



REPUBLIQUE DU BENIN

**MINISTERE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR ET DE LA
RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE**

UNIVERSITE D'ABOMEY-CALAVI

ECOLE NORMALE SUPERIEURE DE PORTO-NOVO

DOMAINE : SCIENCE DE L'EDUCATION ET DE LA FORMATION

MENTION : Professorat de l'enseignement secondaire. SPECIALITE : ANGLAIS

GRADE : Licence/BAPES

MEMOIRE DE FIN DE CYCLE

SUJET:

**CREATING AN EFL RELAXED CLASSROOM FOR
BEGINNER LEARNERS: DIFFICULTIES AND
ALTERNATIVES IN CEG DAVIE**

**Présenté par:
Arsène O.B. OGOUWOLE**

**Sous la direction de :
Dr. Prosper ATCHADE
Maître-Assistant (CAMES)
FLASH-UAC**

Année scolaire : 2012-2013

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research work to:

My dear parents, particularly to my mother, Hélène FAGBOHOUN, whose permanent assistance is a lot in all I have been doing since my birth till today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge my gratitude to Dr. Prosper ATCHADE, who has accepted to supervise this work. I thank him for the countless days and hours he has devoted to correct this research work. May God bless him and his family!

I am also grateful to all my lecturers of the Advanced Teacher Training College of Porto-Novo.

My thanks to my tutor, Mrs. Marina DOSSEH, who has helped me during my professional teaching practice in CEG DAVIE located in Porto-Novo.

My thanks also to all those who contributed to this work, friends, relatives, whose names are not mentioned here.

May God bless all of them.

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INTRODUCTION

People use language as a means of communication. Communication is a tool for everyday life and if one cannot speak the language of a place, it will be very difficult to communicate with people in that place.

Learning another language is one of the most important and valuable part of any person's education but it is especially important for people working in the field of Education.

English is an international language and is one of the most popular and most spoken in the world. English is very much important in our life and it is necessary in each and every field. It is a need of today's world. We need to know the English language in order to study any science subject or any computer language or even to do business. We need to know English to communicate effectively with people in many developed countries. So, we can't deny the importance of English in our life.

In our country where English is a foreign language, teachers seem to ignore that students are exposed to it only at school however they blame them as lazy learners. The students on their side think that English is difficult and hardly understand what their teachers of English do in class. These teachers seem not to be aware of the fact that one of the most important aspects of teaching /learning process is the creation of a relaxed atmosphere for learners. These complaints of students and teachers deserve to be thought about. It is then important to find ways to get students interested in the English language. It is in this regard that I decide to work on the topic: **Creating an EFL relaxed classroom for beginner learners: difficulties and alternatives in CEG DAVIE.**

A classroom is a space where a teacher and a group of students meet regularly for teaching and learning purposes. And this process of teaching and learning should take place in a relaxed atmosphere. Therefore, a relaxed classroom atmosphere is an environment which promotes meaningful learning. So, creating a relaxed classroom for beginner learners is creating an environment where these learners can be safe, secure and can learn effectively.

In addition, to create and maintain a positive, productive learning environment is not meant for absolute control or to create an inert, docile, and totally compliant classroom. On the contrary, to create a positive learning environment is to maintain students' interest, motivation and involvement in classroom learning and teaching.

Moreover, the learning environment must be considered as far as the physical aspect of the class is concerned. So, creating a friendly atmosphere is also creating a place where everybody feels comfortable and at ease, a place where the surroundings are neat and orderly. It is a place where there is mutual respect in a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere, a place where everyone can bloom and do their best.

The beginner learners I am concerned with are mainly students of the first form of secondary school, I mean, learners who are in their first year of English learning in secondary school.

With that purpose in mind, I structure my study as follows:

In Chapter One, which is entitled the Identification of the study, I deal with the purpose of the study, the statement of the problem, and the significance of the study.

In chapter Two, the literature review, I point out some researchers who have already focused their attention on the topic at hand in this research work.

Chapter Three deals with the research methodology I have used to carry out the study.

Chapter Four displays the different data I have collected and the analysis of these data.

Finally, Chapter Five is about my recommendations, suggestions and my conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE: THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

1-1-The purpose of the study

It is important to develop skills of communication with other people. No one's language is sufficient, whether that be English or French or any other language. We cannot learn all languages but we can learn at least one other language which will help us to accept the nature of cultural and linguistic differences.

In the process of teaching and learning at school, classroom management stands at a position of essential importance. On the first hand, good classroom management creates a learning environment in which effective teaching and learning occur. On the other hand, poor classroom management often damages the students' desire for learning.

In teaching and learning process, we are often confronted with some problems which need urgent solutions. To talk about the necessity to create a propitious atmosphere for learning EFL means that this aspect has been neglected. Although there is not any best method, some conditions to be fulfilled for a real teaching/learning process are argued upon by everybody. In classroom situation, the transmission of knowledge involves students, teachers and the type of atmosphere which prevails in the classroom. This atmosphere should be friendly, fair and relaxed before students feel secure for learning.

The general objective of this study is to get information the analysis, of which can help teachers of English to adjust their role in order to get students be interested in the English language learning.

From this general objective, I have some specific objectives so as to deal in details with the problem of creating a relaxed atmosphere for EFL beginner learners. My specific objectives are as follows:

- To show the relationships which prevail in EFL classroom between teachers and beginner learners in DAVIE Secondary School in Porto-Novo.
- To draw the attention of these teachers on the fact that method only is not enough for a successful teaching / learning but some conditions must be fulfilled in the process since teaching is a negotiation, and the most important condition in the process is the relaxed atmosphere created for learners.

2-2-The statement of the problem

The importance of the English language is no longer to be demonstrated, for it is the official language for international exchange. It is the official language of the USA, the first economic, political and military power in the world. Having seen the usefulness of English, the Beninese educational system authorities have instituted it as one of the compulsory subjects in our secondary schools. English is taught from the first year to the seventh year of secondary school. But its usefulness makes some parents register their children in some nursery, or primary schools, or even bilingual schools where English is taught.

