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**DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY EFL
LEARNERS WHILE DEVELOPING
WRITING SKILLS IN BEGINNERS'
CLASSES: A CASE STUDY OF CEG
AKPASSA**

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to:

My parents Ernest T. MEDEDA and Cathérine M. DJEDJE for their love and care, their moral and financial assistance. May God bless and take care of them. My nephew Primaël S. L. KASSA. And my sisters and brothers.

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INTRODUCTION

In the current era, one cannot deal with human beings without thinking about education. It may take place either at home or at school. School education is very important due to the varieties of subjects taught. Among those subjects, I can quote French language, Biology, Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry, English language... The latter is a foreign language taught in secondary schools in the Republic of Benin. This language is taught or learnt through four skills: **listening, speaking, reading, and writing**. It is often taken for granted that speaking a foreign language is more important than writing it. In fact, the importance of writing is coming to be more and more recognised. In so far as, a listener is needed in order to speak, a reader can be found anywhere. And, books and magazines are even handier than audio tapes. I do know and recognise that the teaching of the English language and more specifically that of the writing skill is not an easy task for teachers in Benin, which is a French speaking country. The truth is that as Benin is a French speaking country, the French language is considered as the official language and is allotted the most of the time in the school curriculum. Besides that, English is taken as a foreign language and is given a non-significant place and time in the school curriculum.

Furthermore, whereas the French language is used in all areas of study in the school curriculum in Benin secondary schools, the English language is used only when there is English language class. And learners do not have any other time to practice English apart from the times within which they have English classes. Such a situation makes learners reluctant toward the English language and to the fact of knowing to write in it. In fact in the process of the teaching of English language, teachers focus more on reading and writing. But the way teachers approach the writing skill is not the proper one. Writing, if it appears at all, is given only a small time and even taught swiftly. Faced with this worrying situation, learners ignore this important part and skill of the English language.

Some students will completely leave this part of their work or just jot down something or even introduce French words or expressions in an English language writing work or assessment. This worrying situation led me to decide to work on the topic "Difficulties encountered by EFL learners while developing writing skills in beginners' classes".

Taking into account all that precedes, I can say that the main work is centred on EFL teachers to do their best so that writing can be considered by students as the first skill they have to master before feeling at ease in every field of the English language. This because writing alone accounts for all the four skills. For instance, if one knows to write the word "**Doctor**" that means one can hear it, utter it and read it. I can then say the better one knows to write a language the more he can be skilful in communicative situation in this language. So, the writing skill is as a booster for communication.

This research work is divided into five chapters as follows: The first chapter deals with the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study and the clarification of concepts. The second chapter is about the literature review. In the third chapter, the focus is put on the methodology of the study. The fourth chapter concerns the findings of the study and the fifth and last chapter displays some recommendations and suggestions to the betterment of the situation.

CHAPTER ONE: Identification of the study

This first chapter deals with the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study and the clarification of some concepts of the topic.

1-1- Problem statement

The English language is taught through four main skills: **Listening, speaking, reading** and **writing**. EFL teachers consider writing as the last and less important skill and teach it too carelessly. The ability to write is fundamental to all areas of learning in the school curriculum. Writing has, therefore, to be considered as a powerful tool used in communication. In fact teachers devote all attention, time and care to reading and writing. But, the truth is that they do not deal with the writing skill properly.

Further, I observe that EFL teachers perceive the writing skill as not very essential and important as this is given a small portion in the text books (student's and teacher's books). Although EFL teachers devote very little time to teach writing, they always assess students on it during tests. Surprisingly, they notice that students fail in that part of evaluations. Therefore, some students give blank papers. For those who try to do this exercise their productions are sometimes frivolous and unreasoned. Apparently, students possess limited vocabulary and poor understanding of grammar. That may be the reason why they get difficulties in doing their writing task. So the topic: "Difficulties encountered by EFL learners while developing writing skills in beginners' classes: A case study of CEG Akpassa" is not chosen perchance; it wants to enlighten the difficulties encountered by students as far as writing is concerned and suggest some remedies.

1-2- Purpose of the study

As said earlier, writing is an important skill in the teaching and learning process. The aim in choosing the topic of this research work is first of all to find out some difficulties of EFL students in writing so as to contribute to the improvement of the teaching and learning of writing in Benin secondary schools.

In the second place, this investigation aims at drawing EFL teacher's attention on the importance and the necessity to devote more time and grant more attention to the teaching of writing in their classes. Another purpose of this research work is to arouse interest and motivation in students in learning how to write.

Finally, this investigation aims at proposing some corrective measures to the difficulties encountered by students in writing so as to better the situation.

1-3- Significance of the study

"Difficulties encountered by learners while developing writing skills in EFL beginners' classes: The case study of CEG Akpassa." As a whole, this topic will lead to look for ways that can help tackle the different forms of difficulties related to writing. This topic is significant in so far as it will arouse the consciousness of both EFL teachers and learners on the importance of writing. EFL teachers should do their best to have their students involved and interested in writing activities in the classroom. This study is significant because it will help EFL teachers and learners prevent the disastrous results they get after tests in writing.

The earnest concern in choosing this topic is to disapprove and reject the fact that people think that writing is the fourth skill in language teaching and learning process. Writing must be given a meticulous, painstaking and careful consideration.

1-4- Concepts Clarification

In this section of the first chapter, I am going to elucidate the two main concepts of our study which are *difficulty and writing*. On the one hand, difficulty can be defined according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 8th edition, as "a problem; a thing or situation that causes problems. From the same source, difficulty can also be "the state or quality of being hard to do or to understand; the effort that something involves. It can also be seen as factors that hinders the achievement of a goal.

On the other hand, writing can be defined as "a reflective activity that requires enough time to think about a specific topic and to analyse and classify any background knowledge. Then, writers need a suitable language to structure these ideas in the form of a coherent discourse." Writing can also be seen as "a complex activity, a social act which reflects the writer's communicative skills which are difficult to develop and learn, especially in an EFL context". Further, writing can be seen as a process which involves a number of cognitive and metacognitive activities, for instance; brainstorming, planning, outlining, organizing, drafting, and revising. According to Omaggio Hadley (1993), writing requires composing, which implies the ability either to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narrations or descriptions, or to transform information into new texts, as in expository or argumentative writing. Learning to write is difficult especially for those writing in a second or a foreign language in academic contexts since they do not know enough about how to structure ideas for writing.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature review

This chapter deals with the report of the different readings related to our topic. In fact, the topic we are discussing has been dealt with by many writers and educationists. This chapter is an exploitation of their writings, so as to relate them to our research work.

