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THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH IN BEGINNERS' CLASSES : A CASE STUDY OF CEG KOUTONGBE

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my dear parents who morally and financially helped me carry it out.

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INTRODUCTION

The English language for many decades has been the language more widely used all over the world. Gradually, it is being used by many people in almost every sector of activities such as business, politics, industry, education, and so on and so forth. Due to the value of this language, many actors of education, curriculum researchers and English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers assume that the more English is used the greater the requisites must be to teach it.

Actually, we are all confident that trained native speakers of English would make the best teachers of English; but we are conscious of the fact that the supply of native English speakers, thus, to a much smaller extent, “trained-to teach” native speakers, are unable to cover the entire fast-growing request for teachers of English around the world. Progressively, non-native speakers are being trained to teach English in many countries, especially in our country, the Republic of Benin.

The objective of language teaching is for teachers to seek for more effective ways for improving students’ communication skills so that they communicate effectively in real life contexts. There is no doubt, however, that in learning a foreign language, it is necessary for students to acquire, in addition to phonological and lexico-grammatical knowledge, ways to communicate with others using their target language. The problem is how to do so.

In this thesis, I will, first, look at how the notion of communicative competence has come to play an important role in the fields of sociolinguistics and foreign language acquisition (FLA) over the years; I will discuss how communicative competence should be incorporated into foreign language teaching in our secondary schools.

Then, I will figure out how EFL teachers can make their way to teach beginner learners how to communicate effectively in the target language. Talking of beginner learners, I mean students in their first year and second year of English in secondary schools.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO PROBLEM

1-1- Statement of problem

"The role of communicative competence in the learning of English in beginners' classes: a case study of CEG Koutongbé" is topic that I found very interesting, for many are those students who start English classes with a great desire to handle very early the language of Shakespeare. Unfortunately, after a few courses, those children find the teaching of English boring, useless, and causing then to feel contempt towards the teaching materials and activities and begin to complain about then. These students' attitudes give good reasons for the inability of teachers to help their learners acquire the target language in order to speak inside, especially outside of the school and in various situations. Indeed, teachers' focus is typically on reading and writing activities, not because they do not want to teach "communicative language" also called "speaking", but the problem is how to teach it. For them, the teaching of speaking makes them waste too much time, because their learners never help them move on their task causing them to stick on the same activity for a long period of time. But, the aim of teaching English as a foreign language is to help learners master the language, its structures in order to use it in real life context.

1-2- The purpose of the study

This study aims to supply EFL teachers with some helpful guidelines in the essential task of helping their learners to find out how varied and enriching a language may be, helping them speak fluently in a variety of situation for a variety of purposes and audiences helping them to practice the behavior of effective speakers.

Another purpose of this study is to display the important role "communicative competence" can carry out in the process of EFL learning.

Besides, my intention is to make new teachers become aware of:

mistakes they make unconsciously while carrying out communicative language teaching in class, the similarities and differences between the students' preferences and their teachers' preferences for the classroom activities, the pedagogical implications end the recommendations which are to be made so as to take into account the beginner learners' preferences.

1-3 –The research questions

The present study will answer the following questions:

- How do teachers manage in developing their beginner learners' communicative skills in class?
- Are the activities used during class helpful in the development of learners' oral communication?
- Do teachers' attitudes match with the implication of relevant literature?

1-4 – Significance of the study

I have opted to carry out this research study in the way to get EFL teachers and any other people who will get into contact with this material to know how important and crucial the teaching of speaking is in improving EFL learners' oral communication. During this research, I myself got into contact with much information that I ignored before; so it helped me learn many things in addition to my own experiences. Thus, it

will undoubtedly help other people especially teachers of English be aware of things they don't know yet. This study is significant, for it provides teachers very useful speaking activities suggested by famous specialists of the English language to help EFL learners develop their speaking. It is also important, because it examines the similarities and differences between learners' preferences and the teachers' preferences for classroom activities; it traces the pedagogical implications and draws the situation of the pupil which can help the teacher to know how to conduct English lessons due to EFL learners' level which many EFL teachers are not accustomed to. This can help them teach English in chronological order to help beginner learners use the language of Shakespeare effectively; since this is the very beginning of new language learning, a stage which must not be broken. The Republic of Benin being a French-speaking country in which the only opportunity to speak English really is while learning it at school through English classes, my research is also important, as it reveals how poor learners' oral communication is and suggestions to be made in correcting those errors. This study is still significant, as it can lead to future investigations related to the field.

1-5 - The outline of the study

My research work comprises five (5) chapters:

The first chapter deals with the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research question, the significance of the study and the outline of the problem.

The second chapter exhibits the literature review and it deals with books and documents related to my topic. My focus, here, is to face up to my findings the views of scholars who have dealt with EFL

part in developing beginner learners' communicative competence.

The third chapter is about the procedures used to collect the relevant data for my work .The methodology I used is based on implements such as questionnaires and class observations.

The fourth chapter reveals the findings of the study and it exhibits the results of my investigation, the analysis of the discussions of the collected data as well.

The fifth chapter discusses recommendations and suggestions that I found useful towards the educational authorities and EFL teachers.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The goal that EFL teachers are willing to attain in teaching learners communicative skills is to increase their ease of contact with the target language speakers outside the class. But surprisingly, many EFL teachers focus mostly on reading and writing activities which are not helpful for learners' use of the target language.

Therefore, in order to have English teachers know about the importance of communicative competence in the learning of English, some pioneers have tried their best to write useful documents. The report of these documents will help us get more information regarding the role of communicative competence in the process of learning English as a foreign language.

2-1 – Chomsky's perspective on competence

The conception of communicative competence came about in reaction to the following assertion made by generative-grammarian Norm Chomsky:

> *Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant condition as memory limitation distraction, Shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance.* (Chomsky, 1965:3)

As we can see, Chomsky clearly made a distinction between the description of language form (competence) and language use (performance) and established that the speaker-listener's internal grammar that judges the grammaticality of sentence should be the main object of investigation for linguists. Analysis from sociolinguists will throw light on what communicative competence brings about.