It is commonly accepted nowadays that the ability to communicate is the primary goal of foreign language learning. So, EFL learning is now more regarded as a process of acquiring linguistic and communicative competences. These competences can be acquired only through linguistic and communicative performance, namely, the

actual use of the language. Therefore, EFL class must inevitably be of a communicative nature. Because EFL learners rarely have little chance to use the target language in daily life, they have to depend entirely on classroom activities.

For most of the students, classroom is the only environment in which they can practice communication in English. So, an EFL teacher must bear it in mind that neither control nor discipline but setting a climate appropriate for learning in the class is his most important task for classroom management. Unfortunately, this is not the case. I notice that the teaching/learning of the English language undergoes a crisis as far as the students' school results are concerned. Teachers are so proud of themselves that they cannot discover anything wrong in their method of teaching or in their relationships with their students.

In Benin secondary schools, most teachers think that to be effective is to know teaching methods and to be able to impart knowledge to students whatever the atmosphere prevailing in the classroom. So, these teachers, most of the time, intimidate their students and frustrate them so that these learners feel insecure in the learning process. This often makes learner feel anxious, nervous and constrained. As a result, learners are afraid of speaking the target language in the classroom as they don't want to be ridiculed. In this case, learners tend to avoid personal communication with others, and take language learning as a constraint.

In Such conditions, learners can never be interested in the English language. As I said earlier in the introduction, these teachers seem not to be aware of the fact that one of the most important aspects of teaching /learning process is the creation of a

relaxed atmosphere for learners. Creating a relaxed atmosphere does not mean behaving as God toward students because no human being is perfect.

How can we then manage to create a relaxed atmosphere in our EFL classrooms so as to get beginner learners be interested in the language?

1-3-The significance of the study

My concern in carrying out this study is to contribute to the improvement of the relationships between teachers and beginner learners in EFL classes. I also hope to contribute to the teachers' effectiveness and to the interest of the students in the English language. In other words, this study can help teachers of English to adjust their role in order to get students interested in the English language.

The significance of this study is that it can also draw the attention of the authorities in charge of Education to take into account classroom atmosphere while dealing with the English curriculum. This study can help know that a friendly relaxed learning atmosphere is compulsory for a successful English learning.

Hypotheses of research

In order to carry out this study, I have seen it necessary to formulate some hypotheses as follows:

-Some EFL teachers do not know that a positive and friendly attitude towards a learner can help this learner to be interested in the English language learning.

-Students are not interested in the English language learning because they think it is difficult to understand.

To check these hypotheses, I use as research instruments, the following:

- Appropriate and relevant documents dealing with the topic at hand.
- Questionnaires to EFL teachers and EFL learners
- Interview with the respondent people in EFL field.
- Class observation in the chosen secondary school.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

While carrying out this research work, I have noticed that many articles and books have already been written on the topic of creating a relaxed atmosphere for beginner learners of English as a Foreign Language. However, I am going to focus on the role of EFL teachers in creating a friendly classroom atmosphere for learners.

Many students study English only because they have to. English is part of the school curriculum because a decision has been made by an authority figure. It is then obvious that teachers should help students get interested in the English language. It is in this regard that Bright J.A. and McGregor G.J. (1970) said: *“if we want our students to master languages skill for themselves, so that they can go on learning long after they leave school and teachers behind, we had better make our language activities enjoyable too, and far less exhausting”* (p.5).

Good classroom management creates a learning environment in which effective teaching and learning occur while poor classroom management often damages the students’ desire for learning and spoils the teacher’s passion for teaching no matter how well he has been prepared for the class. As Dunkin and Biddle (1974) point out, *“... it seems to us that adequate management of the classroom environment forms a necessary condition for cognitive learning; and if the teacher cannot solve problems in this sphere, we can give the rest of teaching away”*(p.135).

In other words, a well-organized classroom is a classroom in which students know how to effectively make use of the classroom and its resources. Some of the teaching objectives focus on expected academic behaviors, appropriate use of

materials, and cooperation with peers. So, teacher should play a role to create a community of learners where students play an active part in forming their environment, and learn how to work effectively as an individual and with peers. All actions taken by the teacher should be focused on minimizing disruptions and fostering an environment where students can learn.

So, the interest of the learners for the English language in EFL classes depends on the teacher. The friendlier the teacher is in his/her class, the more her students gain interest in the language learning. Recent research in language acquisition both in natural environment (Schumann, 1975) and in instructional situation (Stevick, 1976) as in teacher effectiveness (Moskowitz, 1976) indicates that the environment in which a person learns a language is one of the most important facets of the language experience. EFL teachers should know that learners have a mind and feelings. And when these feelings are not positive, learners cannot really do anything. As Brumfit (1985) says, "*The second language learner, however, starts learning with an already developed ability to think and speak*" (p.4). To all these authors, one point is common: the necessity for teachers to create a good environment.

Environment is a key ingredient of students' motivation. First of all, an environment must be available and accessible. Thereafter, that environment must be of a quality that contributes to the motivation of the students. For example, if an environment is not safe, it is difficult to put all of one's attention on learning. On the other hand, an environment of openness and freedom to learn from our mistakes can foster motivation to learn. Also, the environment can be physical as well as mental, and even emotional.

This is urgent for EFL teachers so as to develop positive attitude and interest in their language learners. It is clear that on their effectiveness depend their ability and attitude to create a relaxed classroom atmosphere. EFL teachers should be forever seekers of alternatives in this domain because there lies the teaching learning process. It is only by doing so that they can reach their objective which is to really make students learn and understand the language by motivating them and raising their level. As Millrun (1981) says: *“The best teacher in the world would not fare very well if faced with low learners, unmotivated students, a poor learning environment, and an achievement measure out of harmony with the teacher’s goal”* (p8).

This means that even if EFL teachers have the desire to achieve a high score with their students, this goal cannot be reached if students are provided with an unhealthy learning atmosphere which certainly does not motivate them. One of the common problems at EFL teaching, in this case, is the over-crowded class where a teacher can find more than thirty students in a very small classroom. In fact, the physical classroom environment influences students’ learning, participation, and involvement in class activities. So, the teacher should spend some time deciding how to best organize the environment to accommodate the various classroom activities.