2-1-Importance of writing

Writing is a medium of communication that represents language through the inscription of signs and symbols. In most languages, writing is a complement to speech or spoken language. Within a language system, writing relies on many of the same structures as speaking, such as vocabulary, grammar and semantics, with the added dependency of a system of signs or symbols, usually in the form of a formal alphabet. The result of writing is generally called text, and the recipient of text is called a reader. Writing has been instrumental in keeping history, dissemination of knowledge through the media and the formation of legal systems.

DONN BYRNE (1979) in *teaching writing skills* thinks that when we write, we use graphic symbols that are letters or combination of letters which relate to the sounds we make when we speak. Then, writing can be said to be the act of forming these symbols. But writing is clearly much more than the production of graphic symbols. The symbols have to be arranged, according to certain conventions, to form words, and words have to be arranged to form sentences, although we can be said to be writing if we are merely making lists of words, as in inventories of items such as shopping lists. As a rule, however, we do not write just one sentence or even a number of unrelated sentences. We produce a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain ways. The sequence may be very short or long or more than one. But, due to the way the sentences have been put in order and linked together, they form a coherent whole. They form what we may call a text. To sum up we can say that writing is the combination of graphic symbols (letters)

so as to have a correct, coherent and cohesive text. This combination, starts from letters to words; words to sentences; sentences to paragraphs and texts.

Writing is useful in two respects: First, it motivates students' thinking, organizing ideas, developing their ability to summarise, analyse and criticise. Second, it strengthens students' learning, thinking and reflecting on the English language. Moreover, the importance of writing can be seen in fifteen points as follows:

- Writing is the primary basis upon which your work, your learning, and your intellect will be judged in college.
- Writing expresses who you are as a person.
- Writing is portable and permanent. It makes your thinking visible.
- Writing helps you move easily among facts, inferences, and opinions without getting confused and without confusing your reader.
- Writing promotes your ability to put worthwhile questions.
- Writing fosters your ability to explain a complex position to readers.
- Writing helps others give you feedback.
- Writing helps you refine your ideas when you give others feedback.
- Writing requires that you anticipate your readers needs. Your ability to do so demonstrates your intellectual flexibility and maturity.
- Writing ideas down preserves them so that you can reflect upon them later.
- Writing out your ideas permits you to evaluate the adequacy of your argument.
- Writing stimulates you to extend a line of thought beyond your first impressions.
- Writing helps you understand how truth is established in a given discipline.

- Writing equips you with the communication and thinking skills you need to participate effectively in any type of conversation.
- Writing is an essential job skill.

To that extent writing is then a worthwhile skill to be taught and learnt. What are the difficulties that hinder good writing?

2-2- Writing difficulties

Most teachers do not grasp the importance of the writing skill, although it requires more basic skills than any other academic subject. Even during their earliest writing exercises, learners have to combine complex physical and cognitive processes to give letters precisely and fluidly. As writing tasks become more difficult, learners have to call on an increasingly wide range of skills so as not to only write legibly, logically and in an organized way but also to respect rules of grammar and syntax. This combination of requirements makes writing the most complex and difficult use of language. In this part of the second chapter, some of those difficulties that prevent learners from writing well will be pointed out.

2-2-1- Grammatical difficulties

☒ **wrong word usage:** Learners don't often know the right word to choose for their meanings. In writing, choosing a wrong word often occurs because one word sounds like another. *Their, there, and they're; its and it's; to, too, and two; who's and whose; where and were* all these words sound the same, but have very different meanings. Contractions can also cause problems. *Should've* sounds like *should of*, but the contraction is actually of the words *should have*.

- Incorrect sentence: Their are two mangoes on the tree.

- Correct sentence: There are two mangoes on the tree.

- Incorrect sentence: You're semester is difficult because your taking too many classes.

- Correct sentence: Your semester is difficult because you're taking too many classes.

☒ **Lack of subject/verb agreement**: The verb in a sentence must agree with the subject in number and person. If the subject is plural, the verb must also be plural. If singular, it must be in singular too. Additionally, if the subject is first person, the verb must also be first person. This is really noticed when learners use the third person of singular. They almost always forget to put the final "S" to the verb.

- Incorrect sentence: Assiba go home on foot.

- Correct sentence: Assiba goes home on foot.

☒ **Lack of pronoun agreement**: Learners do not know what pronoun to use exactly when writing and misuse pronouns. They may use the personal pronoun *you* or *he* when they have to use the possessive pronoun *your* or *him*. This is the case between the reflexive pronouns and the personal pronouns. A pronoun must clearly refer to a person, a thing or an event. Learners must use the pronouns exactly and consistently. The pronoun must agree with the number, gender and type of subject.

- Incorrect sentence: Ali's father punishes he.

- Correct sentence: Ali's father punishes him.

☒ **Unnecessary tense shift**: When writing, learners do not consider the tense of the verb. Learners should use verb tenses consistently and appropriately. If they start out in the present, they should try not to shift for no reason to the past or another tense and vice versa. We know that sometimes one needs to shift tenses to reflect a change in time, but an unnecessary shift can confuse the reader.

☒ **Problems of conjugation:** When dealing with a writing task, most learners do not know how to conjugate or inflect verbs especially the past tense of irregular verbs. Learners added "ed" or "de" to the infinitive to have the past tense or past participle. So the preterit of the verb "to drink" is "drinked" or the one of the verb "to hold" is "holde". The situation is very worrying as even auxiliaries cannot be conjugated without hesitation and they write for the third person singular of "to have"; "he have". This situation also occurs when dealing with the third person singular present with the ending "s". Learners write "he write"; "he do"; "he play".

☒ **Possessives mistakes:** Possessives illustrate ownership/ the possession. Most of the learners know the rules of possession, but in the heat of the moment while they are trying to get their ideas across, they forget to add the possessive or they accidentally add the possessive to a word that should simply be plural.

- Incorrect sentence: Simon decided to join the mens' group.