2-2 – Perspectives from sociolinguistics

2-2-1 – Communicative competence: Dell Hymes

It was not long before Chomsky's notion of idealized linguistic competence appeared. Dell Hymes, a sociolinguistic as well as ethnographer of communication, was the first among many distinguished language scholars to introduce the idea of communicative competence in terms of the "appropriateness of socio-cultural significance of an utterance" (canal and swain, 1980). In fact, Hymes (1974), Retaining the idea of Chomsky's underlying grammatical competence, looks at contextual relevance as one of the crucial aspects of one's knowledge of language and claims that meaning in communication is determined by its speech community and actual communicative event in question, which consists of the following components he calls SPEAKING (a mnemonic code word): Setting, Participants, Ends, Act sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms of interaction and interpretation, and Genre These are broadly considered speech contexts which real verbal interaction takes place. For a person to say he or she knows a language, therefore, he or she must know when to speak, when not, what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner (Hymes, 1972:277), in addition to how to make a sentence grammatically. In other words, he maintains that the knowledge of language that Chomsky associated with competence should be taken more comprehensively to include knowledge about the above-mentioned components, namely the rules of language use. In the same vision with Dell Hymes, another ethnographer insisted on notion for communicative competence.

2-2-2- The ethnographical point of view: Saville-Troike

Saville-Troike, another ethnographer who is fundamentally in line with Hymes' notion of communicative competence, considers the issue from the viewpoint of second or foreign language contexts. She distinctly

divides a central construct of communicative competence into three types of knowledge: linguistics, interactional, and cultural knowledge (Saville-Troike, 1989, 1996). The first one roughly corresponds to what Chomsky formulated as competence, with one lucid difference: the inclusion of linguistic features that may transmit social messages as well as referential meanings, in linguistic description. Citing her own experience with a Japanese learner of English who used the phrase on her term paper “and all that clap’’ to mean “etc”. Saville-Troike argues that recognizing linguistic variations that carry certain social meanings sometimes pose serious problems even for advanced students of English. Therefore, knowledge of the full range of the linguistic code, including those features that transmit social information, she concludes, needs to be viewed as part of one’s communicative competence.

The second property she considers necessary for communicative competence is interactional skills, namely the knowledge and expectation of social norms and conventions. Native speakers of English know how to do turn-taking naturally when talking to a friend or how to ask someone of a higher status to do something for them. These interactional skills are difficult for students to learn because in many cases they are not taught explicitly in the classroom. Besides the pronunciation of words, grammatical construction of sentences, and the use of vocabulary that learners are presented and learn, according to Saville-Troike, the interaction patterns are an essential part of communicative competence they need to acquire. Cultural knowledge, especially the social structure of language use, is the third component for Saville-Troike’s communicative competence. For example, a native speaker of English can readily identify ways of speaking that are appropriate for men and women, for children and adults, and for the educated and uneducated. For English learners, however, it may not be so easy, they are not able to recognize how a group of people “speaks well’’ in a conversational

exchange, and hence fail to act accordingly, they might make themselves a target of ridicule or imputation or simply offend their conversation partner. As we can see, these three areas of knowledge Saville-Troike proposes as basic constituents of one's communicative competence are all related to Hymes' appropriateness in communicative events in which interlocutors conduct verbal acts.

2-2-3- **Interactional aspects**: **Gumperz**

Perhaps more anthropologically inclined, Gumperz, citing Goffman's (1981) "Interactional Order", which is the organization of discourse functioning to bridge the linguistic and social elements, argues that one should look at talk in context as one form of communicative practice. Talk is not "just a matter of individuals' encoding and decoding messages'' (Gumperz, 2001:218), but also something by which conversationalists try to attain their communicative goals in real-life communicative exchange. Gumperz questions whether theoretical linguists should use judgment of grammaticality as the basis for syntactic analysis. He points out that whether a sentence is grammatical or not cannot be determined without a speaker's ability to imagine a context in which the sentence is interpreted. He is also conscious that the scope of sociolinguistic research on an interlocutor's communicative competence has become somewhat narrower, as many sociolinguistic simply preoccupy themselves with finding the occurrence and distribution of uttered items or verbal strategies in speech situations based on such external variables as speakers and hearers, audience, settings, and so on and so forth (Gumperz, 1997). According to Gumperz, this approach runs the risk of making sociolinguistics research on competence "highly particularistic'' (1997:40). Discussing meaning creation and interpretation at a more general level than the mere sentence level, Gumperz emphasizes the importance of how interlocutors share signaling conventions necessary to carry on their conversations. One aspect of the

productive and interpretive processes that he calls contextualization cues has been of special interest to him

The following brief dialogue has a number of contextualization cues and other discourse structures contributing to the establishment of a shared understanding of what is actually happening between the two interlocutors:

A: Are you going to be here for ten minutes?

B: Go ahead and take your break. Take longer, if you want

A: I'll just be outside on the porch. Call me if you need me.

B: Ok. Don't worry.

(Gumperz, 1997:41)

Gumperz argues that if these two interlocutors' knowledge about their language is restricted to a sentence-level, grammatical correctness, such a simple message as a request and its acceptance can't be interpreted and therefore not successfully exchanged. For example, B's comprehension of A's first speech as a request was possible because B was aware of the illocutionary force of A's question and used conversational inference to arrive at a correct interpretation of A's intention. Conversational inferences such as these are cued contextually, according to Gumperz (1997), by rhythmic organization, utterance prominence to bring to light some elements, the signaling of turn-taking, the choice of discourse strategies that influence their interpretation, and so on and so forth. In summary, Gumperz's view of a person's language competence is that it is a matter that always has to be discussed in relation to interaction, and the appropriate contextualization to mark communicative conventions is an essential factor for the success in conventional exchange. This corresponds to the notion of competence developed by Hymes and Saville-Troike, although the focus is different.