The vast majority of students want their classes to go well. Disruptive or disturbing behavior by one or more students can therefore be annoying, and even distressing, to the rest of the class, as well of course as to the teacher. In this case, the teacher may feel annoyed or he may feel concerned. And this can badly affect the teacher’s will to offer a kind atmosphere to his learners. As professor Fan Yi (2000) says: *“Discipline, order and control can only be used as auxiliary means to achieve a*

wanted learning environment. As they are very much likely to cause anxiety and tension in the class, the teacher should not lay too much emphasis on them” (p.135).

According to him, “when a student is punished for his misbehavior in class, it is not only he but the whole class that are punished” (p.134). That is to say, any punishment on one person can cause anxiety and tension on all the other students. So, punishment should not be the first resort, but the last method for the teacher’s choice to achieve class order. Nevertheless, it is not realistic to give up the use of punishment completely.

Actually, whatever the situation, EFL teachers should tend to create a fair learning environment to enhance their program by bringing out the best in the students. And to do so, EFL teachers should view the language learning as development of skills not as rote-learning of set of items where the teacher is the imparter of knowledge, a model of correct forms, that is to say no mistake is allowed. But unfortunately, this traditional model of language learning seems to be reflected in many of the standard procedures used in school classrooms. On the other side, the new model which refers to interactive approach reflects the standard established by the development of communicative strategies. In this regard Thompson and Ditch (1952) explain:

“We continually think about how our classes are going as communities. Other teachers obsess about their lecture. We obsess both the contents we teach as well as the relationships with both the individual and the group as a whole. We think carefully about how to express our danger when the class is not taking responsibility to carry on meaningful discussion of the reading.

We think carefully about how to address or resolve conflict among particular pairs or group of students. No two semesters are alike. The result of this kind of teaching cannot be predicted because the

students have the power, and we never know how they are going to use it, how they are going to challenge us or how they are going to challenge each other”(p.9).

Thompson and Ditch in their explanation hope that teachers assume roles of co-learners and facilitators rather than authorities. This implies that EFL teachers can only succeed in their task as effective teachers by giving voice to their students, by considering them and by negotiating with them in a teaching-learning process.

The role of the teacher is to provide appropriate experiences in an appropriate context to ensure that students are involved in a teaching-learning process. For this to happen, EFL teachers should not stick to the textbooks that do not generate a real learning. They should have a developmental method in their classes, a method which considers in priority the interest of the students. It is also concerned with helping students understand knowledge in the context of a real life situation.

Moreover, materials and content should be designed to meet the needs of individual students throughout their stages of intellectual, social, physical and emotional development. Learning should be structured so that students enjoy what they are doing while learning. And to make students at ease while learning, teachers are to be partners with students rather than being bosses.

Effective teachers are good at managing students' behavior. The first week of school year is very important. In fact, some like Wong and Wong, (1991) maintain that *“success during the school year will be determined by what you do on the first days of school”* (p. 4). That is to say, the first week of school year can set the tone for the rest of the year. That is why many teachers establish rules and procedures at the

beginning of the school year. They also try to be consistent in enforcing these rules and procedures. Many teachers also argue for positive consequences when rules are followed and negative consequences when rules are broken.

Silberman (1973) described teachers as advisors, supporters, observers, learners, facilitators and senior partners. They bring learners to a certain proficiency level with autonomy, so that they could adapt their knowledge to cope adequately with the demands of new situations.

Indeed, in their research, Epanchin, Townsend, and Stoddard (1994) an interviewed teacher declared: *“I’ve come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous”* (p. 166). So, EFL teachers cannot stir up students’ interests in the English language by putting a barrier between them and the students. They should rather be close to the students like a partner. The activities designed in EFL classes should be student-centered, which will motivate them because they feel that they are at the center of the learning and preoccupation in the class.

In addition, when the activities are student-centered, the learners see themselves important to be at the heart of the lesson. And this brings them to be involved and motivated. This means, students become powerful and successful when they notice that the teacher takes care of them and focuses on them.

Each of the writers or theorists has his own valuable aspect that contributes to the understanding of students' motivation. However, no theory seems to be more important than another. As such, the best way to gain some new understanding about motivation is to gather all of these theories simultaneously. Then one could notice that it seems that motivation in the classroom is a function of the following components: student, teacher, content, method/process, and environment.

To put in a nutshell, it can be seen that researchers have drawn out the great influence of classroom atmosphere in EFL teaching-learning process. It is obvious that the creation of a kind classroom atmosphere for beginner learner is crucial in EFL teaching-learning. So, EFL classroom management should aim at establishing a climate appropriate for effective teaching and learning. A well-managed EFL class is not the one in which all the students sit still at their desks and take note. It should be a learning environment with a relaxed atmosphere and many opportunities for students to act as communicators, practicing on the teacher's instruction and expressing their own ideas. So, the major task of the teacher is to manage time and materials, create communicative needs and involve the students into classroom activities.

It is important to note that teaching is an art. As such every teacher should try, within his possible, to know the individual problems of his or her students. Then, he could adapt and adopt methods of knowledge delivery that will make learning easier and meaningful for them. It is therefore important to know students' learning style; because when some learn best through the auditory, others learn best through visuals.

Finally, discipline problems should be prevented before they appear rather than be solved after they come to the class. So, the teacher should be aware of his role in the class. He/she is the manager or facilitator of the class who creates and maintains a positive climate for students to speak, to act, to learn actively and effectively.

In the following chapter, I am going to expose the methodology I have used to collect data for my study.

CHAPTER THREE: THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Data can be gathered from a number of sources, which include documents, the internet surveys, field notes, questionnaires, interviews. But this chapter focuses on interview with the respondent people in EFL field, class observation and questionnaires as instruments I have used to collect data for my study.

3-1) Interview

Interviews are a systematic way of talking and listening to people and are another way to collect data from individuals through conversations. Interviewing is a way to collect data as well as to gain knowledge from individuals. Kvale (1996) regarded interviews as “... *an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data.*”(p.14). Interviews are also ways for participants to get involved and talk about their views. In addition, the interviewees are able to discuss their perception and interpretation in regards to a given situation.

There are different forms of interviews: general interview, formal interview, informal interview and semi-structure interview. For my study, I have used the informal interview. With informal interview no predetermined questions are asked in order to remain as open and adaptable as possible to the interviewee's nature and priorities. This enables me to get numerous and relevant information so as to deal with the matter of creation of a relaxed class atmosphere for beginner learners. I have tried to select the appropriate method for addressing the needs of the research question. My

role has been to land the discussion and to make the informants generate questions whose answers can elicit valid response.