- Correct sentence: Simon decided to join the men's group.

- Incorrect sentence: The professor was concerned about the students's lack of interest.

- Correct sentence: The professor was concerned about the students' lack of interest.

These grammatical problems are also about punctuation, spelling, organization of ideas into a coherent and cohesive form, and words arrangement in meaningful sequence.

2-2-2- Sentence combination difficulties

Learners do not know how to embed one sentence into another to have a better one instead of separating them into different sentences. Learners can combine two or more sentences into a single sentence. This is done for sentences closely related in meaning, and because it is boring to read a series of short sentences that have a similar structure. For example, learners write:

a- We saw a film. b- The film was made by Jet Li.

The combination of those two sentences may be:

1. We saw a jet Li film. Or
2. We saw a film by Jet Li. Or
3. We saw a film made by Jet Li. Or
4. We saw a film which was made by Jet Li.
5. We saw a film and the film (it) was made by Jet Li.

Sentence combination is particularly valuable in writing programs because it demonstrates the rules of English sentence structure in a concrete way and permits students to generate their own sentences, immediately putting into practice what they have learned.

2-2-3- Transition difficulties

Each sentence should relate logically to the sentence before and after it, to the paragraph it is a part of, and to the text as a whole. Similarly, each paragraph should follow the previous paragraph logically and should anticipate the next. A transition is the process of change from one idea to another. It is also the word or phrase connecting one paragraph of a text to another. Unfortunately, learners do not link their ideas together while writing; they just jump from one idea to another without thinking to use connectors to link their ideas.

2-2-4- Social or cultural disadvantage

In terms of environmental influences on learning, there is evidence that certain groups are over-represented among the population of learners, for example learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Social, cultural and linguistic factors interact for these particular groups, predisposing them to educational risks. Opportunities to learn may be diminished through frequent absences from school, low expectations of success and literacy not being highly valued. For such learners, learning to write effectively may represent such an uphill battle that they opt out of the race. In doing so, the failure gap widens between those with good literacy skills and those without it.

2-2-5- Problems related to the affective side of learners

Writing difficulties are seriously compounded with the detrimental emotional effects of failure that are experienced by most learners. Persistent lack of success causes frustration, loss of motivation and diminishes self-esteem. This in turn causes the student to disengage further from learning and to be resistant to help. Wilson and Trainin (2007) confirm that early perceptions of ability or lack of ability influence students' future levels of engagement and success.

2-2-6- Problems related to French interference

As Benin is a French speaking country, learners are acquainted with the French language from the very beginning of schooling even from home. This phenomenon has negative impact on them when dealing with English in general and writing in particular. And it is easy to see in English a sentence like this: My father is a charpentier. Its meaning in French for them is "Mon pèreestcharpentier". These problems also affect some words spelling. So, learners write "il" instead of "ill"; "socialisme" instead of "socialism"; "capitalisme" instead of "capitalism"; "ressource" instead of "resource"; "developpement" instead of "development"; "environnement" instead of

"environment". To overcome these difficulties teachers should have learners know the difference between French and English words which seemingly have the same spelling

Chapter three: Methodology of the study

To reach my goal, I have used the qualitative and quantitative researches. They include firstly the participants, then, the data collection procedures and the data analysis and their interpretations.

3-1-Participants

This section deals with the target population of this study. The people concerned by this study are the two groups directly involved in the teaching or learning of English in a classroom: EFL learners and EFL teachers. The study has been conducted in CEG Akpassa, Porto-Novo. I have taken into account, all the four forms (6ème, 5ème, 4ème, 3ème) of the first cycle of secondary school. In fact, CEG Akpassa is one of the multiple state schools in Porto-Novo, the capital city of Benin Republic. It is a school for both boys and girls. I chose the four forms of the first cycle to better analyse the situation and try to know exactly about how it happens at each level. But I focus more the investigation on the third form (4ème), and the fourth form (3ème). I do that, because of their level and experience in writing in order to collect reliable data. How have we managed to collect those data?

3-2- Data collection

Here, we will talk about the instrument used to collect the data and the procedures I used in collecting those data.

3-2-1- Research instrument

The instrument used to collect the data is the questionnaires. Indeed, to know really about the difficulties our learners have to write, I addressed questionnaires to both learners and teachers. The questionnaire addressed to learners was written in French so as to help them understand the different questions and get the importance of my study. The questionnaires have played a great and

important role in the data collection as they are the only one instrument we have used to collect the data. A combination of close and open questions has been used to put questions on the questionnaires. That is to say, I put close-ended question. And if needed, this close-ended question is followed by an open-ended question, to allow the participant to explain his or her choice. These questions helped me to get from our participants, what I was expecting. The questionnaires have been filled in anonymously, this to let the participants feel free while giving their answers. A sample of each questionnaire is provided in the appendix page. A total of eighty (80) copies of the questionnaire were addressed to learners and, all of them were filled in and returned. As far as teachers are concerned, a total of twenty five (25) copies were conceived and distributed but twenty two (22) were filled in and returned. Concerning teachers I associated some teachers from neighbouring schools as English language teachers in CEG Akpassa don't reach 25.

3-2-2- Data collection procedures

To collect reliable data, I first went to the school and I went to the classes where teachers welcomed me. Then, I told them what I was there for. I then distributed the questionnaires to learners and explained to them the significance and importance of my study. All those to have them feel free and sincere while answering. Learners filled out their questionnaires on the spot and I waited to get them back. As far as teachers are concerned, I gave them the questionnaires some filled them out on the spot and I had them back at the moment. Some requested some time to fill the questionnaires out. I got those too after teachers had finished to fill them out.

Chapter 4: Findings of the study

4-1- Data analysis

This part of chapter four is consecrated to the presentation and analysis of the main and relevant data collected from various sources. In other words, this section presents the findings of the study and analyses them. This presentation is mainly done through statistical tables to which I added slight explanations to help the reader grasp objectively my research work.

4-1-1- Presentation and analysis of learners' answers

Here are the presentations of the findings of learners questionnaires. Each table corresponds to a question. All the eighty (80) copies were filled in. The respondents here are some learners from form 1 to form 4 of CEG Akpassa.