2-3- Perspectives from Foreign Language Acquisition

- **Four areas of communicative competence: Canale and Swain**

In their often-cited article on communicative competence in relation to foreign language pedagogy, Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a theoretical framework in which they outline the contents and boundaries of three of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competences. Sociolinguistic competence was further divided by Canale (1983) into two separate components: sociolinguistic and discourse competence. He defines communicative competence as "the underlying systems of knowledge and skill required for communication" (Canale, 1983:5). What is intriguing about their framework of communicative competence is that even the aspects of skills that are needed to employ the knowledge are now assumed to be part of one's competence. The communicative competence is, then, distinguished from what Canale calls "actual communication", which is defined as "the realization of such knowledge and skill under limiting psychological and environment conditions such as memory and perceptual constraints, fatigue, nervousness, distractions, and interfering background noises" (Canale, 1983:5). If we are to compare Canale and Swain's construct of communicative competence with that of Chomsky's in a broad sence, Chomsky's "competence" is equivalent to the "grammatical competence" mentioned be Canale and Swain, and all other areas of their framework are lacking in Chomwky's definition.

The four areas of communicative competence they identified are summarized below:

Grammatical competence: the mastery of Foreign Language phonology and lexico-grammatical rules of sentence formation; that is, to be able to express and interpret literal meaning of utterances (e.g. acquisition of

pronunciation, vocabulary, word and sentence meaning, construction of grammatical sentences, correct spelling, etc.)

Sociolinguistic competence: the mastery of socio-cultural rules of appropriate use of Foreign Language; that is, how utterances are produced and understood in different sociolinguistic contexts (e.g. understanding of speech act conventions, awareness of norms of stylistic appropriateness, the use of a language' to signal social relationships, etc.)

Discourse competence: the mastery of rules concerning cohesion and coherence of various kinds of discourse in Foreign Language (e.g. use of appropriate pronouns, synonyms, conjunctions, substitution, repetition, marking of congruity and continuity, topic-comment sequence, etc.)

Strategic competence: the mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies in Foreign Language used when attempting to compensate for deficiencies in the grammatical and sociolinguistic competence or to enhance the effectiveness of communication (e.g. paraphrasing, how to address others when uncertain of their relative social status, how speech for rhetorical effect, etc.) as it is clear from the way their framework is described, their intention was to discover the kinds of knowledge and skills that a Foreign Language learner needs to be taught and to develop the theoretical basis for a communicative approach in the Foreign Language Teaching based on the understanding of the nature of human communication. In addition, their framework indicates that it is the rules that Foreign Language learners must learn for accumulation of their knowledge and skills to be communicatively competent in the use of their knowledge and that these rules are not limited to systematic rules of grammar only but are not practical to all aspects of a language.

2-4- The role of communicative competence in Foreign Language Teaching

- **The importance of a communication-oriented framework**

Adoption of the communication-oriented foreign language teaching, popularly known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), in English classrooms has been repeatedly stressed by Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA) researchers, and indeed, there have been many studies attempting to determine its effects on Foreign Language learners. In discussing syllabus design, for example, Canale and Swain (1980) justify the application of CLT by defending it against the claim that communicatively oriented syllabus tends to be disorganized in terms of acquisition of grammar. They believe that there are no empirical data to support it and that the functionally organized communicative approach is more likely than the grammar-based approach "to have positive consequences for learner motivation" (Canale and swain, 1980:32) as it provides a form of in-class training that makes learners feel more comfortable, confident, and encouraged, with a clear, visible purpose for Foreign Language Learning, namely successful communication.

With respect to the use of strategies in learning a target language, Rubin (1979) describes seven learning strategies typically employed by a "good language learner" in a foreign language classroom. While many of the strategies seem to be rooted in the cognitive processes for language learning, she claims that a learner's intent behind the use of the strategies is a strong drive to communicate, and not effective understanding of grammatical items presented, and consequently there is much relevance and value in throwing light on what a learner does to develop his or her communicative competence in classroom activities.

2-5- Developing Communicative Competence as a Primary Focus Foreign Language Teaching

Brown (1994a), viewing CLT as an approach (that is, a theoretical position about the nature of language and of language teaching), rather than a specific method of teaching, describes four underlying characteristics in defining CLT in a foreign language classroom, which are summarized below:

- Focus in a classroom should be on all of the components of communicative competence of which grammatical or linguistic competence is just part.
- Classroom activities should be designed to engage students in the pragmatic, authentic, and functional use of language for meaningful purposes.
- Both fluency and accuracy should be considered equally important in a foreign language learning classroom. And they are complementary.
- Students have to use their target language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts under proper guidance, but not under the control of the teacher.

(Brown, 1994a:245)

It is clear from these characteristics that CLT is a major departure from earlier pedagogical approaches, particularly grammar translation methods that pay special attention to overt presentation of grammatical rules and translation. And yet, it seems to be a little consent as to what actually to present to the learners or what lesson methods to use to enhance their communicative competence and not just their grammatical commands through CLT. Moreover, Brown (1994b) lists six key words of CLT to better understand what it aims at: learner-centered, cooperative (collaborative), interactive, integrated, content-centered, and task-based. They indicate

supposedly ways in which language teaching id conducted communicatively, and so reflect the abovementioned characteristics of CLT.

In the following section, a few suggestions of activities are offered to foreign language teachers to help make their syllabus communicatively oriented, which can be applied most effectively to integrative English classes. However there are many other important activities to be taken into account such as Discussion, Picture Narrating, reporting, Interviews, role-plays, Storytelling, Information gap activities (Kayi, 2006), more focal point has been put on both the use of audio and audiovisual recordings and role-playing.

2-6- Activities to promote Communicative Competence

2-6-1- Use of audio and audiovisual recordings

Second or Foreign Language learners can benefit from viewing and reviewing audio and audiovisual recordings such as audiotapes and videotapes of their own communicative interactions and model interactions by native speakers. It is, however, recommended to provide only videotapes for beginner learners to get more interested in the lesson. In learning how to make requests, for example, the students can not only participate in pair work as part of their function-building exercise, but also film their actual performance to collect data for analysis. Though close examination of their recordings and introspection, the students will have a chance to reflect on what they said to make model performance by native speakers of the target language, in order for them to see how different or similar their communicative performance of request is, when contrasted with how native speakers execute the same act. Here, the students can both review their grammatical precision in use and learn about the socio-cultural appropriateness of the communicative event. Moreover, the very nature of the audiovisual material enables the

students to see and analyze their own and native speaker's nonverbal communication as well. It is, thus, advisable that the students study their own communicative experience and the nature and characteristics of social interaction in their target language so as to develop the foreign language sociolinguistic competence (Erickson, 1996).

