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THEME:

**Teaching Reading Skills in Competency Based  
Approach Problems Encountered in EFL Classes  
in Djougou**

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## **DEDICATION**

To you Almighty God, my Holy  
Lord, Savior and Redeemer.

To the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus.

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# INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in our everyday life today because of globalization. This role of English language has greatly influenced many French speaking countries in some extent; so they introduce teaching and learning English language in their secondary schools as foreign language. As communication is our basic daily need, English language is necessary in everyday life whether we like it or not, because of the warm cooperation that exists between the West African countries.

Though French is used as the official language in Benin, educational authorities in Benin have worked tirelessly to meet the demand already mentioned above. As a result, the expansion of the teaching of English program in Benin is a reality despite the problems encountered in implementing these programs. Nevertheless, number of people have perceived the importance to learn English considering the advantages it offers in the communication process both in real life and in the classroom context. The view that English can be accessible to everyone in a community has come to be true. But learning this language is a crucial problem in the sense that we live in an environment where French and our different mother tongues have dominated most of the time every aspect of life. Like other languages, teaching and learning English as foreign language is through the following four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Among these skills, I am interested in some of problems encountered by teachers and learners in implementing reading because this skill deserves great care. Reading provides an opportunity for finding out all kinds of interesting

information, rising curiosity and adding something to the general knowledge a person has already possessed. One important thing to keep in mind is that a language is learnt for communication in various circumstances. And this helps us to solve our problems in everyday life. But this communication is overpowered by the ability to read easily in the foreign language in question. It means that reading in learning and teaching a language reinforces one's interest and motivation to that language. Reading and oral communication are interrelated. Especially, with globalization, more emphasis is on English reading for the purpose of having access and obtaining up-to-date information shared in the world. This amounts to underline the importance of reading and the reader's role in the communication process.

To sum up, reading in a foreign language is so important that we are more and more exposed to English texts not only in classroom, but also in real life context. Reading in English plays a vital role in such a way that it lessens our dislike (mostly learners) for the language. In short, if these can be the advantage of reading in a foreign language, how do learners in our secondary schools view English class? What are some attitudes learners have during reading section in their classroom? What problems do teachers and learners encounter during reading class, especially in Djougou?

A critical analysis is then necessary to know the reasons why students develop some attitudes which hinder a better acquisition of reading skills and sometimes prevent teachers to be proud after a reading class. The necessity to

research and make a diagnosis of these problems has led me to shape my topic as follow: ***“Teaching Reading Skills in Competency-Based Approach: Problems Encountered in EFL Classes in Djougou.”***

For a methodical research, I subdivide my work into five chapters. The first one deals with the introduction of the problem. I mean the statement, the purpose, the importance and the limitation of the study. The second is about the review of the related literature and its analysis in comparison with my work. The third chapter displays the methodology of the study. I mean the way I collected the data of the study. The fourth one presents and analyzes the data collected in order to state problems encountered by teachers and learners whereas the fifth and last chapter is on recommendations and suggestions as some approaches of solution to the problems related to teaching reading skill.

**CHAPTER ONE:**  
**THE INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM**

In this chapter, I have to state the problem related to my topic, the purpose, the importance and the limitation of the study. This is to make clear the reasons which pushed me to make research on teaching of the reading skills.

### **1-1- The statement of the problem**

In the context of learning a foreign language, many researchers recommend that learners should be able to communicate easily after many years of study. Taking English as a foreign language in the course of this study, it is clear that learners often fail to master it and thus don't prove successful. In Benin context where English is taught at secondary schools as a foreign language, English is viewed at different angle likely to the role it plays not only on academic level but also in our everyday life. Evelyn Hatch (1978) in her book *Reading a Second Language* wrote: "*For many (...) foreign students, reading skills are perhaps even more important for academic success than speaking skills. Reading is a skill that everyone needs whether he/she is a student in elementary, secondary, university or adult schools*" (pp129-130).

But learners do not often realize the importance of reading and often tend to underestimate it, owing to the fact that it is unrewarding and this because of the teaching method and teacher's motivation . And it is when they find themselves in a situation where reading is compulsory that they highlight its importance. At this point, it is too late. It then follows that when learners do not get into contact with the language at its earlier stage, particularly when dealing with reading based on a variety of motivation techniques, students sometimes become aggressive towards

the language and find it too difficult and repulsive. And though we read silently for meaning, there is no doubt that reading represents an underlying factor that highlights either a person's academic performance or his/her social rank. And most students and even teachers fail to acknowledge this fact.

When I go to a further step, I notice that analyzing critically students' attitudes towards reading skill in EFL classes deserves a thorough consideration.. As teachers are supposed to study each unit up to a level, I realize that some of those suggested texts are really not up-to-date, and in my opinion, they are not worth contextualized socially. Before the introduction of these recommended documents in our curriculum, the former teaching materials ( eg : **Mr. Sale's Job** in "Go for English" ) were most of the time appreciated only because they deal with relevant texts that are related to our everyday life .

So personally, I think that attaining a better result when teaching reading in EFL classes means introducing new interesting and stimulating reading materials for both teachers and students. An effective classroom teacher and a potential observer can notice that students lack interest and motivation during reading sections. In addition to this, students do not devote much of their time to reading English text neither in the classroom nor outside the classroom. However, Mary Finocchiaro (1974) in the book *English as Second Language: from Theory to Practice* said: "*For many students, reading is the one skill they may occasionally use when they have left the classroom. It is also the skill that is retained the*

*longest. Reading is more than just assigning foreign language sounds to the written words; it requires the comprehension of what is written'' (P.249).*

For instance, when I asked questions to most of learners about their reading English text habit, they commonly answered that they did not find any interest in the English texts. And they justified that they did not understand most of the words they encountered in those reading text. Students do not really focus on reading because for them, reading is unrewarding and time-consuming-activity. Taking all these factors into account, I think that the issue of the interest and motivation in reading is important and teachers should put emphasis on it.

From my class observation ,I noticed that the inability of both teachers and learners to find out relevant alternatives to the issue makes things more complicated. What I mean is that if teachers realize the problem at a given time, when carrying out a reading activity, they rarely come back again to reflect on it and suggest possible solutions. Rather, they underestimate it. To sum up, students face the problem of language in texts, the problem of contextualized and complicated texts, and the problem of "I cannot read well" related to phonetic constraints which sometimes hinder comprehension.

As reading is for meaning, then meaning takes place only if the earlier conditions are fulfilled. I would also like to emphasize on the fact that Benin is a French-speaking country where English is taught as a foreign language only from the first year of the secondary school and this for seven years. And as such, we cannot expect learners to use that language as a native speaker who sometimes uses

it as his/her mother tongue or official language in the country where he/she lives. Yet, we don't take it as such, and don't try new approaches considering Benin context. It is a must for us to do it even if we encounter any kind of problems because of the development and the widespread of the English language. I would like in my study to take into account these problems and difficulties. And I would bring these focal points into a better defined and try to make practical suggestions and recommendations.

### **1-2- The purpose of the study**

The way English teachers in Benin secondary schools carry out reading sections in their EFL classes is worth being explored. Indeed, teachers attempt to bring all that can help to resolve reading problems and to find ways and means to reach valuable results, but the problem is still worsening. This study is not meant to be the reference or the last resort, but it may serve as a positive additional tool to what other researchers have already done. Thus, for the topic under consideration, our purpose is first of all to acquire an appropriate level of awareness of the problems encountered in teaching reading in the EFL classes, especially in Djougou.