Table1: Learners level

Question	Answers		Percentage
What form are you in?	FORM 1	12	15%
	FORM 2	16	20%
	FORM 3	22	27.5%
	FORM 4	30	37.5%
Total	80		100%

This table shows that most of the learners are in form 3 and 4. 22 (27.5%) in third form and 30 (37.5%) in form 4, this is to show the importance of the study and to collect reliable and trustful data.

Table2: Importance of English

Question	Answers		Percentage
Do you like English?	Yes	63	78.75%
	No	17	21.25%
Total	80		100%

Through this table, we can see that 63 (78.75%) learners like English. While only 17 (21.25%) do not like it. This means that they know the importance of the English language.

Table3: importance of writing

Question	Answers		Percentage
Do you think that writing is an important activity in English?	Yes	33	41.25%
	No	47	58.75%
Total	80		100%

This table shows that, despite the fact that learners know the importance of the English language, most of them ignore the one of the Writing skill. 47 (58.75%) learners ticked the NO box to answer this question, whereas 33 (41.25%) learners answered yes. Is the problem on the side of learners or on the side of teachers? That is the main question we put at the end of the analysis of this question.

Table4: Learning to do Writing

Question	Answers		Percentage
Have you been taught how to do writing in class?	Yes	14	17.5%
	No	66	82.5%
Total	80		100%

This table shows that most of the learners are not well equipped and prepared for the writing tasks. I noticed that 66 (82.5%) learners have not been taught how to tackle or deal with a writing task. Only 14 (17.5%) say yes to answer the question. This means that teachers are the ones neglecting and ignoring the writing skill; that's why students do not know its importance.

Table5: Writing during tests

Question	Answers		Percentage
Do you do the writing item during tests?	Yes	23	Yes: 28.75%
	No	57	No: 71.25%
Total	80		100%

This table shows that most of the learners do not do the writing item during tests. 57 (71.25%) learners answered no to this question, and 23 (28.75%) said yes. And if I have a look back to the preceding question I establish a link. Learners are not taught the writing, so how can they succeed in doing it?

Table 6: Learner's marks in writing

Question	Answer		Percentage
Do you often get good marks in it?	Yes	08	34.78%
	No	15	65.21%
Total	23		100%

Only 23 learners out of the 80 answered yes to the previous question. Through the answers to this question it can be seen that even among the minority who try to do the writing, most of them do not get good marks. It can be noticed that 15 (65.21%) learners having bad marks out of 23 learners, and only 08 (34.78%) having good marks. The blame is still put on teachers for their ignorance of the importance of this skill in language learning.

Table 7: Reasons for learners' marks

Question	Answer		Percentage
Why don't you get good marks in writing tests?	It is a difficult exercise	02	13.33%
	You don't know how to tackle it	08	53.33%
	You are not motivated by the teacher	05	33.33%
Total	15		100%

15 learners out of the 23 learners get bad marks in writing as it is shown in answers to question n°6. This table shows some reasons why learners fail in writing tasks. I noticed that 02 (13.33%) find writing as a difficult exercise; 08 (53.33%) learners don't know how to tackle or deal with a writing task; and 05 (33.33%) lack motivation.

Question 8:

As far as the last question of the learner's questionnaire is concerned, it asks them what they want from their teachers as help to succeed in writing. Most of the learners want their teachers to help and motivate them, to teach them effectively the ways to deal with writing tasks, and give them exercise to practice it. Learners also say that they should make their own efforts after the teacher's efforts.

4-1-2- Presentation and analysis of teachers' answers

Here is the presentation of the findings from the teacher's questionnaires. Each table corresponds to a question as for the learner's answers analysis. Twenty five (25) questionnaires were distributed to teachers but 22 were filled out.

Question 1:

The first question addressed to teachers was: "how long have you been teaching English?" From their different answers, I noticed that 12 (54.54%) of them started teaching English from at least five (05) years; 06 (27.27%) from three (03) years; and 04 (18.18%) from two (02) years. Unfortunately, none of the teachers I found is not yet at more than seven years of teaching experience.

Table8: Teaching of writing

Question	Answers		Percentage
Do you teach the writing skill to your learners?	Usually	08	36.36%
	Sometimes	14	63.63%
Total	22		100%

It can be seen that only 08 (36.36%) of the teachers usually teach writing in their classes; whereas 14 (63.63%) teach it sometimes.

Table9: Writing easy or difficult for learners

Question	Answers		Percentage
Do your students find writing as an easy task to do?	Yes	00	00%
	No	22	100%
Total	22		100%

All of the teachers ticked the NO box to answer the question. This table shows that teachers know that writing is not easy for learners. Learners find writing as a difficult task.

Table10: Reason why writing is difficult

Question	Answers		Percentage
Why do they find writing so difficult?	Because the instructions are not clear	13	20.63%
	Because they don't know how to deal with it	17	26.98%
	Because they are not motivated to do it	11	17.46%
	Because they lack appropriate tools i.e. grammar, vocabulary, connectors	22	34.92%
Total	63		100%

Here, it has been possible to choose more than one answer. So I got for this question a total of 63 answers. This table shows that all the 22 (34.92%) teachers are conscious of the fact that learners lack appropriate tools to write such as grammar, vocabulary and connectors. 17 (26.98%) teachers know that learners do not know how to deal with a writing task. Besides, 13 (20.63%) also know that the instructions are not clear for learners. And, 11 (17.46%) say that there is lack of motivation for learners. So I may state that teachers know what the work waiting them is.

Table 11: Learners reaction toward writing

Question	Answers		Percentage
Why do they find writing difficult?	They just write something	22	46.80%
	They leave it completely	16	34.04%
	They do it as it has to be done	09	19.14%
Total	47		100%

Here too, it has been possible to choose more than one answer. So I got for this question a total of 47 answers. From the table I can see that all the 22 (46.80%) teachers agree that students try to write something when they are given a writing task. 16 (34.04%) teachers say that learners leave completely the writing. Besides, 09 (19.14%) teachers agree that learners do the writing task as it has to be done. It can then be said that teachers are aware of the fact that learners really ignore the importance of the writing in the learning of a language.

Table12: writing during tests

Question	Answers		Percentage
Do your learners always do the writing during tests?	Sometimes	22	62.85%
	Very often	13	37.14%
Total	35		100%

Once again, it has been possible for teachers to choose more than one answers. So, I got a total of 35 answers. All the 22 (62.85%) teachers agree that learners do the writing sometimes during tests. 13 (37.14%) of them tell that learners do it very often. It may be argued that due to their ignorance of the importance of writing, learners let it down during tests.