2-6-2- Role-play

Role-play is a very important task, in that it tends to develop learners' communicative competence, particularly the sociolinguistic and strategic competence argued in Canale and Swain's (1980) framework. It also helps the students acquire what Saville-Troike (1996) describes as interactional knowledge. Language learning should thus be a lively method and a means to acquire knowledge to act correctly in a cultural group. For this goal to be attained, teachers need to provide the students with chances to act and interact verbally in the classroom. In the discussion of the use of audiovisual recordings above, it was suggested that the students tape-record their own communicative performance for introspection. However, Clark (1987), admitting the importance of role-plays in a foreign language classroom, warns that no role-play topic should be imposed to learners from the teacher's own will; instead, the teacher must structure his or her role-play in a way that his or her learners engage in "role-making" and "role-negotiating" as they interact.

Second, as Harmer (1984) suggests, role-plays increase the self confidence of hesitant learners, because in role- plays, they will have a different role and do not have to speak for themselves, which means they do not have to take the same responsibility.

CHAPTER THREE: THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This chapter deals with the methodological procedure used to carry out this research work. Therefore, a descriptive and evaluative methodology allowed me to identify the different problems English teachers encounter in their beginner learners' classes at CEG Koutongbé. It allowed me to check the different strategies used to help their learners develop their communicative competence.

3-1- Research population

To carry out this investigation, I considered the school actors such as teachers and learners. Indeed, to know what exactly happens in teaching/learning process, teachers and learners are the right persons to question and to observe in real class situation.

I particularly chose teachers for my investigation, since they are supposed to know much about the process of teaching and learning. For that to be done, I have planned questionnaires for them in order to get useful information about how they teach communicative competence to their beginner learners.

Among teachers I questioned, many had no objection to my coming to investigate through my research design. They spontaneously agreed to collaborate and helped me in gathering data related to the topic in study. They were very kind.

The sample population of this study consisted of twenty (20) teachers of English who teach in beginner classes at CEG Koutongbé and some one hundred (100) beginner learners.

3-2- Instruments of investigation

3-2-1- Questionnaires

The questionnaires are the most important source of information for the research. In order to get both quantitative and qualitative data, the questionnaires have been divided into two parts: the closed question section and the open-ended question section.

3-2-1-1- The questionnaire to the students

a- The closed question section

This part asked how much students like each listed activity by asking them to choose the appropriate column as follows:

How much do you like each activity? Please tick the appropriate box.

- *Like very much*
- *Like*
- *No opinion*
- *Dislike*
- *Dislike very much.*

As soon as it can be seen, the word *like* made no distinction between activities learners enjoyed and those they found useful. Students were free to interpret *like* in either way. The reasons for those choices were investigated in the open- ended question section.

(1) The literature on communicative approach in the language classroom and learners' views towards communicative activities they are faced to. In order to obtain learners' views about a wide range of activities, the selected activities include both types. The former is typified by the student- student interactive activities like pair/group work. The latter includes non-interactive activities

(individual work, mechanical drills) and teacher-centered activities (whole class work, teacher's talk).

(2) Current practice at the institution in general and of the target respondents in particular: the consideration of the context helped to choose activities that were actually being applied in these language classrooms rather than a list of general activities which can be labeled 'communicative' activities.

(3) The questionnaire includes sixteen (16) activities used in classes and one last item for recommendation of the subjects' own preferences was drawn up. In order to assess the opinions from subjects with actual experience of the activities only, a column named 'No experience' was included and the students who have never experienced any of those activities were supposed to indicate it by ticking the column. The activities had, in fact, been carefully selected to avoid as often as possible the 'No experience'

b- <u>The open-ended question section</u>

The open-ended question section aimed to identify students' reasons for preferences. Students were asked to choose activities they liked most and three others they disliked most and give the reasons for their choices. The students were free to express their minds either in English or French.

3-2-1-2- <u>The questionnaire to the teachers</u>

In order to obtain parallel data, the questionnaire for the teachers was also based on the list of activities but the questions were different in the sense that it asked the teachers to state their preferences for the teaching perspective (see annex).

In the open-ended question section, an additional question asking them about their views on their students' preferences was included. The

teachers were asked for, at least, three activities they thought their students like the most and three they dislike the most. They were also asked to give their reasons about these thoughts (see annex).

Data collection took place on three consecutive months with students of beginners' classes. The students were advised that the results were for information use only and that the responses were anonymous and would not be seen by their teachers. Each category of questionnaires is displayed on the annex pages attached to this research work.

Beside the questionnaires, I also collected data from interviews and class observations.

3-2-2- Interviews

In my investigation, I interviewed some teachers who have some experiences in teaching beginner classes. I used a semi-structured interview based on pre-set questions according to what to get from the responses. I elaborated a certain number of pre-set questions regarding my topic. Then, I went to visit and interview the target teachers.

Those interviews aim to get relevant information about information about strategies teachers use to develop their beginner learners' communicative competence. The elaborated pre-set questions include eight (08) questions and concern the use of songs, stories, the use of mother tongue, and realization of activities. Those pre-set questions are detailed with the aim of having an idea of how teachers should normally teach their beginner learners' communicative skills.

During the talk, I ticked the appropriate box according to the answers given to the different questions. At least, I met more or less difficulties for this interview. It is notable that though my interviewees had been contacted in advance, some of them categorically denied

cooperating; others explained that they were very busy. On the whole, I succeeded in getting some useful information that l tried to analyze and discuss in Chapter Four. I also made class observations to add more information to our research.

3-2-3- Class observations

To succeed in research design, I negotiated with some English teachers who willingly accepted to be visited in their beginners' classes. I elaborated with them some planning. I also agreed on what was to be observed.