Taking the English documents as back-cloth (I mean the textbooks designed to be used in the Competency-based Approach for reading), I need to explore them thoroughly to point out the impacts of these textbooks on English learners in Benin. I also need to make teaching board be aware of these impacts and find significant measures to solve these problems by putting more emphasis on the

existing problems that teachers face during reading in the Competency-based Approach context.

Another purpose is to acquire basic knowledge and skills to enable learners to actually read with pleasure. In other words, our investigation seeks ‘‘to arise motivation and interest’’ in students learning how to read in English as a foreign language. At the end of this research work, I would like students to feel at ease and find no discomfort to read any English text for its various purposes. And though vocabulary acquisition may lessen understanding, the text must be interesting and deal with their everyday life. I would like teachers to realize that the assigned textbooks are only meant to guide them in their task; teachers are not obliged to be slave of these texts. I would like them to select relevant teaching materials of their own so that the class atmosphere could be enjoyable and the purpose for reading be achieved.

Students must be aware of the fact that reading does not mean to read for the reading sake, but rather, to get good reading habit so that it may be beneficial in the future. That is to follow every key steps when carrying out a good reading activity. Finally, my investigation also seeks to make both teachers and students aware of the importance of reading especially in a world in which every discovery and technology even the best books are most of the time described or written in English.

### **1-3- The importance of the study**

How does a learner feel when he/she reads something in a foreign language and cannot understand it? The common answer is that he/she feels frustrated and aggressive towards the language. As our secondary school learners are very poor in vocabulary which may help to grasp the meaning of a text, interest disappears as well as motivation. Then, there is a need for me to prove that my topic is significant by displaying the problems which do not enable learners to be interested and motivated during reading sections in our EFL classes.

Secondly, my topic will reveal some negative aspects related to our curriculum as far as the prescribed textbooks and teaching materials are concerned. Thirdly, it will be necessary for me to search for some techniques and approaches susceptible to arise interest and motivation in order to promote English language learning, develop good reading habits and encourage fluent reading for some specific purposes.

My topic could also arise in teachers a deep desire to explore some extents, the different aspects of teaching reading in English as a foreign language by considering what my research work would suggest at the end as research findings. In this way, teachers may enhance their way of teaching reading and of reading in the social life context.

My earnest concern in this work is to deny the fact that reading is a complex task and unrewarding. Though Frieda Dubin (1979) in *Selected\_Articles from English Teaching Forum* sustained that “*reading is a multifaceted, complex skill*

*made up of psychological, physical and social element'' (P. 84).* It is however, the third skill in language learning and as such must give it a thorough consideration. I would like this research work to serve much more for everyone who would like to learn English particularly through the reading skills.

I wish that at the end of this research work, people would be aware of the role of reading skill in English language learning process. I also wish that my research work serves as a source of inspiration for those who would like to undertake a research work in this domain. With the advent of globalization and the expansion of English language in all areas that anyone recognizes nowadays, we are always in contact with the language whether we like it or not. So, teachers must let learners and English users know that the practice of the language bring them be aware of the language. Without this, they cannot reach their goal. Therefore, owing to its significance, this study sheds light on those who are still narrow-minded towards the language because to my knowledge, reading is fundamentally a will to discover the new knowledge.

I could not end up this part without summarizing that good reading habits provide good meaning and being aware of the foreign language. And to back up this viewpoint, Frieda Dubin (1979) in *Selected Articles from English Teaching Forum* said: *“A person without reading competence is severely limited; literacy is widely regarded as an essential tool for learning”* (P 91). So , EFL teachers have the duty to help learners know that reading is not only for getting good marks in

the class situation during evaluations, but it has beneficial effect even in their everyday life of their adulthood situation.

#### **1-4- The limitation of the study**

The target population to be considered in this research work is strictly limited to students learning English as foreign language in the competency-based approach. I have been teaching English as foreign language in Djougou, particularly in CEG Bélléfoungou and CEG Kolokondé. I would like to make know that CEG Bélléfoungou is one of the secondary schools chosen by the educational authorities in Donga to experiment the New Program of Education (NPE) which becomes today the Competency-Based Approach (CBA). As I cannot use the case of these two secondary schools to generalize it to all the secondary schools in Djougou, I have broadened my study case to CEG1 Djougou which is the first and the biggest secondary school in Djougou.

I would like to state that my research work does not take into account the problems encountered by every EFL teacher when teaching reading skills in their classes. I restrict my research work on the general and common problems that teachers have when implementing reading teaching in their EFL classes in Djougou through different strategies suggested by the competency-based approach. This research work also takes into account the causes of these problems.

**CHAPTER TWO:**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW RELATED TO THE**  
**STUDY**

I would not continue this research work without making reference to those who have already investigated in the domain under consideration and have already clarified some aspects of my topic. Therefore, it is worth pointing out the substance of their findings by relating it to my research work.

### **2-1- Clarification of the word “skill”**

Success in anything requires skill. If a writer is not skilled, people cannot enjoy reading his/her books. The same thing is noticed as far as carpenter and building designer are concerned; if they are not skilled, their works will not be attractive. In this work, I am concerned with skill in the context of learning to read English, a foreign language. So, I am interested to the definitions of the word “skill” in this context.

In the English Dictionary of Encarta (2009), skill is “*the ability to perform something expertly and well through training and experience.*” This definition is highlighting the mastery and the facility to do something without mistakes after being trained for. Taking this definition into account, I can say that being skilled in reading an English text is being able to read it without difficulties and well in order to recognize its meaning after a number of years in the secondary school.

### **2-2- Clarification of the word “reading”**

In this section, I will just give the common definition of reading since it is the fact I am interested in, regarding the problems encountered when teaching reading in the classroom.

For the English Dictionary of Encarta (2009), reading is: “*the process of identifying and understanding the meaning of characters or words in written*

*material*". In other words, reading is discovery of the writer's ideas by extracting meaning of the written words and by guessing the hidden information. This includes two things:

- the conversion of the written words into spoken words while reading;
- processing and relating information contained in the text.

Nowadays, students do not actually grasp the importance of reading to achieve a specific purpose. Their attitudes in a class during a reading session do not allow them to reach this purpose. According to Rivers (1981) in *Teaching Foreign Language Skills* : "*reading is the most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of information and pleasurable activity, but also a means of consolidating and extending one's knowledge of the language*" (P. 259). From this, I can say that reading activities in our classes are not only for pleasure or for getting the marks in order to go up to the high class. And pointing out the competency-based approach ideology, the reading activities are to help learners get new knowledge and consolidate their own knowledge on the topic of the text. But the way learners deal with reading cannot be applied to the above quotation. I really feel unrewarded when at the end of a given reading lesson; students are not able to achieve specific tasks for consolidation. When learners are not able to gain much from a reading activity, it means that bad attitudes can always be observed.

If we all assume that reading can help to achieve a specific purpose, Hyland (1989) in the book *Purpose and Strategy: Teaching Extensive Reading\_Skills* adds: "*In the real world, however, reading is a means to an end not an end in itself. It is*

*always a purposeful activity and our job as teachers is to help students identify these different purposes and to master the strategies best suited to achieving them. In other words, we must use reading lessons to develop student's reading proficiency rather than improving linguistic competence ' (P.104). So, our job is not to make segregation between good readers and bad readers in our reading classes. It is for teachers to help learners know the specific purpose of each reading activity. The teachers must also help students master each strategy of the reading skills so as to make them be the best decoder of information, not the best linguist. In this way, our learners can easily discover the ideas developed by the writer in a paragraph or a text for a specific audience.*

### **2-3- Relation between reading and phonetics**

I would like in this part of my work to say that if learners are not able to recognize many spellings for one sound, many sounds for one spelling and the role of silent letters, our objective will not be achieved accordingly. This is an aspect which explains the reason why learners have negative attitudes towards reading. As illustrated, some learners refuse to go through the reading activity because they are not able to recognize different spellings for a given sound and to pronounce it accordingly; this slows their understanding of the text and therefore makes them dislike the activity. This attitude is not often taken into account in the teaching process and teachers sometimes think that the above categories of learners are not ready to make little effort and expect everything to come easily. When learners

lose control of what they read, little chance for comprehension is therefore obvious.