Table13: Motivation on writing

Question	Answers		Percentage
Do you motivate them about doing the writing during tests?	Usually	08	36.36%
	Sometimes	14	63.63%
Total	22		100%

From this table we can notice that 14 (63.63%) teachers say that they motivate learners on doing writing during tests sometimes. Whereas, 08 (36.36%) teachers tell that they do it usually. So I can say that learners lack motivation to do the writing.

Question 8:

As far as the last question of the teachers questionnaire is concerned, it asks them what they think can be done to motivate learners to be interested in writing. Most of them say that more time should be granted to writing during classes. Some say that learners should make their own effort by practicing so as to better what they have been taught in class. Others state that learners should be motivated as much as possible so as to get the importance of writing. So I can say that teachers are aware of the great work that should be done to get learners interested in writing.

4-2-Discussion of the data

After the analysis of the different data collected from both teachers and learners I noted that some points were worth discussing. As for question n°2 from learners questionnaire "Do you like English?" it shows that learners like English. But most of them have bad marks for English language tests and evaluations. I can state that learners lack motivation. For the question n°3 "Do you think that writing is an important activity in English?" from learner's questionnaire, it helps know that despite their love of English language, learners do not know the importance of the writing. That explains their bad marks in writing. It is now to teachers to have learners know and get the importance of the writing in the learning of a language. The work is on the side of the teachers, because for the question n°4 "Have you been taught how to do writing in class?" learners answer NO. So teachers have to do their best to teach learners how to write, so as to help them get the importance of the skill. This situation is fostered by their answer to question n°7 "Why don't you get good marks in writing tests?" most of them say they don't know how to tackle a writing task. So when given a writing task they forget about it or just write something for the sake of

writing. As for learners, some points of the teacher's questionnaires analysis deserve discussion.

From the question n°2 "Do you teach the "writing" skill to your learners?" it has been noted that most of the teachers deal with writing in their classes once in a while. This phenomenon has the learners not to grasp the importance of writing and explain their attitude toward writing tasks. The result of the question n°3 "Do your students find writing as an easy task to do?" from teachers questionnaire help me get that teachers are aware of the fact that learners have difficulties when dealing with writing. What I would say is that teachers have to do their best to have learners practice writing by stating clearly the instructions and motivating them. This can help learners overcome writing difficulties. Those difficulties is seen through learners reaction when given a writing task, most of the teachers say that their learners just jot something down on the papers or some learners give blank papers. It can also be said that learners ignore English due to a lack of motivation from their teachers. The result of question n° 7 "Do you motivate them about doing the writing during tests?" clearly confirms that. In so far as most of the teachers confess that they motivate learners occasionally. So teachers have to motivate learners so as to help them really grasp the importance of the writing skill.

Chapter five: Recommendations and suggestions

As indicated by the title, this chapter is about the recommendations and suggestions. It will help various actors to take appropriate measures to improve the teaching/ learning of the English language in Benin.

5-1-Recommendations

In the light of my findings on the topic under consideration, I wrote these words as recommendations to the government and school authorities.

5-1-1- Recommendations to the government

As recommendations to the government, they are as follows:

Teachers should be recruited so that all schools be provided with teachers in order to span the gap created by the lack of teachers. After being recruited, teachers have to be trained. In fact, this is an important issue and I insist on it, the government have to make effort to the effectiveness of the training of teachers. They have to be trained before starting the job, and also, trained during the job. The remark is that most teachers fail in the proper accomplishment of the job. So, if good results are expected from teachers, the in-service training should be organized more frequently. This will help teachers improve their way of teaching and be more efficient and even updated with fresh information on the target language I mean English which is in movement like any other language.

After the recruitment and the training of teachers; the government have to think about their conditions. Teachers should be granted good living and working conditions. The government should take care of the teachers before teachers feel able to take care of learners and also cope with their different attitudes. The salaries of teachers should be raised and their requests satisfied in

order to avoid strikes every year. More classrooms should be built in the schools so as to reduce the overcrowded classes. By doing this, the number of students per class will be reduced and it will be easier for teachers to work appropriately with their learners. This will enable the teaching to take place effectively. The government should also think about the learning conditions of learners. They should facilitate the task to school authorities by: supplying adequate didactic materials; building libraries and laboratories. All this, will enable the teaching and learning process to be a success.

5-1-2- Recommendations to school authorities

Since writing is an extension of thought, I recommend to school authorities to think about the policy of publishing an issue each month of a magazine written by students of the school. They will also organize writing competitions and winners will be given prizes and their names will be announced on the notice board. They should reduce the classes size; create good atmosphere and conditions of work for teachers and learners; inform learners' parents about their children's behaviours and work.

5-2- Suggestions

The main concern of this section is to suggest some procedures which can lead to the improvement of the teaching and learning process of the English language in Benin secondary schools.

5-2-1- Suggestions to teachers

Teachers are playing the most important role and have a great responsibility in the success of the teaching and learning process. Teachers should keep in mind that they have to plan well any lesson and properly, do researches for their own development. By the teacher's own development, I

mean everything done by a teacher day after day to improve his teaching. The teaching of writing requires a lot of effort and this effort has to be granted to its teaching for its effectiveness. If writing is limited only to writing lessons, then the students will have insufficient practical writing experience. Consequently, writing needs to be encouraged and assessed as part of all the English class. Thus, various writing activities are important elements in teaching writing. Since the only way to learn writing is to write, then students should be writing every day because there are different types of writing or writing tasks. Free and controlled writing activities could be developed or adopted by the teacher to be used in different parts of the writing lesson. It is always helpful to encourage students to use different activities and strategies to improve their writing e.g. keep a journal, get a pen-friend, keep copies of everything they write, etc. The implication of this approach is that teachers should require frequent writing exercises from their students. Teachers need to spend a great deal of time checking, marking and giving feedback to their students. If teachers really want to be serious about improving writing, they should have an idea of each student's individual writing problems and this is not at all an easy task. Having said that, we should also emphasize the point that the skill of writing could be further maximized by activities that have students write and keep writing.