The observations themselves concern the size of the classrooms, the number of students gathered in each classroom, how teachers develop student communicative competence, the way teachers motivate students to speak in class. I also paid special attention to aspects of using warm-up exercises, pictures description and stories telling which is very important in teaching / learning process.

All the teachers who accepted to cooperate were very kind and very hospitable. Whenever I paid them a visit, they spared me a seat at the bottom of the classroom in order to set me at ease to carry out my task. From this place, I could see every event during the learning situation.

At the end of each observation, we spent a few minutes discussing and exchanging ideas on issues which were relevant to my research.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

In this chapter of my research work, I revealed all the data I collected. Some will be analyzed through statistical table and some others will be exemplified. Afterwards, I will discuss my findings in relation to the topic.

So, similarities and differences between the findings and the topic under investigations are to be pointed out in order to propose appropriate solutions to the problems.

4-1- Presentation of the data

4-1-1 – Questionnaires

I designed questionnaires to about twenty (20) teachers. Out of these distributed questionnaires, I collected fifteen (15) answers. This number represents more a half of expected answers. It is not less important. Even if everyone has not responded to the questions, I am satisfied of this number of responses, for it allows me to make a valuable analysis and to gather reliable information about how English teachers proceed in developing the Communicative Competence in beginner learners.

I distributed one hundred (100) questionnaires to beginner students of CEG koutongbé among which I collected eighty four (84) answers. I think this is sufficient to carry out my analysis and draw a reliable conclusion about it.

All the sixteen (16) question items about activities were answered by all the respondents and no students recommended any other activities. Only one (01) participant ticked the ‘’No experience’’ in some of the activities.

The responses were coded as follows:

1= dislike very much

2= dislike

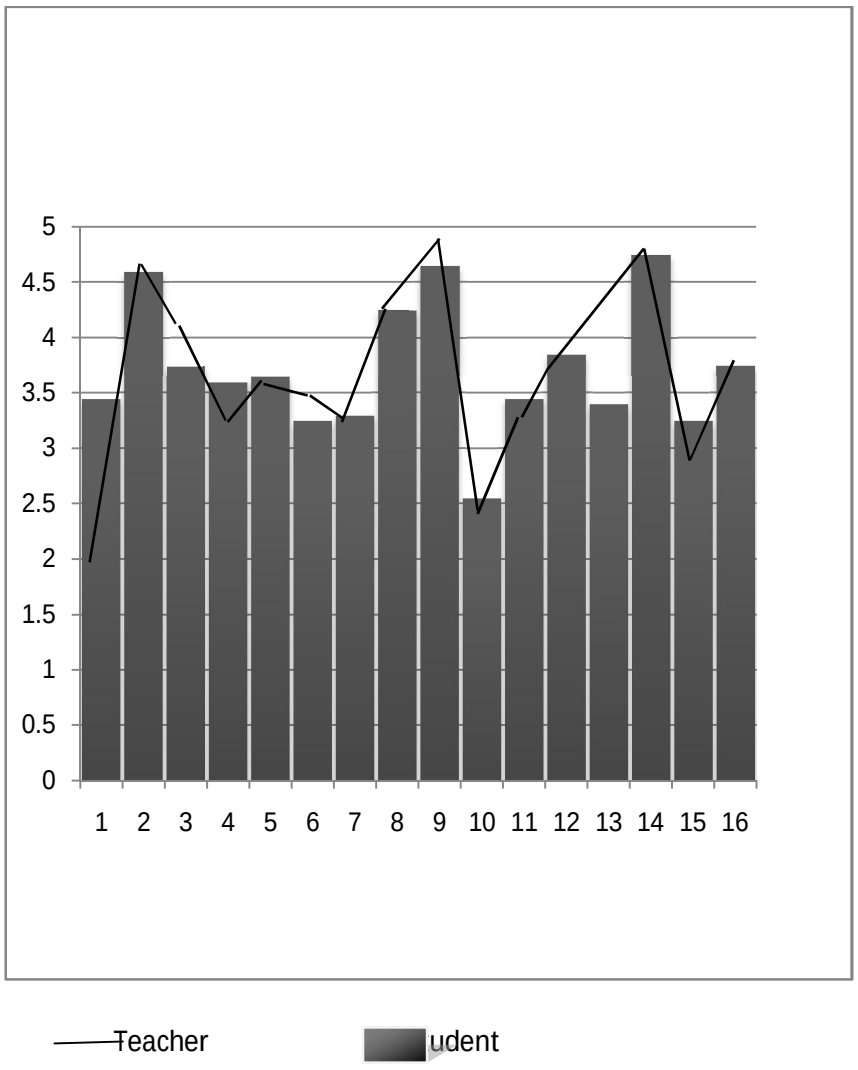
3= no opinion

4= like

5= like very much

Descriptive statics were used to identify the mean scores of each group. The comparison of the mean scores by both groups represented in Graph 1 below:

Graph 1: Comparing students and teachers' preferences for classrooms activities



Generally, the graph demonstrates a high degree of agreement between both teachers and students. Both groups highly valued the student-student interactive activities (activity 2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 14, 15). In fact, the items where the groups appeared to disagree include 1, 6, 10 and 13).

The results showed that 4 out of 16 items mostly showed mismatch between both groups. This indicates that among the 16 activities 25% mismatch between the ideas of the two groups.

The open-ended question section provided rich and interesting information from the respondents, which is more helpful in the explanation of the results.

4-1-2- Interviews

As mentioned in chapter three, my goal in undertaking a semi-structured interview is to get information about how teachers develop communicative competence in their beginner learners. So, after ticking the boxes related to the pre-set questions for the height semi-structured interviews, I administered, most of the results are presented in the chart below:

Questions / Answers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Yes	x	x				x		
No			x	x	x		x	x

As we can observe in this chart above, less half answers (3) are positive in the pre-set questions. The others are negative though some of them are expected to be positive answers. That reflects how some teachers of English neglect the strategies to use in order to develop their students' communicative competence in class.