For Karl Conrad Diller (1978) in his book *Language Teaching Controversy* “*student wanting real reading power must have active control over what he reads. The only effective way to attain the goal of a reading knowledge of language is to gain an active mastery of the productive-speaking and writing-aspect of that language*” (P.91). Without being able to pronounce words correctly, learners fail to read the text and then develop negative behavior during reading classes. The competency-based approach can help learners achieve this goal: teacher starts by having learners pronounce the words before going to the effective reading activities. So, if teachers try to help the learners in this domain, they can have active control over what they read. Thus, teachers can diminish the problems they have with the reading teaching in their EFL classes.

#### **2-4- How to control the reading text ?**

Having active control over what is learnt means being oneself interested in what is read and what is read interesting one. Before any reading material is thoroughly controlled, learners have to adopt attitudes which facilitate their understanding of the material while reading. For this, Robert Norris (1995) in the article *Getting students more personally involved in their reading in literature classes* analyzes reading and how it applies to Japanese students of English. And after his analysis, he gives suggestions on how to improve the teaching of English reading at Japanese colleges. These suggestions are based on some main tenets:

- getting away from translation exercises and teacher-centered format.
- using texts that are related to students' own lives and concerns and can be completed within a particular time frame.
- using group activities that involve the students personally are aimed at improving bottom-up skills as well as introducing top down skills (P.35)

These three important truths often escape teaching reading hours and when confronted with specific problem coming from learners, they truly judge this as awkward and look down on learners.

Having active control over the reading texts also means choosing interesting, motivational and social contextualized texts for the reading section. So, reading in English as foreign language in the context of Competency-based Approach supposes that the choice of the reading texts must take into account some satisfactory factors such as: stimulation, personal involvement, learners' interest, provoking strong and thoughtful reactions from the learners. Text selection is really a phase where the best reactions and attitudes can be seen. Failure to achieve this goal for learners' sake results in wrong judgments. In this same line of thought, Baxter (1992) in the book *First Things to Know* said: *"If the text is meaningful and enjoyable, reading is more likely to have a lasting and beneficial effect upon the learners' linguistic and cultural knowledge. It is important to choose books, therefore, which are relevant to the life experience, emotion, or dreams of the learners"* (P.6).

Since the learners cannot choose themselves their reading texts in the classes, I think that the reading text and activities have to be chosen according to the learners' background, social and economic environment. That's why the competency-based approach suggests the contextualizing of the teaching/learning process in our different classes. In so doing, learners discover their concern through the text and are on hurry to express their opinions about the text's content. In this way, the new language knowledge has the beneficial and lasting effect on learners' life even adult.

But the real problem in the competency-based approach is where to find relevant texts for our learners according to the learning situation and the learners' level. Any text from any book, if we want to stay in the learning situation's context, is over the learners' level. Then, the reading text must be always chosen according to the learners' level especially with the intermediate learners.

### **2-5- Keeping learners on task**

It is important here to arise that learners mostly complain about the readability of the text teachers give them to read. Learners' first reactions or attitudes when they are given a text to work on task are to see if it can be understood when being read. Unless learners discover this aspect, teachers have to accept that the task they are assigned to will not be successful. The key problem students often denounce is the difficulty in reading text and in that way, students will gradually perform poorly and then reduce their enthusiasm to engage in a reading activity. Their conception about English language will be distorted. Not

only are they appropriately degraded but also they accidentally come across teachers' refusal to help them solve any problem since they have lost confidence in the teachers' work.

According to Baxter (1992) in *First Things to Know*, “*if the combination of structural and lexical difficulty is too high above the students' reading level, the odds are that they will not be able to identify with or enjoy the text because they will perceive it as being fraught with difficulty every step of the way. If the text is loaded with new vocabulary and complex structures, it is probable the students, if not the teacher, will resort to translation as the only way of coping*” (P.6).

The problem of new vocabulary items and complex structures in the text often blocks the learners' will to read and to acquire new language knowledge. They simply remain saying “I cannot read the English text”. In this way, the English reading class becomes teacher-centered; and such teaching/ learning process is out of the competency-based approach process. When I go thoroughly through the competency-based approach curriculums, I remark that every learning situation in English starts with what's called the “starter situation” followed by the listening and repeating activity. During this starter situation learners discover with their teacher new vocabulary items related to the topic of the lesson. The teacher helps learners to pronounce these vocabulary items accordingly. Thus, if the reading material takes into account these new vocabulary items, the learners' difficulties to decode information from the text will be diminished. They cannot

also find the text structurally complicated. In contrary, they will be on hurry to evaluate their level of new language acquisition through reading of the text.

Another way to keep learners on task when teaching reading skills is concerned is to emphasize on interest and motivation during the reading section. In this way, teachers may in some extent limit learners' attitudes which sometimes hinder fast acquisition of reading skills and deep comprehension of the reading text. But the most vital problem here is how to stimulate and retain the interest of every learner. In our classes, there are a high number of learners with different familial and social education. So, I think it will be difficult for teachers to deal with stimulation of all of them during only four hours per week and to go through all the class' program before the end of the year.

But since the art of teaching is the art of interesting and of arising curiosity, I would like teachers to show proof of ingeniousness during their reading classes in order to retain as possible the majority of their learners' attention. It is also said by the elders that the curiosity is active only in happy minds. So, before retaining a learner's attention, teachers have to raise their curiosity for the reading material. After this, teachers must transform their reading classes into friendly and flexible classes. Then, it would be possible to keep our learners on task in our reading classes.

## **2-6- Learners' attitudes towards reading**

In the English Dictionary of Encarta (2009), attitude is “*an opinion or general feeling about something*”. In this section I will try to list some learners' attitudes which constitute the problems encountered during reading activity in EFL classes in Djougou. Students learning English as foreign language sometimes think that English class is for displaying their weaknesses, for separating bad learners from brilliant ones. They also feel that teachers' behavior brings up their repulsiveness toward the language. They also feel that this foreign language becomes more and more a matter of selection during the final examinations of cycle (I mean BEPC and BAC). Moreover, learners' attitudes can be those of dropping-out or missing of the classes, the fear that English is an academic requirement for evaluation.

As such, they cannot expect plausible results judging from their weaknesses. At this point, Hsiu-Ju Lin and Cycle A. Warden (1997) in their article *Papers from Different Attitudes among Non-English Major Students* claim that, “*most of the students have either fear or unpleasant feeling about their past English learning experience [.....]; that a better understanding of language learners can have a beneficial effect on the process of attempting to help language learners in learning English as a foreign language*” (P.1).



**CHAPTER THREE:**  
**THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

In this chapter, I would like to describe the methods and techniques I have used for the collection of the data and necessary information for further analysis.

So the chapter comprises:

- 1- Research procedure  
Questionnaires
- 2- Class observation
- 3- Interview

### **3-1- Research procedure**

In order to get factual data on problems encountered when teaching reading skills, I have displayed the review of the appropriate literature on what has already been done about it. I have also devoted much time to observing reading classes. I have issued questionnaires to teachers and learners so as to enable them to feature their reading styles. I have interviewed some qualified EFL teachers in order to get their opinions about my research topic. I also find it important to make a quick survey on the content of the books and thesis I found.