5-2-1-1- Why teach writing?

Clearly it is possible to learn a foreign language without learning how to write in it. For many of the students, perhaps the majority, writing is the skill in which they are not only least proficient, even after considerable practice, but also the one for which they will have the least use. Despite the difficulty of writing, it serves a variety of pedagogical purposes:

- The introduction and practice of some form of writing enable learners to provide for the different learning styles and needs. Some learners, especially those who do not learn easily through oral practice alone, feel

more secure if they are allowed to read and write in the language. For such students, writing is likely to be an aid to retention, because they feel more at ease and relaxed.

- Written work serves to provide learners with some tangible evidence that they are making progress in the language.
- Exposure to the foreign language through more than one medium is likely to be more effective than relying on a single medium. Writing also provides variation in classroom activities, serving as a break from oral work and increases the amount of language contact through work that can be set out of class.

5-2-1-2- Motivation

Writing is a task which needs a lot of concentration. Motivation and attitude are not only related to the learners but to the teacher him/herself. If the students are motivated to learn and teachers are not motivated to teach and vice versa, the result seem to be the same; i.e. disappointment, loss of interest. At the end, no actual learning takes place. Teaching writing needs very devoted teachers. Students should be always encouraged to write and express themselves on subjects of their interest. Students need to know that the writing process is difficult. Only through practice can students improve their writing. Involving learners in their own writing assessment would be motivating for them and will increase learner involvement in aspects of the learning experience which is highly beneficial. "Teachers who want to help their students gain confidence in writing should try to follow a writing process that takes the student from insecurity to success" (Cimcoz, 1999). Teachers also have to praise, encourage learners when they make progress; take some time to relax the atmosphere in the class; supply students when they are in lack of information; state clearly the instructions.

5-2-1-3- Classroom environment

This refers to the pedagogy that creates classrooms where students and teachers work productively in an environment clearly focused on learning. Such pedagogy sets high and explicit expectations and develops positive relationships between teachers and students and among students. Progress for all students relies on a positive and stimulating environment where the writing tasks are seen as real and purposeful and the teacher provides support through explicit teaching. In fact, students seem never to stop making errors in writing in EFL in spite of the teachers' endeavours. The "skill getting" and "skill using" (Revell, 1979) is too difficult to bridge because of the restrictions imposed by the classroom formal environment. So, related to the previous point is the teaching environment itself. The classroom should be a foreign language learning community where learners can enjoy the merit of sharing work with other members of the class community striving to communicate in writing.

5-2-1-4- The needs of learners

- **Learners have to be Taught letters.** Here I mean the teaching of the alphabet. Teaching the fundamentals of letters (what a letter is, what each letter is called, and how it sounds) is where you should begin if you want to teach literacy effectively. Regardless of age level or language, literacy must begin with an understanding of letters.
 - Teach your students how to recognize the different shapes of the letters. They will need to be able to easily differentiate between letters which look the same and letters which sound the same.
 - Size variation is an important part of learning to write letters. Teach your students about capital letters and lowercase letters and when to use them.

- Directionality is another important skill. Your students will need to know what direction letters face and how to properly place them next to each other.
- Spacing is an important skill as well. Teach your students how to place space in between words, sentences, paragraphs, etc.
- **Learners have to be taught how to form words.** Once your students have a solid grasp on letters and their associated sounds, you can move on to using those letters and sounds to form words. Read to them frequently at this stage, as well as writing lots of examples for them to look at. This will give them opportunities to see how words are formed.
 - An important part of teaching word formation is teaching your students the difference between vowels and consonants. Teach them the proper usage of letters and explain to them the necessity of vowels within a word. For example, it is very rare for the only vowel in a word to go at the very end of the word but quite common to have the second letter or sound of a word be a vowel.
- **Learners have to understand sentence structure.** Students need to learn and understand sentence structure once they have mastered forming words. Sentence structure is the order in which words or parts of speech go in the sequences in which they are used. Understanding sentence structure will be necessary if they are to write sentences. People often have difficulty writing naturally, even if they speak correctly.
 - Your students should learn how to identify nouns. Teach them what a noun is and where it usually goes in a sentence. The easiest way to explain it will likely be the tried-and-true “person, place, thing or idea”.

- Your students will need to be able to identify verbs, too. Teach them about “action words” and give them lots of examples. You can have them act out different verbs in order to solidify the concept in their mind. Explain them where verbs can be put in a sentence.
 - Your students will need to be able to identify adjectives as well. Explain that adjectives describe other words. Teach them where these words go in a sentence and how they attach to other words.
- **Learners have to be taught proper grammar.** Teaching proper grammar will be absolutely essential to your students’ learning to write sentences which can be understood and sound natural.
- Using parts of speech together is an important concept in grammar. Your students should develop an understanding of how nouns, verbs and adjectives interact and how they fit together. Where these words go in a sentence and when they must be preceded or followed by another is also important to understand.
 - Tense is a key concept to understanding how to form proper sentences. Your students should learn and practice creating sentences which take place in the past, present, and future. This will teach them how verbs must be changed in order to indicate time. This is a complex skill and is often not truly mastered until much later.
- **Learners have to be taught punctuation.** A difficult skill to master, the use of proper punctuation will be vital to creating well-constructed sentences. Later in life, proper punctuation is often seen as a mark of intelligence and education, so building your students’ skills in this area will be very important for opening up opportunities for them.

➤ **Learners have to be taught how to write different kinds of texts.**

Writing in any significant form, involves the ability to organize sentences into a coherent whole or text. In fact, learners cannot be expected to master all the different varieties of the written form of the language. At the same time, it is not enough to try to teach them some general forms of written expressions. As in speech, they have to some extent at least be able to select an appropriate style, formal or informal, depending on what they are to write about and whom they are addressing. Although it cannot be said that this is easy, many of the difficulties learners have in this area arise because of the nature of the writing tasks: for example, simply being asked to write a paragraph. Also, this kind of task does not encourage learners to think of writing as communication. Likewise, it might be noted, the teacher's goal should not be to teach different kinds of writing such as narrative, descriptive, expository, letter, argumentative and so on; but rather to see that these are practiced within the wider context of a text. For example, a letter may involve some narration or description, while a report might provide the setting for some expository writing.