Through the interviews, I intended to get the respondents' views of the concept of friendly atmosphere for EFL learning and their opinion about the barrier between teachers and students.

To carry out the interviews I often negotiate the day, the time, and the place some days before the interviews. I have explained to them that their identity would be kept confidential and only the answers they would provide would be used as illustrations in my research work. Indeed, I explained to them the purpose, the interest and the importance of the interview. These explanations generated a trustful atmosphere between them and me.

The resourceful people are teachers in office or who are retired and experienced people in the EFL field. They agree to collaborate with me for this work. They are of a great importance in this study because they show frank collaboration with me and their contribution enables us to obtain the information we want to get straight forward. At the end I thanked the respondents for taking time out of their busy schedule to meet me and answer my questions.

3-2) Class observation

Another instrument I have used for data collection is class observation. Classroom observation is a method of evaluating and recording specific information about what is going on within a classroom. It can make teachers more aware of how they behave in their classrooms and of the needs of students in their classroom.

Classroom observation can be a guide for teachers so they can reflect on their own teaching practices. Many teachers, even experienced ones, are not always aware of the nature of their interactions with individual student. Consequently, one of the most important purposes of systematic classroom observation is to improve teachers' classroom instruction. Feedback from individual classroom profiles derived from systematic observations has been found to help teachers understand their own strengths and weaknesses, and has consequently enabled them to significantly improve their instruction. Through feedback, teachers can become aware of how their classroom functions and thus bring about changes they desire.

There is growing evidence that feedback from systematic observation can be used to improve teaching. Teachers could positively change their attitude and behaviors toward pupils after receiving feedback from classroom observation.

The overall purpose of classroom observation is to evaluate the way in which teaching impacts upon students' learning and to ensure that all learners' needs are met. Classroom observation enables the researcher to gather information on whatever happens during the teaching and learning process.

This tool has been a powerful instrument because it enables me to collect reliable and trustful event which occurs in the classroom. I carried out the observation in beginners' classes. I often negotiate the time and the date with the teacher I am going to observe.

For the observation, I focused on how the teachers interact and cooperate with their students. I paid attention to the general atmosphere of the classrooms and to

the students' working condition. I always sit at the bottom of the class so as to observe each every step of the teaching-learning process.

3-3) Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a set of written questions that are given to the respondent. Questionnaires can be very useful in carrying out research, because questionnaires use quantitative data, and also usually involve a lot of respondents. Quantitative data are useful in carrying out research, because it is reliable.

Questionnaire is the most commonly used method of gathering information because it is the less costly way to reach more people.

Before writing the questions, it is obvious to base on the purpose of one's research. There are different forms of questions: closed questions and open questions.

A closed question or closed-ended question is a question for which the researcher provides a suitable and list of responses. This produces mainly quantitative data. As far as open question or open-ended question is concerned, it is a question where the researcher doesn't provide the respondent with a set answer from which to choose. The respondents are asked to answer in their own words. As a result, this produces mainly qualitative data.

For my research work, I have prepared a set of closed questions; which means that questions to which there are a limited range of responses. These kinds of questions are useful for questionnaires because they are quick to complete, and they provide answers that are easy to analyze.

I have addressed learners and teachers by distributing questionnaires to them: one for students and one for teachers. A sample of each questionnaire can be found in the annex pages. About 50 copies of questionnaires were distributed to beginner learners and 30 copies of questionnaires to teachers.

At the beginning, the questionnaires appeared as tests according to some students and teachers. In fact, some considered the questionnaires as traps. As a result, many respondents were reluctant to fill in the questionnaires. But after some explanation that I tried to give them to have their confidence, all the respondents accepted to cooperate. I have explained to them that their identity would be kept confidential and only the answers they would provide would be used as illustration in my research work. Indeed, I explained to them the purpose, the interest and the importance of the study. As a result, the explanations generated a trustful atmosphere between them and me.

Through, the questionnaires to students, I intended to find out beginner learners' view about the English language learning, the atmosphere of their learning environment and the attitude of their teachers toward them. As far as teachers' questionnaire is concerned, I intended through them to find out their relationship with their students, their opinion about the aspect of relaxed class atmosphere and the elements which could affect a classroom atmosphere.

The questions are so clear that teachers have no difficulty in filling the questionnaires. I helped the students understand the questions when a word or expression seems difficult for them to understand. The questions addressed to teachers

are ten (10) and those to students are seven (7). I did not succeed in collecting back all the questionnaires I have distributed. The returning rate is 98% for the teachers' questionnaires and 90% for the students' ones.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4-1) The collected data analysis

4-1-1) The interview

One of the instruments I have used to collect data was interview. Through this instrument I got much information. The resourceful people are teachers who are in office or retired and experienced people in the EFL field.

Through my investigation, I realized that 30% of my respondents were not aware of the fact that physical classroom management could help reduce pressure on students. They even argued that to be effective, a teacher must impose himself without caring about atmosphere of the classroom. On the other side, 40% of them had recognized that a relaxed class atmosphere was necessary for a teaching-learning process to take place. However, they added that this aspect is theoretical in so far as the official curriculum does not mention it. They said that many teachers may not view it as a crucial aspect in the teaching-learning process. Another important element of their opinion is that there is a risk of creating a friendly atmosphere in the classroom in so far as some students could take it as an opportunity for lack of respect to their teachers.

Finally, 30% of the respondents said that the most important thing for effective teaching is the competence of the teacher and that if he/she has this competence, everything will go well in his/her class. They argued that when the students fear the teacher, they can learn well their lesson. So, the more they fear their teachers the more they learn. In this way, they thought that the objective of the teacher should be to get a good feedback from the students and not an active class. They seem

to give priority to the official curriculum regardless the way in which it should be carried out.

4-1-2) Class observation

This tool has been a powerful instrument because it enables me to collect reliable and trustful event which occurs in the observed classrooms. I carried out the observations in beginners' classes.