My class observation procedure has consisted in observing English lessons dealing with reading; I have attended reading classes of different levels in some secondary schools in Djougou. Then follow-up sessions were devoted to teachers who claimed their desire to improve reading lessons.

### **3-2- Questionnaires**

Since the research work is based on teaching and learning environment, it is important to notice that the target population which is supposed to be valuable

source of information is learners of our secondary schools (I based the work on learners at the first cycle). The study covers secondary schools in Djougou especially CEG<sub>1</sub> Djougou, CEG Béliéfoungou and CEG Kolokondé. So, I have addressed learners and their teachers by distributing questionnaires to them. As such, the questionnaires are of two types: one to the learners and other to the English teachers.

As for the learners, two hundred and fifty (250) questionnaires have been distributed. All the questionnaires have not been returned; I only get in return two hundred (200) questionnaires. I find it interesting to explain how I proceeded. I went to these classes with the agreement of the teachers who have the classes in charge, and distributed questionnaires to the learners who filled them. I take time to explain it to the learners with the teachers' permission. After crossing or answering the different parts of the questionnaires, I often wait to collect the questionnaires. The procedure is not as difficult as some may think. This questionnaire seeks to examine the causes of problems encountered when teaching English as foreign language through reading and students' perspectives about English learning. These aspects allow students to find no trouble in responding.

Another technique consisted to choose some teachers who would perform the work accordingly if I couldn't cover all the classes at a time. So the teacher performed the task and had the questionnaires collected as I did myself. The questionnaire addressed to students can be seen in the annex page.

As for the teachers, forty-five (45) questionnaires have been distributed. I decided to leave the questionnaires with them as they promised to fill them in and return them to me as soon as possible. They only returned thirty (30) questionnaires. This questionnaire helped me to know more about the way teachers go through reading teaching in their classes, the problems they encounter and their perspectives about the learning of English through the reading skills. The questions are also clear that teachers have no trouble in filling in the questionnaire.

In addition to the collection of data through questionnaires, I have devoted much time to the class observation particularly in CEG Béliéfoungou and CEG Kolokondé where I teach.

### **Class Observation**

During my research, I have decided to undertake a class observation in order to better appreciate students' and teachers' behavior in the teaching and learning process. Moreover, an evaluation of how the theory is put into practice has led me to do so. This helped me to be near and to experience what I need for my work such as: students' attitudes and perspectives towards reading and reading material, students' participation, and teachers' instructions; shortly the problems encountered by both learners and teachers when dealing with reading activities.

It seems important to take this part seriously. So, each time I had to visit a class, I let the teacher know and together we set up a meeting. As my research is based in the first cycle, I have observed teaching of reading for three months in 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> forms of secondary schools once a week and one month for each class.

For each visit, I sat in the back of the class so as to better observe every step of teaching and learning process and so as not to distract learners from their teacher's instructions.

### **Interview**

In order to get more information for my research work I have decided to interview two qualified EFL teachers who have been teaching English for many years; I mean who have taught English through other teaching approaches before the competency-based approach. It is important for me to have these interviews; apart from the questionnaire, they may have some experiences about my research topic. They can also help me to get some theoretical knowledge about reading teaching. I could learn from their comparison between the former teaching approaches and competency-based approach when teaching reading skills.



**CHAPTER FOUR:**  
**THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

This chapter covers the results or findings of my research and their analysis.

#### **4-1- Presentation of the findings**

The questionnaires used to collect data are of two types: questionnaires to students and questionnaires to E.F.L. teachers. I have decided to break down the findings into small tables in order to better observe the statistical data.

##### **4-1-1-Learners' questionnaire**

**Table 1: Importance of English for E.F.L. learners**

| <b>N°</b> | <b>Questions</b>                                 | <b>Answer</b>                              | <b>Total number of students</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1         | Is learning English at school important?         | -Yes                                       | 200                             | 100%              |
|           |                                                  | -No                                        | 0                               | 0%                |
| 2         | Why do you learn English?                        | -To communicate orally in it               | 122                             | 61%               |
|           |                                                  | -To become an English speaker              | 78                              | 39%               |
| 3         | Your objective by attending reading Classes is : | -To broaden your knowledge about the world | 158                             | 79%               |
|           |                                                  | -To kill time                              | 42                              | 21 %              |

**Table 2: Teachers' motivation in reading classes**

| <b>N°</b> | <b>Questions</b>                                                                          | <b>Answer</b> | <b>Total number of students</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| 4         | Does your English teacher usually help you?                                               | -Yes          | 169                             | 84.5 %            |
|           |                                                                                           | -No           | 31                              | 15.5 %            |
| 5         | Do you like how your English teacher manages his/her reading classes?                     | -Yes          | 108                             | 54 %              |
|           |                                                                                           | -No           | 92                              | 46 %              |
| 6         | Does your English teacher often evaluate your reading performance?                        | -Yes          | 124                             | 62%               |
|           |                                                                                           | -No           | 76                              | 38%               |
| 7         | Does your English teacher often motivate or stimulate you during his/her reading classes? | -Yes          | 158                             | 79%               |
|           |                                                                                           | -No           | 42                              | 21%               |

**Table 3: Attending English reading classes**

| N° | Questions                                                | Answer            | Total number of students | Percentage |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| 8  | Do you like English reading classes?                     | -Yes              | 175                      | 87.5 %     |
|    |                                                          | -No               | 25                       | 12.5 %     |
| 9  | Do you always attend your English classes?               | -Yes              | 166                      | 83%        |
|    |                                                          | -No               | 34                       | 17%        |
| 10 | You like to attend your reading classes because they are | -Friendly classes | 108                      | 54 %       |
|    |                                                          | -Imposed classes  | 92                       | 46 %       |
| 11 | How often do you miss your English reading classes?      | -Never            | 117                      | 58.5 %     |
|    |                                                          | -Always           | 83                       | 41.5 %     |

**Table 4: Assigning reading texts to students**

| N° | Questions                                                | Answer | Total number of students | Percentage |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------------------------|------------|
| 12 | Do you read English books and novels at home?            | -Yes   | 140                      | 70 %       |
|    |                                                          | -No    | 60                       | 30 %       |
| 13 | Do the English reading texts prescribed meet your needs? | -Yes   | 144                      | 72%        |
|    |                                                          | -No    | 56                       | 28%        |
| 14 | Do you belong to an English reading club?                | -Yes   | 20                       | 10 %       |
|    |                                                          | -No    | 180                      | 90 %       |

**Table 5: Learner's attitude in reading classes**

| N° | Questions                                 | Answer    | Total number of students | percentage |
|----|-------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|------------|
| 15 | What is your attitude in reading classes? | -Positive | 42                       | 21%        |
|    |                                           | -Negative | 158                      | 79%        |

#### **4-1-2-Teachers' questionnaire**

**Table 1: The need for effective E.F.L. teachers**

| <b>N°</b> | <b>Questions</b>                                                                    | <b>Answer</b>                | <b>Total number of teachers</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1         | How long have you been teaching reading?                                            | -5 years                     | 20                              | 66.66 %           |
|           |                                                                                     | -More than 5 years           | 10                              | 33.33 %           |
| 2         | What is your professional qualification?                                            | -Qualified EFL teacher       | 10                              | 33.33 %           |
|           |                                                                                     | -Non-qualified E.L.F teacher | 20                              | 66.66%            |
| 3         | How often do you attend in-service training with regard to the teaching of reading? | -Sometimes                   | 13                              | 43.33%            |
|           |                                                                                     | -Never                       | 17                              | 56.66 %           |

