for recommendations

5.2 Recommendations

Taking into account the data presented, interpreted and discussed, some recommendations are made to Benin government and Benin EFL curriculum designers.

5.2.1 Recommendations to Benin government.

First, I would like to ask the government to promote the pre-service and in-service teachers training. It is through training that teachers will know the ‘‘hows and whys’’ of everything concerning the teaching job. If teachers are not trained, they will not succeed in their job, they will just do things as it pleases them. Many of the participants stated that they don't do speaking assessment because they don't know how to do it. So the progressive training for teachers is very important.

Second, the government should try to provide schools and teachers with adequate materials that are needed for teaching. Today, many schools don't have library yet. How can good language teaching and learning be done without books that are available for both teachers and students? Moreover, language laboratories are compulsory for a good language assessment, but there is no language laboratory in our schools. The government should think about all of this.

Finally, the government should do all of its best for the betterment of Benin educational system because education is a key to the sustainable development of a country.

5.2.2 Recommendations to EFL curriculum designers

In the educational system of Benin, only two skills (reading and writing) are regularly assessed at school. Listening and speaking are not taken into account during summative assessment. These last two skills are only evaluated in the second part of the official examinations of the secondary school: BEPC and BAC. So, the first examination takes place after four successful years of English learning, and the second one, three years later. How can learners, whose goal is generally to get good marks, really acquire the speaking skill if they know that they are not going to be formally evaluated in it in the classroom? Since marks are precious and are one of the sources of motivation to learners, it will be good if curriculum designers try to introduce the speaking assessment in everyday summative assessment. The data showed that teachers are ready to use it if it is introduced.

They should also think of providing well defined oral assessment format and criteria through which the assessments will be marked for both classroom summative and official national exams as it is for the written tests.

The next section is for suggestions

5.3 Suggestions

Some practical suggestions are made not only to EFL teachers but also to EFL students in this section.

5.3.1 Suggestions to EFL teachers

First, it is important for EFL teachers to review the way they are teaching speaking. If speaking is taught through grammar-based approach, the goal of teaching it, which is to help students speak English, will never be reached. So it is imperative to teach speaking through communicative activities i.e. activities which bring students into the

real life communication and make them practise the speaking skill in the classroom. These activities are role-plays, simulations, information gap activities, drama, problem solving, picture description, discussions, etc.

Second, as it is described in the previous chapter, many Benin EFL teachers don't carry out speaking assessment in their classroom. So, I want to suggest to them to simply use the tasks through which they have taught the speaking lessons for the speaking assessment. If, for example, they have taught speaking through role-play, picture description, they may simply assess their students through these strategies. They can also use interview as strategy for the assessment of speaking in their classrooms.

Interview is the assessment strategy which consists in the fact that the teacher asks questions to a single student who provides answers to them. The teacher may ask questions basing on passages read to students. He/she may also ask real life questions related to the previous speaking lessons. Interview is really a direct test of language use. It measures oral skills by having the examinees actually speak. It can also be done in all of Benin EFL classes. Through interview, teachers will know how well students have mastered the functions or speaking abilities taught to them.

Third, EFL teachers should always motivate students on the assessment of speaking by explaining them its importance and by being flexible and fair. They should always provide well defined criterion on which their speaking tests will be marked and explain clearly these criterion to students. Also, EFL teachers should try to record the performance of each student so as to assure objective marks of the tests.

Finally, EFL teachers should not always wait for the government to buy all the materials they need. They should invest in their job by buying books so as to train themselves in order to do a good teaching job.

5.3.2 Suggestions to EFL learners

EFL learners should know that they are the center of the teaching/learning process. So, they should always remind their teachers to teach them speaking lessons. They should also insist for the speaking assessment to be done in their classrooms so as to prepare them for real life communication. They should also learn their lessons every

time and try to read English books and papers. Finally, EFL learners should try to practice the speaking skill everywhere they are in order to improve their speaking skill because the more they are practicing, the more competent speaker they will become.

This last chapter gives detailed information about the discussions made on the data, the recommendations for Benin government and English curriculum designers, and the suggestions made to EFL teachers and learners.

CONCLUSION

The present research was set up to explore EFL teachers' opinions about the assessment of spoken English in their classrooms. The study sought to answer the following research questions: Does oral evaluation have any meaning and importance to EFL teachers? What strategies do EFL teachers use to carry out oral evaluation in their classrooms, if they do it?, What difficulties do EFL teachers come across while conducting oral tests?, and What do EFL teachers do to overcome these difficulties?

The findings revealed that the majority of Benin EFL teachers, in spite of the fact that they recognise how it is important to carry out speaking assessment in their classrooms, don't do it. The findings also showed that the minority of the EFL teachers who carry out speaking tests do it through oral presentation, debate or discussion, and questions/answers. The difficulties encountered by these teachers concern generally the problem of time management due to the class size, the lack of relevant materials, and the problem of marking oral assessment objectively. Finally, all of participants are of the opinion of introducing speaking tests in the summative classrooms evaluation.

An important deal of work needs therefore to be done as far as the assessment of speaking is concerned in Benin. If teachers teach speaking and don't assess it, it is because they are no trained for it and the curriculum doesn't ask them to do so. It is thus important for the government and English curriculum designers to take into account the different recommendations made to them in this work. EFL teachers should know that nothing must prevent them from assessing the speaking skill in their classrooms work because, if we assess badly (i.e. if we leave a skill in our assessment), students will learn badly, no matter how good we are teaching.

The most obvious limitation of this study is the small number of participants. Only thirty ELF teachers participated in the study when there are hundreds of them in Benin. Also, we have twelve departments in Benin and this work is based on only two of them. Because of this, the findings cannot be generalised to the whole Benin without further research which will take into account a more broad setting and use more research instruments.

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5- Does the assessment of speaking in CBA have any importance to you?

No

Yes

If yes, what is its importance?.....

.....

If no, why?.....

6- As an EFL teacher in Benin, do you carry out speaking tests in your classrooms?

Yes

No

If yes, what strategies do you use?

.....

.....

If no, why?.....

.....

7- what other strategies and techniques you think we can use to carry out speaking tests in our EFL classrooms?.....

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8- If you carry out speaking tests in your classrooms, what difficulties do you come across?.....

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9- How do you overcome or deal with these difficulties?.....

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10- What do you think about introducing speaking tests in our summative and national exams?

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Once more, thank you very much for your collaboration and help. May God bless you and provide for all your needs.