Class observation showed that each teacher of secondary school of DAVIE has his teaching method. Indeed, it happened that some teachers change their teaching method from a class to another one. So, in terms of percentage of the teachers whose classes I visited, I have noticed that 40% of them tried to be partners of the students by greeting them when they entered the classroom. When teachers asked questions like “how are you? Are you ready for today’s lesson?”, I noticed that students were very happy to give their answer that they were ready to start. And the atmosphere became more relaxed when some of the teachers call some students’ names just to say “are you well”. In this way, I noticed that some students were seen as important to be in the classroom. Such classes have been very interesting because the students tried to answer their teacher’s questions even if some were irrelevant to the topic. Nevertheless, the class showed an interest in the English language learning.

On the other side, 60% of the teachers I observed began their classes directly by what they had to teach. They do not care any conditions to reinforce their students’ comprehension. Some did not even have time to ask questions on their previous lessons to check out understanding before they began the new lesson. In this

percentage, some even told the students they do not want rubbish questions. So, when students answer questions, instead of answering they just ask the given students to sit down for they did not see what was difficult that need explanation. Some said that they did not want to waste time answering rubbish questions. Other teachers never called a student by his/ her name. They just said “you” and most of the time the students were confused because they do not know exactly which student the teacher has pointed to.

During the class observation, I have noticed that in most of the classes, students are very numerous. Class size varies from a class to another one. But 90 % of the classes observed contain more than 60 students each. In some other classes, the size is better and those classes contain about 40 students. I have noticed that in all the classes students sat in groups. The groups were heterogeneous, that is to say they were made of both boys and girls. Each group contained 5 or 6 students.

In the oversized classrooms, some students sat by three. This is due to the lack of tables and benches in the school. While the observed teachers were performing different activities I noticed that some students, in the oversized class as well as in the classes with normal size, sat by three. This means that some students do not have the “document d’accompagnement”. The worst is that in some groups there is only one book for 5 or 6 students.

In short, the physical environment of the observed classrooms did not reflect the standard of what a place where teaching and learning can take place.

4-1-3) Questionnaires

For my research work, I have addressed to learners and teachers questionnaires. These questionnaires are of two types: one for the beginner learners and the other one for the EFL teachers. I have distributed fifty (50) samples of questionnaire to learners. I have been helped to distribute thirty (30) to teachers. A sample of the questionnaire can be founded in the annex pages.

I did not succeed in colleting back all the questionnaires I have distributed. The returning rate is 98% for the teachers' questionnaire and 90% for the students' one.

4-1-3-1) Questionnaire to teachers

Filling in the first question, 80% of the respondent teachers thought that a relaxed atmosphere is always important in EFL classes. Only twenty 20% thought that a relaxed atmosphere is important but sometimes.

In addition 45% of these teachers thought that relaxed atmosphere can facilitate knowledge acquisition by learners and 45% thought that it can help getting students comfortable to learn. Only 10% declared that the relaxed atmosphere enables the teacher to organize his class.

For the third question, 55% of the respondents stated that it is the teacher's method which can affect more students' achievement in a relaxed classroom. 25% of them thought that this depends on the teacher's competence and 20% thought that it depends on the students' devotion.

Filling in the fourth question, 45% recognised that the type of activity designed could affect students' behavior in a relaxed classroom and 35% thought that this depends on the time of the day. But 20% of the teachers thought that their students' behavior depends on their age.

Moreover, for the fifth question, 65% of the respondents considered their students as active learners and 30% considered them as talkative students. Only 5% of the respondents considered their students as stubborn.

For the sixth question, all of the respondents declared that they used to set a code of conduct in their classes. To the seventh question, which is to know whether these teachers are used to planning their lesson before going to class or not, 75 % of them accepted that they always plan their lesson. And the remaining, I mean 25%, said that they rarely plan their lesson before going to class.

Filling in the eighth question, 70% of the teacher argued that they always referred to warming up strategies during the teaching-learning process. But 30% of them rarely do that.

Another important feature in the teaching and learning process is the relationship between teachers and students. For the ninth question as to know how teachers view their students, 80% of the respondents considered their students as partners but 20% of them thought that there is a great difference between teachers and students.

The last question, indeed, was about the same matter. Almost all the teachers considered themselves as students' guiders in the teaching-learning process. And 90%

teachers declared that. Only 10% of them thought that a barrier should be noticed between teachers and students.

4-1-3-2) Questionnaire to Students

As far as the students' questionnaire is concerned, beginner learners filled them in. The questionnaire contains seven (7) questions based on learners' learning environment and their opinion about the English language learning.

The first question was to know students' opinion about the English language learning. I have noticed that many of them showed interest in the English language and thought that it is a good subject and they are 80%. At the same time 10% of the students thought the contrary saying that English is not a good subject.

To the second question to know how students found English when they started learning at school, 55% of them answered that learning English is easy. 10% of them thought that its learning is difficult. But at the same time 35% of the students found language learning easy and difficult as well.

The third question was to know if the students think that they could be good at English or not. 75% of them were sure that they can be good at English. But 25% of them were still pessimistic thinking that they could never be good at English.

Filling in the fourth question which was to know the students' feeling when coming to English class, 85% declared that they feel happy but 15 said that they feel like being afraid.

Through the fifth question, I intended to know if there was laughter from time to time during English class. 55% of the students responded by saying yes. But 45% denied that.

In this students' questionnaire too, I intended to know the relationship between teachers and students. So, for the sixth question, 30% of the students said that their teachers often interested themselves in all students during lesson. But 70% of them stated that their teachers often interested themselves in a group of students.

Filling in the last question which was to know if the students felt comfortable during English class, 45% of them responded by yes, saying that they always feel comfortable; 35 % of them said that they fell comfortable sometimes. But 20% stated that they never feel at ease during English class.

4-2) The results of the study

With regard to data analysis, I can relate the results of my investigation in three (3) different points.

- ✓ **Teachers:** they are aware of the fact that a relaxed classroom atmosphere is crucial for the English language learning. They even know that this can help to get students comfortable and ready to learn. And as a result, the relaxed classroom atmosphere can facilitate knowledge acquisition. Indeed, the method used by teachers during the teaching and learning process is crucial for students' achievement in a relaxed classroom. But the pressure that these teachers use toward beginner learners makes the latter anxious. The worst is the fact that some

of these teachers do not show interest in all their students. In addition, the activities designed by teachers as well as the time of the day can affect the atmosphere prevailing in a classroom.