**Table 2: Arising learners' interests for reading teaching**

| <b>N°</b> | <b>Questions</b>                                                     | <b>Answer</b>                                                          | <b>Total number of teachers</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| 4         | Are your learners interested in your reading classes?                | -Yes                                                                   | 16                              | 53.33 %           |
|           |                                                                      | -No                                                                    | 14                              | 46.66 %           |
| 5         | How can you arise your learners' interests for your reading classes? | -By meeting their expectation through the choice of your reading texts | 30                              | 100%              |
|           |                                                                      | -By insulting them in your reading classes                             | 0                               | 0 %               |
| 6         | Do you like to teach reading lessons?                                | -Yes                                                                   | 16                              | 53.33 %           |
|           |                                                                      | -Not really                                                            | 14                              | 46.66 %           |
| 7         | Have you set up an English class library in your school?             | -Yes                                                                   | 0                               | 0%                |
|           |                                                                      | -No                                                                    | 30                              | 100%              |

**Table 3: Creating motivating reading classes**

| N° | Questions                                                              | Answer | Total number of teachers | Percentage |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------------------------|------------|
| 8  | Do you often motivate your learners in your reading classes?           | -Yes   | 30                       | 100%       |
|    |                                                                        | -No    | 0                        | 0%         |
| 9  | Do you allow your students to interact in your reading classes?        | -Yes   | 26                       | 86.66 %    |
|    |                                                                        | -No    | 04                       | 13.33 %    |
| 10 | Do you usually maintain a friendly atmosphere in your reading classes? | -Yes   | 30                       | 100 %      |
|    |                                                                        | -No    | 0                        | 0 %        |

**Table 4: Giving opportunities for reading**

| N° | Questions                                                                                            | Answer     | Total number of teachers | Percentage |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|
| 11 | How often do you give opportunities to your students to practice reading activities in your classes? | -Sometimes | 30                       | 100%       |
|    |                                                                                                      | -Never     | 0                        | 0%         |
| 12 | Do you always organize reading tests in your classes?                                                | -Yes       | 21                       | 70 %       |
|    |                                                                                                      | -No        | 09                       | 30 %       |

**Table 5: The need for appropriate reading materials**

| <b>N°</b> | <b>Questions</b>                                                    | <b>Answer</b>                                     | <b>Total number of teachers</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| 13        | What type of reading materials do you have in your reading classes? | -African novels and short stories                 | 22                              | 73.33 %           |
|           |                                                                     | -African and non-African novels and short stories | 08                              | 26.66 %           |
| 14        | According to you, a reading text should be:                         | -Learners' culture-oriented                       | 22                              | 73.33 %           |
|           |                                                                     | -Culture-free oriented                            | 08                              | 26.66 %           |

**Table 6: A good reading attitude**

| <b>N°</b> | <b>Question</b>                                                                        | <b>Answer</b> | <b>Total number of teachers</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| 15        | Do all your students display a positive attitude towards your English reading classes? | -Yes          | 06                              | 20 %              |
|           |                                                                                        | -No           | 24                              | 80 %              |

### **4-1-3- Class observation**

It is necessary to appreciate the different occasions through which I went to sit in the class in order to better observe teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. My main goal is to see how teachers present their reading classes and how learners react throughout the lesson.

From my observation, it appears that most of the teachers use books authorized by the curriculum (I mean the “documents d’accompagnement”). The learners sit in groups of 4 or 6 as recommended by the *Competency-based Approach*. Before properly starting the lesson, the teacher adopts the warming-up approach. First, some tell a short story or ask students to sing a song. Then, he asks students some questions and discuss about them with learners as pre-reading discussion. At this stage, learners are eager and relaxed when enjoying and looking forward to learning the text that the teacher is going to give them.

So far, the teacher has yet put on the board the title of the text even if some learners might guess it. After this step, he asks learners to open their documents on the mentioned page to read silently the text. After 10 or 15 minutes of reading (according to his plan), he picks at random some learners to read, asking one to start where the previous reader has stopped, and the process continues until the reading is over (two or three times). Afterwards, he puts some questions on the board asking them to respond orally. If the answer is correct, one writes it himself on the board and other make learner write it on the board. If it is wrong, he makes the necessary corrections with brilliant learners. This step takes too much time

sometimes and is often boring because some students are very slow at finding out the answers. So the teacher very often is obliged to give the answer himself in order to avoid time wasting. Then, the teacher starts teaching vocabulary and pronunciation. Some teachers often spend two hours to teach reading, vocabulary and pronunciation. The lesson ends with note-taking and with some discussion on an important topic chosen by the teacher. Let me point out that from the beginning of the lesson up to the stage of answers, few of the learners are interested in the lesson. From where I sit, I can see some learners conversing on other matters, some holding other books, others reading mathematic theories simply because just after the English lesson, they will tackle the mathematics or physics subjects. And at times, the teacher is obliged to ask for silence or call the attention of those who are not really following. This is to say that there is no motivation from the teachers in order to keep students in task.

In some classes I observe, I can see that within the time allotted to the lesson, some learners keep quiet and never say a word. Very often some learners feel frustrated because when they attempt to react in English, others start laughing, which discourages them. In other words, group work often results in difficult classroom management because it generates opportunities for some to deal with other matters.

#### 4-1-4 Interviews

For the first interview I had with the experienced teacher, I asked some questions about the problems teachers encounter when teaching reading skills in their classes. He said:

*“I have been teaching English for many years. You know that our country is a French-speaking country. From the experience I have when teaching reading skills, I can say that not all students present positive attitudes during these classes. This is sometimes seen through their poor performance to read English texts easily. They do not make any effort to decode words from the text. Then, it is difficult for them to answer teacher’s questions on the text. In such situation, it cannot be easy for the teacher to do easily his job. But let me say that most of students’ attitudes often depend on the reading material, the teacher’s motivation and his ability to know what his students read. For example, we have used a book called English for French-speaking Africa. And I noticed that the English class was vivid, students and teachers were happy to read stories contained in texts. That book was very interesting and contains african stories and met my need. Unfortunately, this kind of atmosphere doesn’t exist today in our reading classes.*

*Now, we are studying both Go for English and “documents d’accompagnement” prescribed by the curricular conceptors. Even if these books present some enjoyable texts and the teaching approaches, it doesn’t totally meet my need, I say my need. The competency-based approach is called in other words the student-centered approach. But the conceptors don’t early set that teachers are*

*autonomous to choose their own texts related to the lessons topic. And our new colleagues are rigid about the texts of these documents regardless the students' concern. So if students do not show positive attitudes towards reading skills' teaching, it is up to teachers to know how to changes their teaching strategies so as to meet their students' needs”.*

The second interviewed EFL teacher declared: *“I have been teaching English for more than fifteen years and I remark that our students mostly prefer grammar lessons to reading classes. They usually think that grammar is more important than reading when learning a language. But since our job is to bring students to know that English is taught for many purposes, we often try to carry out some interesting reading activities. When dealing with the reading skills in our classes, some students find it as an occasion to do exercises of other school subjects such as mathematics or physics. Some of them say, without reading it, that the text is difficult to read. These attitudes from the students led some teachers to avoid teaching of the reading skills.*

*For me, all the problems teachers encounter when teaching reading skills lie in the reading material and the teaching method. I personally notice that students enjoy reading texts, regardless the subject, if the texts develop topics related to their concern and if the texts are easy and short. For the teaching method, I can say that some of our colleagues don't know how to motivate students. All things they know are to insult learners and to blame them. In so doing, students hate such teachers and their classes. And they conclude that*

*reading classes is boring and an occasion for English teachers to show their poor performance for reading.*