Justifying their answers, some teachers say that they do not need to give opportunity to learners to be aware of what the mastery of English can bring to them. They even added students will realize it themselves later. Others estimate that they don't give opportunity to their learners to

react on subject of their own choice, because they don't have sufficient time devoted to English course (around 3 or 4 hours per week). Some also justified why they don't use students' mother tongue (L1), guessing that if they do so, students will become dependent on L1 and won't even try to understand meaning from context and explanation, or express what they want to say within their limit command of the target language.

All of the teachers interviewed kept up that a great attention must be on developing students' communicative competence, and mostly in beginners' classes. According all of them, skipping this level equals skipping all the followings; so they must develop some communicative skills in this level before reacting on the next one so as to master the target language in the view of using it appropriately in real-life situation.

In order to witness what problems teachers encounter in developing their learners' communicative competence, we decided to visit some classes at CEG Koutongbé.

4-1-3- Class observations

The essential of the identified problems can be listed as follows:

Many visited classes are not so wide to contain a great deal of students. They are too tiny for the number of the students to be at ease (the lowest number we encountered during our class observations is sixty (60) students in a classroom).

The hours devoted to English language are about three or four hours per week.

During the courses, some students seemed to be quiet and felt lack of concern.

4-2- ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

There are only mismatch between the students' preferences and their teachers', and both groups favored student-student interactive activities over the non –interactive and teacher-centered activities for both enjoyed and usefulness. The small differences between the teachers and the students scattered in most areas with significant difference in the writing-related activities.

4-2-1- Area of similarities

In this study, both teachers and students highly valued student-centered activities. While the communicative-orientation of teachers in this study bears similarity with other research, that the students bring a distinct feature of the findings. This orientation may be attributed to the learners' beliefs, language level and the classroom culture. The following part of the discussion will explain this in more detail.

The reasons given in the open-ended question section showed that the students were aware of their responsibility in active learning. In accordance with this perception, they were willing to participate in student-student interactive activities in order to maximize their opportunity to practice the language. Here are some learns viewpoints' mentioned below:

'In English courses, we hate sitting absent-mindedly, keeping quiet and listening to the teacher talking from the beginning to the end of the lesson. As far as I am concerned, I always think that our teacher should spare some time to give us the opportunity to speak English in class. Then correct our pronunciation and grammatical mistakes. If he lets us play a more active role in the class, I hope we will get more interested in the lesson. Normally, our teachers' role should be explanations and instructions.

It is very remarkable that those students have a very strong idea of learner-centeredness and this is the reason why they are opposed to the idea of teacher-centeredness seen as a passive way of learning a language.

‘*As far as I am concerned, I disapprove anything teacher-centered approach. I think that we are the ones to learn the language; it (teacher-centered activity) makes us passive although we wished the contrary.’*

Regarding pair/group discussions and presentations, they can be all effective and useful skills for students’ future careers as well as improving their language skill, if they are used in an appropriate way. As all teachers consent on, pair/group works can be excellent tools to promote students interaction.

‘*For me, these activities are very important in that they help develop team-working spirit, problem solving skill and oral presentation. It helps my team work ability. Also can my friends and I share our points of view and learn some skills from one another.’*

The way the student respondents highly valued student-centered activities for the usefulness and saw the rationale behind them was encouraging however some learners’ views about the nature of learning and learner-centeredness may be crude. In addition, the findings of our study that the beginner learners favorably evaluate pair/group work over whole-class work, for they are willing to use the English language in a more socially interactive situation.

4-2-2- <u>Area of differences</u>

The differences found between teachers and learners’ preferences appeared in only 4 out of 6 activities and scattered in most areas. Among the differences, the most notable and interesting points are related to the learners’ views toward the learning of grammar and pronunciation, which go against their teachers’ views regarding the importance of the teaching of grammar and pronunciation.

According to the teachers, teaching grammar and pronunciation helps students improve in the language and develop their communicative skills.

Students however claimed that grammar and pronunciation cause lack of focus, not because of the subjects, but the way and the situations in which teachers tend to teach them. In fact, the teacher should not start teaching pronunciation while students are answering questions or finding solutions to problems, which hinders their concentration, compromises their need to speak. Correcting students' mistakes is done due to situation:

''If my teacher always corrects me when I take the floor to speak, I feel nervous and unwilling to learn English that I thought I was not bad in; but it was quite a mistake.''

Some teachers effectively correct every mistake committed by students. That attitude makes students tense and leads to a lack of fluency. By the way, teachers should correct learners when they can't find the right way to proceed, when they are searching for the right word, phrase, or grammar.

Students in this study have shown that they are a great source of information when they are asked for their views, they are then able to report a range of factors that they feel promote or hinder gains from those classroom learning activities. Though some learners' views may be misleading, being aware of learners' views is undoubtedly useful for teachers.

On the one hand, these views inform teachers of their learners' needs and also how their teaching is perceived, since learner is the first to evaluate the teacher's lessons. By taking these wishes into consideration in the teaching decision making process, teachers are more likely to foster the enthusiasm of language learners. On the other

hand, by knowing learners' concerns or misleading perception, teachers may take timely interventions by raising awareness of the precise strategies, explaining the rationale of activities, or training students how to carry out tasks.

It is, for that reason, essential to let students express their judgments about the teaching and learning practice in the classroom and give them some important place in the teaching decision making process. Accordingly, considering and combining students' preferences, teachers would have more inclusive outlook, which must surely be essential for their teaching decision making so as to develop their learners' communicative competence, and their beginner learners' communicative competence principally. For this, we account for the fact that it will have many pedagogical inferences which influence optimistically teachers' choice.

4-2-3- Pedagogical implication

The findings result in the following pedagogical implications.

a. Asking for learners' views is very essential for the reason that they express their beliefs and positions in the direction of teaching means as well as classroom activities; therefore, it is crucial to lead them in their comprehension of language teaching and learning. In the case, where learners are opposed to communicative activities, the awareness-raising of learner autonomy and the explanation of the rationale behind those activities as well as how learners should carry out these activities may be compulsory.

As a teacher displayed in the interview that the learners show lack of interest to be involved in these activities previously, but according to the outcome of clear instruction of the aim of each activity, they appear to be more engaged.

b. We notice different classroom activities should be appropriate with different proficiency level and that proficiency level should be given particular awareness in the programme design and the choice of teaching method.