EFL teachers in their teaching job always set a code of conduct in their classes. This helps them to be on control and avoid disruptive behaviors which definitely threaten the atmosphere of the classroom. Another way to avoid disruptive behaviors is the performing of warming up activities. It is true that much fun with students can make the latter consider the teacher ridiculous and lack respect toward him. But laughter times can help students find the English class pleasant, interesting and enjoyable and it can cause them to feel happy. As a result, the relationship between teachers and students become friendly. In that way, students can have confidence in their teacher and come to him whenever they have a problem.

- ✓ **Students:** they work in difficult conditions due not only to physical classroom environment but also to the social environment. They work in groups of 5 or 6 students. But due to the lack of furniture and reading materials, students work in large groups. It is true that their only objective is marks. But many of them find the English language easy and show interest in it saying that they could be good if their working conditions were better. Indeed, others are suppressed by their teachers in so far that they become anxious and afraid. They do not feel comfortable for their teachers do not show interest in all of them during the courses. As a result, they are not active and do not react promptly during English classes.

- ✓ **Classrooms:** the physical environment of the observed classrooms does not reflect the standard of what a place where teaching and learning can take place. The classrooms are full of students. There is a lack of tables and benches and some of the ones available are not in good conditions. But the tables and benches are well arranged in so far as teachers can easily go through rows and circulate from group to group.

From the analysis of the different results, I have seen that it urges to find appropriate solutions to difficulties Education in Benin in general and in secondary school of DAVIE is confronted with. So, in the following chapter I am going to make some recommendations to Benin Education authorities so as to overcome the problems. Then, I address some suggestions to teachers, students and school principals and their staff in order to improve EFL teaching and learning in Benin.

CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

5- 1) Recommendations

The success of the objectives of English teaching/learning is linked to the materials and human conditions that the government offers to the school users. It is in this context that my research work proposes some recommendations to the government, that is to say the role they play for the success of leaning and acquiring English in general and, in particular to enable EFL teachers to create a relaxed and propitious atmosphere for learners. Some efforts are being made in the teaching field, but they are not enough compared to the effective needs of the school users.

In order to perform effectively, teachers need the appropriate materials and they need to be in good working conditions. As far as materials and teaching equipment are concerned, my recommendations to the Government are the following:

- The Government should build classrooms which:
 - Allow space for multiple simultaneous activities.
 - Are fairly large (about 25 by 35 feet)
 - Accommodate the physical activities. For this, the classrooms should be well ventilated and attractively decorated.
- The Government should equip classrooms with:
 - Some furniture such as tables, comfortable chairs, chalks, boards, files, enclosed cupboards.
 - Some equipment such as tape recorders, cassettes players, listening stations for class use, and more typewriters.

-Some materials: folders for students' works, a topic box with topic ideas for writing and discussion, a picture folder to stimulate ideas for writing and discussion, audio-visual aids, magazines and current newspapers can positively help to enhance a relaxed friendly atmosphere for the learners and then motivate the students for interactive class activities.

-Computers: to get students used to their practice in this twenty-first century where they are more than a need but a demand.

-Books: documents and books in program should be available in great number on local market before each school resuming. Each Department and town should be provided with a well equipped library for students and teachers documentation. To reach this goal for example, the Government can negotiate with some publishing houses and book shops to enable teacher to have access to new teachers' books; they can also reduce the price of the documents and books on program in order to enable parents to buy them for their children. The Government should also provide schools with unilingual and bilingual dictionaries, idiomatic dictionaries.

In order to put EFL teachers particularly those of secondary of Davié in good working conditions the Government should:

- ✓ Provide teachers with the appropriate materials they need for different academic activities.
- ✓ Improve the EFL teachers' well being by revising their salaries and by paying them fairly.
- ✓ Organize frequently in-service training for teachers because they need to be trained so as to be at the standard of the task assigned to them. In this specific case, EFL

teachers of secondary school of Davié need to be trained through workshops, seminars and conferences. They need to be trained and be informed of the fact that a relaxed classroom environment is crucial in EFL classes for a real and effective teaching/learning process. Those teachers need to be trained on how they can provide a warm environment by eliminating pressure from students. The Government can, for example, motivate EFL teachers by organizing trips during holidays in English speaking countries such as Ghana, Nigeria. It would enable these teachers to exchange with teachers in those countries where English is the second language. It can also help them to acquire new pedagogical tools as far as creating a propitious atmosphere for EFL learning is concerned. This can be of great importance as EFL teachers throughout our country can profit of such meetings and it can reduce the lack of interest in English displayed by students.

- ✓ The government should put an emphasis on this implicit aspect of the curriculum which is creating a friendly relaxed atmosphere for beginner learners. It is true that in each lesson in the official curriculum, a certain number of suggestions are given to help the teacher to organize and to convey his/her message but this is not sufficient. The Government should elaborate curricula which take into account the situation of the English language as a foreign language. Indeed, EFL students have not any chance to practice or to use English apart from the school context. And putting this aspect in the curriculum would help teachers to be aware of the fact and then to seek ways and means to bring students to be interested in the language. In doing so, EFL teachers know that they have a great responsibility toward regarding the failure or the success of the English language in our Secondary

Schools and then they would try to bring out the best in them to achieve the task which is theirs, as EFL teachers.

- ✓ The Government should highlight the teaching profession. Teachers really need to be looked after. All the human resources of a country are the outcomes of teachers. Their effectiveness and performance depend on their living conditions. A substantial increasing of his or her allowance can foster a desire and enthusiasm of a well done job for the teacher whose roles are essential in the training learners receive.

5- 2) Suggestions

As far as my topic is concern, my suggestions will be addressed mainly to EFL teachers and then to learners and schools' principals.

5-2-1) Suggestions to EFL teachers:

An EFL teacher must have exceptional qualities among which emotional growth, that is to say, he or she must be fair and relaxed. He or she must have a relatively sufficient and sure academic level to transmit knowledge with security. This implies humility from him/her to know that he or she has weaknesses. It is through his self criticism that the teacher can improve his or her performance.

EFL teachers must also be ready to adjust to any situation, that is to say they should be adaptable and flexible. They must be open to receive new ideas. They must be in perpetual searching of knowledge. For this to happen, they must read magazines, books, listen to radios and follow information on televisions.