*In the former approach, it was not so difficult for me to teach reading skills. The former students were good in reading English texts. With the competency-based approach, I think it would not be difficult for teachers to teach reading skills. This approach wants from teachers to help learners build their own knowledge through different reading strategies. But our learners' reading level even in French is very very poor; their social and economic conditions don't help them and their teachers to reach the competency-based approach goal easily when dealing with the reading skills. For example when you compare your evaluation test to the former evaluation test, you can remark that the competency-based approach put the accent on reading skills than the former approach. So it is up to teachers to know how to manage reading classes".*

## **4-2- Analysis of the findings**

### **4-2-1-Learners' questionnaire**

The learners involved in the investigation think that learning English at school is very important. This illustrates that most of them have interest in the language no matter what activity is being carried out. Answering question n°2 which relates to question n°1, 61 % argue that learning English at school is to communicate orally in it whereas 39 % wish to become a native English speaker. Considering reading classes, 79 % express that their objective in attending reading

classes is to broaden their knowledge about the world while 21% attend them to kill time. For question n°4, 96 % agree with their teachers' behavior while 4% reject it. While dealing with the reading class, 84.5 % think that their English teachers are helpful to them while 15.5 % don't think it. Regarding classroom management, 54 % like it because of the friendly atmosphere that prevails owing to the teachers' teaching behavior whereas 46 % disagree with it.

Evaluating students' reading performance is often done regarding the 62 % of the learners and 38 % against. When we touch motivation and stimulation, 79% declare that their teachers often take it seriously during reading classes; 21 % don't feel stimulated or motivated. Only 83 % accept their attendance to English classes which in fact doesn't back up the first question. 17% do not attend their English classes simply because for them they hinder their performance. Question n°6 and n°11 closely examine the teachers' behavior. Maintaining friendly classes is true according to 54% of the students with 46% who think that are imposed classes perhaps because they are included in their time-table or the teachers make students attend their classes by force. In relation to missing English lessons, 58.5 % never miss them whereas 41.5 % do it. Question n°13 reveals that 70 % read English books and novels at home perhaps because they are skilled readers or they read them for pleasure and 30% neglect or don't care about this activity perhaps because of the nature of the reading material. 72% of learners agree that English reading texts prescribed in the documents meet their needs whereas 28 % don't

think so. It is important for us to give a thorough consideration to this aspect of the findings.

It is extremely important to point out that learners don't like reading out of the classroom context. For illustration only 17.5 % belong to an English reading club in contrast with 82.5 % who don't care about its importance. Finally and to sum up, 21 % actually show positive attitudes toward reading classes. The majority of the learners, 79 % have negative attitudes learning English through reading skills.

These findings show that it would not be easy for EFL teachers to do their work proudly especially when teaching reading in EFL classes in Djougou with the Competency-based Approach.

#### **4-2-2-Teachers' questionnaire**

For teachers, 66.66 % have been teaching reading classes for five years or less and 33.33% for more than five years. And all those who have taught English for more than five years are qualified EFL teachers whereas the teachers who have done it for five years or less are not. When we go to a step further, 56.66 % of teachers have never attended in-service training with regard to reading teaching and 43.33 % sometimes have attended in-service training. Paradoxically, all the teachers involved in the investigation like teaching reading classes although the majority has never had in-service training and are non-qualified E.F.L teachers.

For 53.33% of them, their learners are interested in their reading classes and sometimes allow them to practice reading activities in their classes. Questions n°5,

8, 10 clearly give the total agreement of teachers to motivate, maintain friendly atmosphere in their classes which in fact is a crucial factor to learning a new language. Learners' expectation is met through the choice of reading texts to arise their interest. Concerning interaction during reading classes, 86.66 % of the teachers do it whereas 13.33 % don't, may be they don't know how to go through it or they are not trained for.

I find from the questionnaire that setting up an English class library is not a reality in our secondary schools. Many of them, 72.72% provide opportunities for learners to read after classes. And in order to meet learners' expectation, 73.33 % of the teachers agree to choose texts from African novels taking learners' reality into account and 26.66 % think that the choice of the texts can be culture-free oriented. Question n°17 almost sums up all that has been said: all the learners don't display positive attitudes towards English reading classes; 80 % of the investigated teachers agree with that, but 20 % think that all their students show positive attitudes towards their reading classes.

#### **4-2-3-Class observation**

##### **➤ Teachers' behavior**

For any teaching to be successful regardless the subject, the teachers' behavior is part of this success. From my observation, I notice that most teachers show good mood before their learners for the sake of letting them be eager to learn the language. They are not put off at once whenever learners make mistakes since the language they are exposed to is new and difficult to learn at this stage. Rather,

encouragement is a better way to use with learners learning a foreign language. Learners are sometimes tired of taking the same thing especially when these learners fail to know what the teacher is trying to show them. It is just to say that class management with regard to teaching is crucial. As evidence, learners learn and behave better with teachers whose classroom is pleasant, positive and a postulating place to be, than do the learners with teachers whose classroom atmosphere is harsh, negative and unchallenging. Therefore, a need to provide a supportive learning environment is necessary.

It is also interesting to point out that not all the teachers I visited behave well with regard to reading teaching. I notice that some of the teachers are very often fed up with learners when all their reactions to the questions posed are negative. At this stage, teachers and learners lose confidence and more importantly learners do not feel secure. Little by little, the atmosphere becomes harsh and the teaching becomes teacher's time teaching. With reference to what I said at the beginning of this section, teachers must not make confusion between being strict to keep discipline and being fair for better learning to take place. While teachers' behavior have something to do with teaching approaches, it is highly important to display that during my class observation, some teachers do not really allow learners to think deeply by giving much time, or at least guess or say approximately the answers to the questions. And to my opinion, this behavior doesn't really give learners the feeling that they have to participate in the lesson, and most of the learners come to English class only to take their teacher's answers.

➤ **The teaching material**

Most of the teachers I have visited in their classes use the prescribed teaching material when they pick out a reading text for their learners. Some teachers quickly understand that reading text must interest learners to arise their curiosity and interest to learn the language. This means that some teachers do not follow an on-line study to teach reading and they stick to the unit after unit and teach any text they encounter regardless of its importance. This is what I pointed out when I talked of the importance of the choice of the text in chapter one of my research work. When the reading material meets learners' need, they feel that they are involved in what is going on in text, therefore, they feel part of lesson. As a matter of fact, the class is vivid, the lesson interesting and comprehension is then achieved

➤ **Teaching method**

As for the teaching method, some teachers lack the basic knowledge. Because they do not know how to tackle a lesson with the learners, hesitation arises, improvisation starts coming in and even some skilled learners often notice that their teacher is improvising, that he didn't plan his lesson before coming into the classroom. These kinds of teachers are those recruited by the government with the help of local authorities in charge of education and who have not received any training in the domain or any university information. I remember one day, an English teacher said that these kinds of teachers sometimes hinder learners'

comprehension. He finally got angry and used to call us ‘‘raw teachers’’ to mean non-qualified E.F.L. teachers.

When I go back to the account of the class observation, some teachers failed to recognize that prior to loud reading which enables people to check pronunciation, silent reading must precede the comprehension stage. But unfortunately, some did it the other way round. Such a method sometimes distorts learners’ comprehension of the text since silent reading is for that purpose. This was one of the negative aspects I noticed during some of my class visit. And in the course of the lesson, learners do not succeed in doing the follow-up activity. The teachers moreover blame the students. So these learners start feeling frustrated and aggressive toward the target language. As teachers, we must evaluate ourselves and make efforts to know if our teaching methods fit best.