- Teach your students to recognize narrative writing. This is writing which conveys a story and is the form most often read for pleasure. It is commonly used as an exercise to increase literacy skills. Examples of narrative writing include novels, biographies, history, and newspaper articles. It is easily recognized by the format: "This happened, and then this happened, and then this happened." and so on.
- Teach your students to recognize expository writing. This is writing which explains, informs or describes something. What you are reading now is an example of expository writing. Newspaper

articles can also fall into this category, along with encyclopaedias and reports.

- Teach the elements of storytelling. Children in this age-group will need to learn the basic elements of storytelling. This will give them the tools they need later in life in order to analyse the things they read. Elements of storytelling include beginning, middle and end, crisis or climax, and character. These are most easily taught to children when done in tandem with reading a book aloud over the course of a few weeks. This gives you the opportunity to discuss and analyse the text, so that they can see how these ideas work in practice. Solidify these skills by having them write stories of their own.

All these kinds of writing after being taught have to be tested by submitting learners to practice through many activities that will keep them writing. As it is said "practice makes perfect". So, teachers have to keep their learners writing and writing so that they can get to perfection.

5-2-1-5- Some examples of writing activities

✓ From the alphabet to words

The alphabet is the most used element while writing. So, teachers have to teach to learners how to form and read the English letters. To succeed, teachers may put the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet, transcribe them phonetically and then read the letters to learners. This will help learners to well pronounce the letters. The teacher may also teach students the "ABC" song to reinforce his teaching. The mastery and manipulation of the alphabet have a great importance in writing. After the alphabet, the teacher can introduce the cardinal numbers. This can help learners to spell words.

Activity: Writing words

The teacher writes on the board cardinal numbers from 0 to 10 and in full letters. Then, he pronounces them and students repeat. We will have:

0 zero 1 one 2 two 3 three 4 four 5 five
6 six 7 seven 8 eight 9 nine 10 ten.

This activity helps learners to count from 0 to 10 and to write these numbers in full letters. To help students have a solid background in vocabulary, the teacher can teach them the name of classroom objects such as table, chair, desk, chalk, windows, pen, pencil, book, copybook, blackboard, etc. In short, elementary notions have to be mastered and easily used and manipulated by learners.

✓ **From copy to sentences and paragraphs:**

- *Example of copy:*

Ask learners to classify these words in column A and B.

Morning Pen Book Desk Board Map
Sharpener Clock Slate Pencil Chair Table
Door Window Name What

Column A: Classroom furniture	Column B: Classroom objects

The teacher just indicates students the way to do, he acts as a guide.

- Construction of sentences:

The teacher can teach learners the different forms of sentences in English language. He teaches them how to form an affirmative sentence, a negative sentence and an interrogative sentence.

Formations:

Affirmative sentence: Subject+ base verb or auxiliary+object.

Negative sentence: Subject+ auxiliary + not + object.Or

Subject + semi auxiliary+not+base verb+object.

Interrogative sentence: Auxiliary + subject + object +? Or

Semi auxiliary+subject+base verb+object+ ?

Exercise: Write five sentences from each of the table 1, 2 and 3

Table 1

I am		Porto-Novo
You are	in	London
He works	from	the stadium
We were	at	football
You play		Accra
They are		

Table 2

I	am not		Porto-Novo
You	are not		London
He	does not work	in	the stadium
We	were not	from	football
You	do not play	at	Accra
They	are not		

Table 3

Am	I		Porto-Novo	
Are	you	in	London	
Does	he work	from	the stadium	?
Were	we	at	football	
Do	you play		Accra	
Are	they			

At the end learners have to find sentences like this:

Affirmative sentences: I am in Porto-Novo. /We were at the stadium.

Negative sentences: He does not work in London. /They are not from Accra.

Interrogative sentences: Are you from London? / Do you play football?

- Paragraph construction based on guideline questions:

Example: Write a paragraph on how you spend your last holidays based on the following questions.

Questions:

- 1- Where did you go for the last holidays?
- 2- How did you get to the town or country?
- 3- What did you see in the country or town?
- 4- How is the city or town?

Example of paragraph:

Last holidays, I went to my uncle who lives in Accra. I took a bus to get there. My uncle and I visited a lot places. We went to a zoo where we have seen lions, snakes, monkeys, elephants, etc. Accra is a beautiful and big city. I will be so glad to get there the next holidays.

5-2-2- Suggestions to learners

Learners have a role to play in the success of the teaching and learning process. Learners must always be ready to revise their lesson at home, do their homeworks and go to look for information on their own. In addition to this are some other suggestions:

5-2-2-1- Provide extensive amounts of time for learning

The more time students have to practice a skill, the better they learn. Teaching and study time in school, as well as student work done at home, advance students learning. Assigning homeworks promote language learning. So learners have to work even after classes so as to get better in their learning. They

have to grant most of their time to learning. It is the only way that will help them know whether they are progressing or regressing in their learning. They may impose on themselves a timetable to be followed with rigour.

5-2-2-2- Students need a variety of experiences in writing

In school and in life, students face a diversity of circumstances that require writing skills. For this reason, experience with a variety of writing activities in school can help learners acquire the abilities they need to be successful. They need, for example, to practice varied kinds of writing. Teachers may present general guidelines for all writing, but specific types of writing, such as poems and essays, may require specific lessons. Students can benefit from practice at writing about the results of their own researches, as well as expressing their own feelings and experiences. The writing strategies involved in each form usually require explicit teaching, frequent practice and information given to students about their progress.

5-2-2-3- Paragraph writing

An important part of any writing task (whether it is a narrative, descriptive, a letter...) is the development of good paragraphs. According to RAJA T. N. (1972), a good paragraph has the following characteristics:

- It is unified. This means that all the sentences in it are connected in meaning and centred around one main thought or idea.
- It is clear. This means that the central thought or idea in the paragraph is developed clearly and logically. One sentence leads naturally and smoothly to the next sentence within the paragraph.
- It is part of a whole. This means that, while each paragraph is unified in itself, it is nevertheless a part of a larger written production; and as part of

a larger whole, each paragraph must clearly, naturally, and smoothly develop from the paragraph before it and lead to the paragraph after it.