Generally, it is noticeable that the learners' language level, viewpoints, and nervousness are the major factors controlling their preferences for the student interactive activities.

The recommendations and suggestions are displayed in the next chapter of this work.

CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

After analyzing the beginner learners' preferences and their teachers' for classroom activities, and having recognized the problems hindering communicative competence in learning English as a Foreign Language in beginner classes, it is quite normal to search for remedial resolutions for good performance.

5-1- Recommendations

It would be quite important to give Beninese students the quality public education they deserve. To reach that goal, we make request to the government of this country to develop and to improve teachers working conditions by creating teachers' training colleges throughout the country and by supplying each school needed and adequate materials.

5-1-1- Recruitment and training of teachers

In countries where there is shortage of teachers, many English teachers are untrained, which hinders their ability to deliver quality education. To solve this problem in our country, we do need trained and motivated teachers. In this respect, we would like the government to organize a test in order to recruit English teachers and train them due to the request of the learners mentioned in chapter four. Accordingly, there will be fewer problems related to the language class management, and the learning of learners will be easy, that will help them develop their communicative competence in the target language.

There are many reasons why many teachers don't put any serious to the teaching; some of those reasons are the lack of motivation from the government towards the teachers. In effect, teachers need to be paid living wage house, travel, health and other incentives and benefits, which are things far to be done.

5-1-2- Excursions to English speaking countries

My recommendations are addressed towards the government and parents about the organization of excursions jointly sponsored by the government and parents. Surely does only the government provide everything, learners would not attach any importance to it. But their parents' part would oblige them.

Unfortunately, we have noticed that due to the large number of students and the financial capacities of some students' parents, this will be very difficult to recommend excursions for everyone. English teachers may submit the names of poor students of the class to attend the programme. Surely, not all students are interested in learning English. But that opportunity can help them change their mind and have them get interested in the learning of the language. Once in the host country, learners will socialize and make friends. They will then have no other choice than to interact in English. Even though back to their country, this attitude will stick to their mind and they will keep speaking the language without deciding to do so. Henceforth, if we really decide to reach a step where the learning of English is joined with such excursions, foreign language learning will stop being a simple subject but an interesting experience.

5-2- **Suggestions**

My proposals are essentially addressed to English teachers and to parents. Hence, to develop learners' communicative competence, English teachers must be aware of the goal they need to reach. And to improve students' speaking skills, there many activities that promote communicative competence which English teachers can easily exploit to their beginner learners.

I will just propose illustrative activities which will be useful to teachers of English.

- **“What English can help me do”**

Goal

Especially in formal educational contexts, one of teachers’ concerns is to help learners be aware of the reasons why they are learning the language and what they will gain from it. This activity has the goal of helping learners to be aware of what meaning the language can allow them to do and the opportunities that it can offer them. Learners once informed of this situation will affectively and effectively learn English open-heartedly.

- **Discussions**

The teachers can seize discussion activities for diverse motives. Perhaps, the students may intend to arrive at a conclusion, share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups: at this point, the teacher can form groups of students according to the class size, and then give each group its topic to be argued for a period of time and presents its opinion to the whole class. This activity can promote critical and quick judgment making, and students become skilled at how to communicate and defend themselves in polite ways even while they are contradicting the others. For group discussions to be proficient, the teacher had better not form large groups despite the class size, because quiet students may keep away from contributing in large groups.

- **Storytelling**

This is one of the tasks students may like the most. Students can briefly summarize a tale or story they heard from someone earlier, or they may produce their own stories to tell their classmates. Storytelling fosters creative thinking. It also helps students express ideas in the

format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting a story has to have. Students also can tell riddles or jokes. For instance, at the very beginning of each session, the teacher may call a few students to tell short riddles or jokes as an opening. In this way, not only will the teacher address students' speaking ability, but also get attention of the class.

- **Picture narrating**

This activity is based on several chronological pictures. Students are asked to tell the story taking place in the sequential pictures by paying attention to the criteria provided by the teacher as a rubric. Rubrics can include the vocabulary or structures they need to use while narrating. The teacher should try to involve each student in this activity, for this aim, practice different ways of student participation.

- **Picture describing**

Another way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students just one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. For this activity, students can form groups and each group is given a different picture. Students discuss the picture with their group mates, and then a representative for each group describes the picture to the whole class. This activity fosters the creativity and imagination of the learners as well as their public speaking skills.

- **Find the difference**

For this activity, students can work in pairs and each couple is given two different pictures, for example, a picture of boys playing football and another picture of girls throwing balls to each other. Each group is now to find the similarities and the differences in the two pictures.

- **Brainstorming**

On a given topic, students can construct ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group brainstorming is effective and learners produce ideas rapidly and freely. The good characteristics of brainstorming are that the students are not criticized for their ideas so students will be open to share new ideas.

- **Playing cards***

In this game, students should form groups of four. Each suit will represent a topic. For instance:

- Diamonds: earning money
- Hearts: love and relationships
- Spades: an unforgettable memory
- Clubs: best teacher.

Each student in a group will choose a card. Then, each student will write 4-5 questions about that topic to ask the other people in the group. For example:

If the topic “Diamonds: earning money” is selected, here are some possible questions:

- Is money important in your life? Why?
- What is the easiest way of earning money?
- What do you think about lottery? Etc.

However, the teacher should state at the very beginning of the activity that students are not allowed to prepare “yes/no” questions, because by saying “yes” or “no”, students will get little practice in spoken language production. Rather, students ask open-ended questions to other so that they reply in complete sentences.

- **Information Gap**

In this activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that other partners do not have and the partners will share their information. Information Gap activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or completing information. Also, each partner plays an important role because the task cannot be completed if the partners do not provide the information the others need. These activities are effective because everybody has the opportunity to talk extensively in the target language. The teacher should then, in every activity, reduce teacher speaking time while increasing student speaking time, steps back and observe the learners and helps if needed.