#### **4-2-4-Interview**

Both the two interviews reveal that motivation, teaching method and teaching material are the most outstanding points to achieve a better teaching/learning process during the reading classes. Students are interested in reading when the texts they face are not above their level, when the texts are interesting and easy to read, and finally when the texts take into account the learners’ concern. Learners considered in my study have started learning English as a foreign language from the first year to the third or the fourth year for example. They cannot be considered as those who have mastered the language and who have

enough vocabulary items which can be assessed with any reading texts taken at random without any preliminary clues.

If the learners still develop attitudes that hinder the acquisition of reading skills after three or four years of learning English, it will be up to teachers to assess themselves. Teachers must wonder if they have taught reading skills through different strategies stated by the competency-based approach so as to help learners acquire basic knowledge for the purposes of reading activities. Since my study is strictly limited to the first level of secondary school, I would like teachers to be faithful to different reading strategies in the competency-based approach's curriculums. I would also like them to think before selecting the reading materials, to be sure of the validity and the readability of the texts given for reading activity.

I notice through the interviews that the problems encountered by teachers in their reading classes are not caused by the competency-based approach. But it is up to teachers to well manage their reading classes with EFL learners in order to hope a challenged and vivid reading class.

#### **4-3- Partial conclusion**

The findings have shown that not all students display positive attitudes toward reading classes. These kinds of attitudes constitute the problem for an effective reading teaching. It is obvious that in the process of learning a foreign language through formal instructions, the result we can expect is that satisfaction cannot be total among learners. Authors did much to sort out that learning a new language and learning one's mother's tongue would not be the same. In the context

of our research work, figures showed that teachers need to adopt some attitudes in order to avoid some problems encountered when teaching reading. Some questions related to learners were asked them implicitly about their sources of fear in their English learning. The responses tended to fall into these categories:

- afraid of being laughed at by others due to inaccurate pronunciation;
- fear of making grammatical errors;
- fear of examination;
- the ways reading classes are taught;
- teaching approaches and processes.

The findings also show that all the problems teachers encounter in EFL classes lie in the learners' attitudes caused by teachers' behavior and teaching materials they choose for their reading classes.

**CHAPTER FIVE:**  
**RECOMMENDATIONS AND**  
**SUGGESTIONS**

This chapter of my work is about some recommendations and suggestions to all the educational actors especially to EFL teachers in competency-based approach. And I think that taking these into account could, in some way, diminish the problems encountered during teaching and learning reading skills in our EFL classes.

### **5-1- Recommendations**

#### **To the government**

The government which recruits teachers may train teachers who can improve their performance with regard to education. It is a fact that Benin secondary school teachers still suffer from a great lack of initial training and in-service training. I notice that most teachers recruited by the government and who act as a link between parent and learners do not prove successful. Learners do not gain much from them. The lack of in-service training is responsible for that because it prevents teachers from doing their job professionally and they encounter many when doing their job. And being recruited as non-qualified teachers or “raw teachers“, these teachers very often fail to achieve teaching successfully. The early years of teaching are hard for them. The losers of this situation are the learners who should learn the target language for communication purpose. So, I highly insist on teachers’ training to be held very often and efficiently in our country so that the non-qualified teachers can become effective and qualified teachers. Moses in *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, under inspiration, said something

important which can be taken into account regarding teaching EFL in the Competency-based Approach context. Talking about children education, he wrote:

*“And these words I am commanding you today must prove to be on your heart, you must tie them as a sign upon your hand, and they must serve as a frontlet band between your eyes, then you must inculcate them in your son.”(Deut.6:6-9)*

This assertion means that before educating their children, parents must firstly be educated by the law. The same is true for teachers: without being correctly trained, they cannot be efficient in the teaching process regardless the subject. Teachers must be trained before training their learners.

### **To teachers**

As recommendations to teachers, I would like from them to follow techniques of reading skills described in some prescribed books in order to diminish the problems encountered when teaching reading. Unfortunately, even some qualified teachers today fail to use these techniques related to an effective reading in the Competency-based Approach such as: skimming, scanning, guessing, silent reading, reading aloud...etc.

## **5-2- Suggestions**

### **To teachers**

As the government often fails to listen to teachers, and as teachers can't wait for a long time for rescue, it is up to teachers to organize themselves into a powerful association to fight for their rights. I suggest that teachers exchange teaching experiences with their fellow teachers who are professionally trained for teaching reading in the Competency-based Approach context. Teachers should collaborate and discuss matters related to teaching. They may also pay class visit to one another and then meet for discussion (teaching animation). They should take into account motivation, teaching material and teaching method .They should keep good mood and friendly atmosphere in their reading classes and arouse interest in order to keep their learners' attention on the topic . By doing so, their teaching style can improve gradually.

### **To the learners' parents**

Parents should be involved in their children scholarship. For example, when any problem comes up, strict measures should be taken for its solution and learners' parents contributions should be welcomed. It is a reality that our secondary schools lack the necessary teaching materials for an effective classroom management. For example, with a very large size class which cannot be less than 50 learners, most of them do not own their prescribed documents for classroom activities, specifically reading activities. These documents are the only teaching

material which the teachers use and to which they stick. And when this material is not available, teaching become effective less.

Though some learners' parents are aware of this situation, they do not devote time to resolve it and they expect from teachers good results. How can these good results be possible? Learners' parents must provide their children with books and teaching materials necessary for teaching to take place. In addition, school libraries should be set up with different books, novels or short stories to enable teachers have at their disposal some reading texts which meet students' needs.

### **5-1- Suggestions related to an effective reading teaching**

My specific suggestions are about some teaching approaches that teachers may use or implement to improve their classroom reading activities. As my investigation deals with the problems encountered when teaching reading, I would like the following suggestions to be implemented in E.F.L. classes. These suggestions lay on the characteristics a good reading text may have to facilitate a good reading class process with regard to English as a foreign language teaching. I would also like theses suggestion to bring about some solution to the problem my topic has risen.

#### **5-1-1-The meaning**

A reader will not decide to read a text if it is not meaningful for him/her. Since reading is for meaning in most cases, it amounts to saying that, if the text is meaningful and enjoyable, reading is more likely to have a lasting and beneficial effect on the learners. As learners' first reaction in front of a reading material is

being able to understand the message with ease, it is therefore important to choose texts or books which are relevant to the life experiences, emotions, or dreams of the learners.

### **5-1-2-The readability**

A second important factor to eliminate fear or bad feeling in learners besides the meaning of the text is its readability. The biggest problem our secondary school learners, I mean in Djougou, encounter is their difficulty to read things with ease. For example, if the combination of structural and lexical difficulty is too high above the learners' reading level, the odds are that they will not be able to identify themselves with the given text or enjoy the text; for they may perceive the text as being fraught with difficulty every step of the way. In such a situation, there is a danger for the learners to revert back to translation in order to make sense of the text. When learners resort to translation which is a hard task to perform, they may lose courage and therefore give up. Such a situation never rewards and the teacher handing this class may be seen as an ineffective teacher to end up with.

Another important aspect of the readability is the physical presentation of the text to be studied. This is important to eliminate fear or bad feeling. If the text is not well typed or word-processed and is fraught with many mistakes or missing letters and words, the problem is that learners will not be able to read this text with ease and will find it too difficult or meaningless.

### **5-1-3-The length**

A third factor in choosing the text for E.F.L. learners is its length. Most of the time, learners complain about the length of the text they are assigned to during an evaluation where they are very limited within a time. Unless the text is given as homework where learners are supposed to be free because of the amount of time available, they won't really enjoy the text if we are in a class context. Nuttal (1982) in the book *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*, says that “*finishing a text is itself one of the best incentives*” and “*it is important to start students off with short essay texts, so that they quickly experience the satisfaction of this achievement*” (P.186). In order to reduce learners' fear or problems, the given texts have to be short and easy especially for evaluations. If a reading text is too long, learners find it time consumer and fail to read it accordingly. Thus, all the questions on this text are supposed to be answered by the teacher.