An EFL teacher has a role of stimulator and must bear in mind that he/she should bring students to discuss, to exchange during interactions in different groups. Students working then in pairs or in groups discuss without the teacher's control. This latter is only there to motivate, to encourage, and mainly to stimulate.

While group work is going on EFL teachers must contribute to generate ideas from learners by going from one group to another. Here, he/she plays a role of participant. He/she participates with learners in the activities in each group helping students to perform the tasks assigned to them. At this level, the teacher becomes a resourceful person and provides students with information they might need.

An EFL teacher must also play the role of organizer and monitor. In doing this, he/she must plan activities with clear instructions, in such a way that learners work individually or in pairs or even in groups. Then, he/she makes sure that students are following. So, he/she assesses the students from time to time to check their understanding and how good they are.

In the case of teaching enterprise, EFL teachers must make their classes interactive by referring from time to time laughter and putting enthusiasm and motivation in their teaching/learning process. EFL teachers can create a friendly relaxed atmosphere in their classes. So, they should remember that students have lives outside classroom. These other aspects of their lives, for example, other courses and social life, may affect their behavior. Such factors do not make disruptive behavior acceptable. But it may help to make it comprehensible.

Moreover, they should also apply the following:

Clarity of outcomes and processes and boundaries

-Students like clarity. They like to know what the course is designed to achieve; what will happen in each class; what work and what standard of work will be expected of them, and when; what feedback they will receive, and when; when and where you will be available to see them outside the class. They also like to know how they (and you) should behave in class. So, teachers should state clearly those different details to their students.

Confidence

Students want to have faith in their teachers teaching ability, their reliability and fairness. As well as displaying all these qualities, teachers also need to show that they are confident in their own abilities. So, if a teacher shows justifiable confidence in himself/herself, students are more likely to have confidence in him/her.

Consistency

Students know that their teachers have a lot of power over them. Teachers should be consistent through their teaching and assessments so that students can be reassured. Consistency is an important part of fairness, which students value very highly.

Control

It is the teacher's role to be in control of the class. Being in control can, and indeed should, involve getting the students appropriately active: asking and answering questions, making presentations, chairing sessions, whatever is appropriate to the course. But, ultimately, the teacher is in charge of the class.

Encouragement

Students do better when they know that they are making real progress. The teaching needs to give opportunities for students to do good work, and to receive positive feedback when they do good work. Teachers can do this in class as well as in written work, through classroom exercises and tests.

Responsiveness

Teachers should respond to some of the students' legitimate wishes and needs because they like it when their teacher values and uses some of their experiences, viewpoints, good questions.

Variety

For a student, an hour's lecture in which they are lost and boredom can feel like an unpleasant lifetime. A variety of appropriate activities in the class is the best way to prevent boredom, confusion and classroom difficulties.

But, despite teachers' best efforts, things may sometimes go wrong and a classroom difficulty may arise. In this case, the teacher's behavior is very crucial. So, I am going to suggest some action to take in case of disruption:

If the teacher is the only one who's being irritated, he/she could choose to ignore the behavior. He/she needs to ask himself 'Whose problem is this?' But if other students are being disrupted, or if he/she find the disruption intolerable, he/she could, among other things:

Wait for silence

If the difficulty or disruption takes the form of conversation or other noise, the teacher could simply stop talking; say nothing; look, in a non-threatening way, at the student(s) making the noise. The rest of the class will rapidly realize what the teacher is doing, and why.

Reduce your volume

If the problem is low-level background noise and conversation rather than a single disruption, then the teacher can speak a little more softly. Students will strain to hear him/her. They are more likely to ask the talking students to stop talking than to ask their teacher to talk more loudly.

Be calm

It's great to get excited about one's subject and one's teaching. Students respond well to such enthusiasm. But it is very important to stay calm if one face classroom difficulties. Calmness will help to reduce the temperature. Anger from the teacher would probably raise the temperature.

Take the disruption seriously

If the teacher hears a student make a comment that contains an interesting idea or question, he/she could choose to take it seriously, whether or not it was meant to be serious. It is better to respond to it. This could encourage serious comments from other students in the classroom.

To put in a nutshell, teachers should demonstrate interest and concern for each student by calling them by their name. They should project a friendly and positive attitude and point out volunteer students and ask them to cooperate in performing

group work. They should make sense of humor and enter their classes not with the prejudice that students are lazy and rude but with enthusiasm and confidence. They should show a positive attitude toward both the English language and the learners. Patience must prevail in what the teacher is doing so as to avoid misbehavior. This enables him/her to be tolerant as far as errors are concerned and to take appropriate action in case of disruption.

5-2-2) Suggestions to EFL learners

EFL learner should know and value the importance of the English language and mainly the opportunities that language can offer him in the future. So, beginner learners should be sensitized on that at the beginning of each academic year and this must be carried on during the school year with concrete examples.

One can notice that students in general seem to be disinterested in everything. They should know that the learning of a foreign language mainly the one of the English language requires an elaborated effort. Students should know that their effort to succeed is based on practice and errors making is necessary because success comes from the correction of the errors. Without any complex, shame, anxiety fright to be laughed at, one succeeds in being active and interactive in one's class.

In addition to help their teachers to create a friendly atmosphere in the teaching/learning process, students should be organized and show discipline. They should adopt correct attitudes which favour the language learning and encourage the teacher. They should be regular in classes and be concentrated, participate and

involve themselves in competition with their mates. Learner should not consider the advance of level that some of his mates have over him as a failure.

They should be aware of the fact that acquisition and assimilation of a foreign language varies from one individual to another depending on the interest each individual has for the language. Whatever their viewpoint, students should know that they will need to communicate and do research in some fields. For that, they should be cooperative and participate in organization implying English language.

5-2-3) Suggestions to secondary schools principals and their staff

To help EFL teachers, mainly those of secondary school of DAVIE, to improve their role and create a friendly learning atmosphere, I am going to address some suggestions to the principal and the school staff. I suggest that the principal and the school staff be impartial in recruiting the category of teachers called “vacataires”. They should recruit teachers who are really able to do the job and who meet the conditions required to teach English. Once recruited the headmaster should ask the head teacher to follow these teachers for a time and try to supply them with the pedagogical skills they need. It is clear that this is not enough but it can help a lot in the improvement of those teachers in their tasks of teaching.