(Kayi, 2006)

5-3- The role of parents in the development of students' communicative competence

Parents may control their children programme preferences on TV, choosing also English news, English movies to help them improve. Parents who master the target language can speak with their children at home; those who are able to send their children to some English speaking countries for holidays can do so for socializing and making friend relationships with English speakers. This will help them a lot in mastering the language.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In every EFL class, many students seem obsessive about communicating efficiently in English, but it is quite impossible for them to reach that goal by themselves. Their teachers are well placed to guide them in doing it. But what is tormenting them is “how?”. That’s the reason why the purpose of our research work consists in putting light on what the beginner learners’ preferences and the teachers’ preferences for classroom activities are, and to see how students’ needs can be taken into account in order to be aware of how to help them be communicatively competent.

To achieve our goal, we firstly tried to expand our knowledge about the topic by going through some pioneers’ books related to the role of communicative competence in learning English as a Foreign Language. All information we have gotten from those productions led us to be more aware of how beginner learners can be helped to develop their communicative competence in our secondary schools. Teaching communicative skill is a central part of foreign language learning. The ability to communicate in a foreign language clearly and efficiently contributes to the achievement of the learner in school and achievement later in every stage of life.

The second stage of our research work consisted in designing questionnaires to some teachers of English as well as some beginner learners in one of our secondary schools so as to get their opinion and their preferences about activities chosen by their teachers to help them better in speaking. At the same time, we interviewed some EFL teachers before embarking on classroom observations to get more information about the real situation in our English classes. During our investigation, we found many difficulties related to the lack of classrooms, the inadequacy of hours allocated to English lessons. All those problems hinder the learners’ motivation to learn effectively the language.

Henceforth, the last step of our research work was about recommendations to the educational authorities, and some suggestions are also made to EFL teachers to carry out activities that can help learners become competent in communicating in English. Consequently, it is necessary that language teachers pay great attention to the teaching of communicative skills. Instead of directing students to pure memorization, we should provide a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place. Another important way to make English learning efficient is to train teachers and also motivate them by increasing their salaries if possible.

Various activities such as those listed in Chapter Five can contribute a great deal to develop basic interactive skills in learners, which is necessary for life. These activities make students more active in the learning process and at the same time make their learning more meaningful and fun for them; it also helps teachers know their students' needs for better comprehension.

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ANNEX 1

The questionnaire to the students

Dear students,

I am now doing research into “the role of Communicative competence in the learning of English in beginners’ classes: a case study of CEG Koutongbé” at Ecole Normale Supérieure of Porto-Novo. I would highly appreciate if you could spare some time for the completion of this questionnaire.

Your cooperation would be essential to my research.

A- Please indicate your opinions by answering the following question based on your experience up to now. The question is:

- How much do you like each activity? Please tick the right column.
- If you have no experience of any particular activity mentioned below, please tick the “No experience” column.

Class: ……

Activities	Like very much	Like	No opinion	Dislike	Dislike very much	No experience
1. Reading texts aloud in class						
2. Oral discussion in pairs						
3. Oral discussions in groups						
4. Giving individual oral presentation						
5. Giving group oral presentation						
6. Taking part in oral exercise (grammar, pronunciation drills)						
7. Listening to classmates giving oral presentation						

8. Listening to recordings and doing follow-up exercises						
9. Role-play						
10. Reporting						
11. Interviews						
12. Storytelling						
13. Classmates giving oral feedback						
14. Interacting in English with classmates						
15. Taking part in language games						
16. Listening to English songs						
17. Your own preferences (please add any if you need)						

B- From the list above, choose at least three (03) activities you like most and three (03) activities you dislike most, write the numbers of those activities and give the reasons why you like or don't like each of them.

In answering this question, please write as much as you like either in English or in French and continue on separate paper if necessary.

a- Activities I like most:

-

-

-

b- Activities I don’t like most

-

-

-

ANNEX 2

The questionnaire to the teachers

Dear teacher,

I am now doing research into "the role of Communicative competence in the learning of English in beginners' classes: a case study of CEG Koutongbé" at Ecole Normale Supérieure of Porto-Novo. I would highly appreciate if you could spare some time for the completion of this questionnaire.

Your cooperation would be essential to my research.

A- Please indicate your opinions by answering the following question based on your experience up to now. The question is:

- How much do you like each activity? Please tick the right column.
- If you have no experience of any particular activity mentioned below, please tick the "No experience" column.

Teaching experience: ……. years

Activities	Like very much	Like	No opinion	Dislike	Dislike very much	No experience
1. Reading texts aloud in class						
2. Oral discussion in pairs						
3. Oral discussions in groups						
4. Giving individual oral presentation						
5. Giving group oral presentation						
6. Taking part in oral exercise (grammar, pronunciation drills)						
7. Listening to classmates giving oral presentation						

8. Listening to recordings and doing follow-up exercises						
9. Role-play						
10. Reporting						
11. Interviews						
12. Storytelling						
13. Classmates giving oral feedback						
14. Interacting in English with classmates						
15. Taking part in language games						
16. Listening to English songs						
17. Your own preferences (please add any if you need)						

NB: Please answer this question from your own opinion, not from students' answer. Thank you for understanding!

B- From the list above, choose at least three (03) activities you think your students like most and three (03) activities you think they dislike most write the numbers of those activities and suggest the reasons why they may like or may not like each of them.

In answering this question, please write as much as you like either in English or in French and continue on separate paper if necessary.

a- Activities I like most:

-
-
-

b- Activities I don't like most

-
-
-

Pre-set questions to the teachers

1- Do you use songs in your lessons?

Yes ☐ No ☐

2- Do you use stories in your lessons?

Yes ☐ No ☐

3- Do you succeed in stimulating whole class participation in your lessons?

Yes ☐ No ☐

4- Do you speak only English in class?

Yes ☐ No ☐

5- Do you use your students' mother tongue during class?

Yes ☐ No ☐

6- Do you talk more than your learners during class?

Yes ☐ No ☐

7- Do you help your students to be aware of what English can bring them?

Yes ☐ No ☐

8- Do you give learners opportunities to react on a subject of their own choice and in which they have a particular interest?

9- Yes ☐ No ☐