5-2-2-4- The importance of connectives in writing

When students progress from writing sentences in exercises to putting sentences together in paragraphs, they must begin learning about connectives. Connectives or links are devices that help a paragraph to be coherent, cohesive and meaningful. In fact, sentences in written production must be linked together in some manner; if not, they fall apart completely. The links consist of a variety of devices, such as pronouns, demonstratives, articles, conjunctions, adverbs, prepositions, synonyms and so on. By means of this linkage the movement of ideas from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph is brought about. These connectives can be classified in various ways. Some of them are referential (their), some are sequential (then), some are additive (also), some are contrastive (but), etc. The classification of connectives is complicated by the fact that many of them have both grammatical and logical functions. They not only serve as links between sentences, but they also indicate the logical nature of the connection; that is, they express such relationships as addition, causation, comparison, contrast, result, summary, etc.

5-2-3- Suggestions to learners' parents

Learners' parents have a role to play in their children's success at school. They must favour their children's learning by agreeing to sacrifice. They should:

- Provide learners with adequate school materials (books, copybooks, and other objects);
- If possible engage an English tutor for their children at home;
- Pay school fees on time;
- Feed them correctly;

- Encourage and motivate learners to study, revise their lessons and do their homeworks.

5-2-4- Suggestions to both teachers and learner's parents

Encourage students to attain excellent writing skills: Great writers have often had not only their own writing ability but also strong motivation, supportive parents, inspiring teachers, informative literature and direct experiences, as well as exposure to skilful peers and fine writers. While perhaps only one in 100 or 1000 can attain the status of a great writer who is long influential and long remembered, all students can be encouraged to write as well as they are able. Thus, parents who themselves write and who encourage, guide and express interest in their children's writing may be exceptionally helpful. From libraries, exchanges and purchases, they may be able to supply their children with magazines, books and other stimulating materials, as well as providing them with interesting experiences for joint discussion. Similarly, teachers may not only conduct skilful lessons but also stimulate all students to become better writers, and identify talented writers for special encouragement and lessons. To become better writers, students may need to read good even great literature that can serve as a model for their own efforts. Hearing and reading about the lives of great men and women writers and how they developed their talents may stimulate them. Direct contacts with professional writers, such as novelists and news reporters, may be inspirational. Inquiry and discovery also inspire great writing. Having topics that a person cares deeply about, as a consequence of personal interest and investigation, may prove decisive for a fine writing and even lead to a life devoted to writing.

CONCLUSION

This study aims at improving the teaching/learning of English language in Benin secondary schools. In this study; I investigated student's attitudes about English learning in general and their fears about writing in particular. This investigation shows that learners like the target language, but they ignore the importance of the writing skill. And this ignorance is reinforced by teacher's attitude toward the writing skill, teachers teach writing swiftly. All this, makes writing difficult to learners. In fact, learners find writing as the most difficult skill among the four. Many reasons justify this situation. The lack of interest and motivation from both teachers and learners is the first reason. I can also list the lack of qualified teachers, the lack of training, the large number of students in the classes, the lack of adequate tools and materials. The working and living conditions of teachers and learners are also handicaps to the efficient teaching and learning of the writing skill.

With regard to all the consequences of this problem for the different actors involved in teaching, and as the purpose of the study was to find out ways and means to solve the different difficulties displayed throughout the study, I have made some recommendations and suggestions to contribute to the betterment of the situation. Suggestions were made mostly to teachers this, to draw their attention on their responsibility in the resolution of the problem. Talking about responsibility, learners should know that writing is a skill which can only be mastered through practice. So, their involvement and commitment are required to reach a satisfactory result at the end of the process of the acquisition of this skill. Learners' parents should not be forgotten when dealing with effectiveness of teaching and learning. They have to provide their children with the means they need to learn effectively and efficiently. To the government, they have to improve teachers and learners working and living conditions. I will point out that those recommendations and suggestions are not masterpieces to the

resolution of the problem or satisfy any potential reader; but rather they come in the work as complement to what other researchers have found and done in the same domain.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE POUR LES APPRENANTS

Cher(e) apprenant, voici un questionnaire d'enquête sur le thème *les difficultés rencontrées par l'apprenant dans l'acquisition des compétences rédactionnelles* en Anglais. Tu voudras bien m'aider dans la réussite de cette tâche, en répondant aux questions ci-après. Tu cocheras la case qui convient à ta réponse ou donneras une réponse écrite où il le faut. Merci pour ta collaboration, coopération et aide.

1. Quelle est ta classe?

6eme

5eme

4eme

3eme

2. Aimes-tu le l'Anglais? Oui Non

3. Penses-tu que le "writing" est un exercice important en Anglais?

Oui

Non

4. As-tu appris comment faire le "writing" en classe?

Oui

Non

5. Fais-tu le "writing" lors des devoirs?

Oui

Non

6. As- tu souvent de bonnes notes quand tu le fais?

Oui

Non

7. Pourquoi n'as tu pas de bonnes notes en writing?

- C'est un exercice trop difficile

- Tu ne sais pas comment t'y prendre pour réussir

- Le professeur ne t'encourage pas à le faire

8. Que veux-tu que ton professeur fasse pour t'aider à améliorer ta performance en "writing"?

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.....

Merci!

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

Dear teacher,

I am prospective teacher; I am carrying out my research work on the topic "Difficulties encountered by EFL learners while developing writing skills in beginners' classes". The following questionnaire is framed in order to collect some data from you. Please tick in the right box or answer the questions accordingly.

I would be grateful if you could fill in this questionnaire as clearly and objectively as possible. Your cooperation, collaboration and help are really appreciated.

1. How long have you been teaching English?

I have been teaching for year(s).

2. Do you teach the "writing" skill to your learners?

Usually

Sometimes

3. Do your students find writing as an easy task to do?

Yes

No

4. Why do they find writing difficult? (more than one choice possible)

- Because the instructions are not clear

- Because they don't know how to deal with it

- Because they are not motivated to do it

- Because they lack appropriate tools i.e. grammar, vocabulary, connectors

5. How do your learners react when they are given a writing task? (more than one choice possible)

- They just write something

- They leave it completely

- They do it as it has to be done

6. Do your learners always do the writing item during tests? (more than one choice possible)

Sometimes Veryoften

7. Do you motivate them about doing the writing during tests?

Usually Sometimes

8. What can be done to motivate learners to be interested in writing?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you so much!