In addition, in-service training can be organized by the secondary school. During these trainings, the experienced teachers will have a class and show the appropriate skills to make their classes vivid and interactive. This will enable the “new teachers” to have a reference when they are in their own classes. Very often, these teachers begin teaching without any training reference. Some of them have the

required academic degrees and diplomas but do not have the methodology to convey their message. Others do not even have the syllabuses and think they can teach anything and anyhow based on their academic knowledge. So, with the in-service training, they will be aware of seeking to develop the required skills.

I also suggest that the principal and the staff be strict with teachers as far as the ethics of teaching job is concerned. This is very important because teachers are references for the students and if their behaviors are not good examples, students cannot profit. As for creating a propitious atmosphere for EFL learning, the principal should also be strict with teachers to apply what they often do with the head teachers during the pedagogical workshops and invite the head teachers to do regular class observation. While doing this the head teachers can try to bring the “new teachers to conform to the teaching learning demands. This can help them professionally in a short time.

CONCLUSION

Education in Benin in general and in the secondary school of DAVIE in particular, undergoes some crises as far as EFL teaching and learning is concerned; and the aspect of creating a friendly atmosphere for beginner learners is not the least. Teachers often encounter some difficulties in their teaching job and mainly while trying to get students involved and interested in the English language learning. Teaching is not an easy task. Therefore, EFL teachers have a responsibility in the success as well as in the failure of the English language teaching and learning.

Through my research work, I tried to show widely all the interest that our educational system can gain in creating a friendly atmosphere to learners in general and to beginner learners of secondary school of DAVIE in particular. Because when one considers the growth of the Information and communications Technology in this millennium, the usefulness of the English language is no longer to be proved.

I carried out my investigation by using a descriptive methodology which has enabled me to define, in the first chapter, my objectives and to state the main reason for my research.

To achieve my aim, I tried to expand my knowledge about the topic by reading some authors interested in the role of motivation in the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The reading materials I have read led me to get more information about how the beginner learners can be motivated in our secondary schools. Then I made a deep analysis of the report of the reading materials.

In the third chapter, I described the different procedures I used for data collection. So, to collect data, I interviewed some EFL teachers and some experienced people in the teaching field. In addition I have undertaken class observation to know more about students' working condition and what really happens in English classes. Then, I addressed teachers and students by giving them some questionnaires to be filled in order to know more about teachers' relationships with their students, and to get students and teachers' opinion about the aspect of classroom atmosphere.

In chapter four, I analyzed the different results I have got in the previous chapter. From this analysis, I noticed that students work in difficult conditions, not only for physical environment but also for the teaching and learning process in general. As far as teachers are concerned, although they are aware of the fact that a relaxed atmosphere is necessary for teaching/learning, they do not practice the creation of such an atmosphere. They make pressure on students, getting the latter anxious.

I noticed from this study that the uneasiness in the teaching of English in general and in the creation of a friendly atmosphere in particular is a real fact which calls upon the different actors of our educational system. Then the responsibility in the problem solving comes to the government as well as to teachers, the students and the secondary schools staff. It is in this regard that, in chapter five, I have made some recommendations and suggestions to the Government, to teachers, to students and to secondary schools principals and their board in general and to those of secondary school of DAVIE in particular.

So, it is up to the Government to facilitate the teaching job to teachers by providing them with necessary materials and equipment they need. The administrative authorities must put teachers in good working conditions to achieve their task of appropriate education. The recruitment of qualified teachers, the increasing of pedagogical seminars and training would be welcomed.

The board of our secondary schools should be impartial in recruiting teachers and organize internal training for beginner teachers. They should be strict with teachers as far as the ethics of teaching job is concerned

EFL teachers must have initiative skills and be creative, give opportunity to students to express themselves during class activities, organize students in pair or in groups to work. In that way, they can contribute to the creation of a reliable and relaxed atmosphere for EFL teaching and learning.

Students should be aware of the importance and usefulness of the English language in this millennium. They must be regular to English classes, be interactive and work hard for better outcomes.

I do not have the impression to have done a complete work, but I hope that it will serve as a basis for other researcher willing to examine the difficulties of the teaching/learning of a subject like English considered as a foreign language in our country.

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ANNEX PAGES

QUESTIONNAIRE TO TEACHERS

The questions below are designed to help me get ideas and opinions about my research work. Please, tick only the appropriate box which expresses most you answer. Your identity will be kept confidential, only your answers will be used as illustrations in this research work. Thanks for your comprehension.

1-Do you think a relaxed atmosphere in EFL class is important?

Yes No Sometimes

2-What role can a relaxed atmosphere play in the process of EFL learning?

It facilitates knowledge acquisition it helps getting students comfortable to learn it enables the teacher to organize his class

3-Which aspect among the following affects more students' achievements in a relaxed classroom atmosphere?

Students' devotion the teacher's competence the teacher's method

4-Which aspect among the following can disrupt a classroom atmosphere?

Type of the activity the time of the day the students' age

5- Which kind of students do you have in your classes?

Talkative students active learners stubborn students

6-Do you set a code of conduct in your class?

Yes No

7-Do you plan your lessons before going to class?

Always sometimes rarely

8-Do you refer to warming up strategies from time to time?

Always sometimes rarely

9-How do you view your students?

As partners a great difference with you

10-How should the relationships between a teacher and his students be in an EFL class?

Good relationships with the Teacher as a simple guider a barrier should be noticed between them the teacher is the master and is not easily approachable

QUESTIONNAIRE TO STUDENTS

The questions below are designed to help me get ideas and opinions about my research work. Please, tick only the appropriate box which expresses most you answer. Your identity will be kept confidential, only your answers will be used as illustrations this research work. Thanks for your comprehension.

1-Do you think English is a good subject at school?

Yes

No

2-How do you find English when you start learning it at school?

Difficult

easy

easy and difficult

3-Do you think you can be good at English?

Yes

No

4-How do you feel when coming to English class?

Happy

afraid

frustrated

5-Is there laughter from time to time during English class?

Yes

No

6-Is your teacher often interested in all students, a group of students or nobody in the class?

All students

a group of students

nobody

7-Do you feel comfortable and relaxed with the teacher and your teacher during lesson?

Yes

No

Sometimes