### **5-1-4-Authentic reading material**

We may vary our reading materials according to their idea we aim at making learners to be aware of. It is clear enough that knowledge acquisition can be through extensive reading where we face various reading materials. And since knowledge acquisition has no frontier, it is thus true that learners may feel free to meet their needs whenever they want. But here, the role of the teacher as a helper, a coach and a counselor is to allow learners to be accustomed to authentic reading materials that is, materials which best fit their cultural, physical, social and economical environment. Doing so, they may not find many problems in grasping

their texts meaning and the activities linked to them. It is up to the teacher to recognize that authentic reading materials are to be stressed so as to avoid many problems.

### **5-1-5-Motivation and interest**

Before any task can be carried out successfully, the person involved in such a task should have the will to do it. The person must be determined to tackle the activity which can generate for him/her some profit or interest. No one would decide to undertake anything for nothing. In the same trend, teachers must bear in mind that learners play a vital role in the completion of a successful reading activity in the classroom. A teacher could not decide to teach something by force regardless of the learners' interest. Here motivation can be created, that is arising their interest and let them know why they have to learn. In a classroom context, the effective teacher is up to know it. From that perspective, Scott (1986) in *Phonic Workbooks: Blacken Masters and Answers* observed that: *“a boring teacher will soon create for himself a bored class, which is a boring class, and leads to a bored teacher: this is vicious circle and can become worse and worse. On the other hand, an enthusiastic teacher is hard to resist, and except in the presence of very adverse additional factor, will generate a responsive enthusiasm in his class: the students' enthusiasm reaches him as feedback and stimulus for further enthusiasm in a reciprocal process which leads to a rewarding experience for students and teacher”* (P.275).

From this observation, I can say that it is the challenged teacher who forms the challenged learners in a challenged reading class. So, we as teachers have to do the entire possible not to make our reading classes be boring. And before reaching this goal, teachers must not only teach reading skills, but must be a real motivator by selecting the motivating reading material and by using the interesting teaching method according to the competency-based approach. The EFL teachers have also to keep in mind that the learner-centered process stated by the new approach is better than the teacher-centered method if they want to be a real guide and motivators in their respective classes

#### **5-1-6-Teacher's goals in EFL reading class**

In EFL classroom approaches to reading, Norris (1995) in the book *Getting students personally involved in their reading and literature classes*, suggests the teacher the following goals for the class:

- help the students learn to enjoy reading in English;
- discourage the students from overreliance on dictionaries and word-by-word translation strategies, and give them practice in skimming for main ideas and scanning for specific kinds of information;
- help the students become less dependent on received opinion, and acquire some confidence to develop, express and value their responses;
- help the students, through their own effort; begin to acquire such skills as thinking critically, inferring and interpreting.
-

## **5-2- Text exploitation in an E.F.L. class**

### **5-2-1- A key to a reading text exploitation**

In order to discourage learners from reverting to such bad reading habits as word-by-word translation and overreliance on dictionaries, the teacher needs to guide them in reading for the general text while ignoring isolated words whose meaning they cannot guess and which do not prevent from the comprehension of the text.

If teachers can help learners to develop the attitude that it is not always necessary to know every word in the text in order to understand it, reading will become easier, less of a strain. As reading becomes easier the student will be able to enjoy it more, and will therefore become more inclined to read for pleasure, thus accumulating more comprehension input and making reading still easier and this diminish teaching problems. Thus, dictionary should be used judiciously, as an aid to guessing, not a decoder for every secret message.

### **5-2-2- Organizing periodical reading test**

To sustain learners' reading performance and help them to learn to enjoy reading in English, I think it is important also to evaluate learners on reading by grading them more on their active participation throughout the semester than on a single final test. Attendance and contribution to the group activities are key elements in the class. For example, grades can be based on group scores. The test may consist for instance of "true or false" questions, multiple-choice questions and three or four comprehension questions.

### **5-3- The place of an English club**

An English club gathers teachers and learners who share English as a foreign language. The Benin context where English is taught as a foreign language in a francophone area leads to the necessity of creating English club. It is not easy to have learners join such a club simply because for them, it is a place to show all their deficiencies. But beyond this opinion though true, English club appears as a “river where everyone can drink whenever he/she feels thirsty”. I mean here that English club rewards more than it does harm because at least, three skills of language learning are dealt with: listening, speaking and reading. Taking as a means to promote English through those skills, it is a must for learners to feel happy and to know that they cannot master English if they don't practice it. Since practice is very rare in classroom, it is very important to join it if there is any in the school. A good atmosphere is often present in an English club and nobody can deny that we learn much in a friendly climate. It is also an opportunity to fully practice reading for betterment. Pronunciation and vocabulary are often emphasized in an English club.

# CONCLUSION

In this study, I investigated students' attitudes and perspectives about English learning in general and what their fears are about reading in English learning process in particular. In other words, does reading play a major role in students' academic performance to a point where they distinctively show positive or negative attitudes? It is not fair to demonstrate equal interest among E.F.L. students due to the fact that what this investigation has found is that while some groups of students may generally be accepted as having better English ability, this doesn't exclude other students as having fears or unpleasant ideas or behavior about reading with a different emphasis and differences in attitudes. The special interest was the way different students showed preferences for different teaching material and teaching method as well. While it may be difficult to measure objectively, it is generally observed by English teachers that some students behave overtly as passive readers or participants while others show confidence and enthusiasm and thus are viewed as active readers.

Being able to unmask all the above remarks, I proceeded through my investigation with the use of two sets of data collection instruments: administration of questionnaires to learners and teachers and the class observation done in secondary schools where English is taught formally. This environment of English learning was so important due to the problem my theme has risen and to the fact that determination and trustworthy result must be drawn from E.F.L. learning environment. Going beyond this area of investigation impels me to stray away from the defined scope covered by the topic. Following the collection of data

necessary for my study, I then proceeded in the presentation of these data into small tables that I later analyzed qualitatively and drew conclusions for appreciations of the findings. As the purpose of the study was to find some of the problems encountered when teaching reading and find ways and means to solve the different problems displayed throughout the study, I tried to suggest to the different groups involved in the children education what they should be aware of and what role they play in the whole process. Moreover, suggestions were also made mostly for teachers involved in the process of foreign language teaching and reading. These suggestions are not meant to totally solve the problem or satisfy any potential reader; but rather they came in the work as an additional tool to what other researchers have found in the same field of investigation.

The general lack of research findings exploitation on the issues surrounding non-English student has led many language teachers to assume that all student can be treated with the same standard approach. This has inevitably given way to disappointment among students in Benin E.F.L. classes. Still, the vast majority of students studying English in school are not likely to be treated the same way. As among them , there are passive and active readers or participants, the fair solution may be that of a balanced treatment to put both parties together for management. Frustration and dropping out should be avoided. Certainly, the findings point towards understanding the special needs of students. This could mean adopting methods to have a better fit with the target students. While fashionable teaching methodologies come and go, the teaching situation in Benin is generally similar

with large class size and limited resources in which reading teaching may be done successfully. Rather than dismissing reading teaching or hating it as a teacher or a combines with other factor such as learner' background, levels, preferences, cultures etc.

Can we assume that different learners have the same interest and the same skills or generally appreciate their teachers' efforts in the same way? This investigation has clearly shown that this is not the case.

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# ANNEX

## QUESTIONNAIRE TO LEARNERS

The questions below are designed to help me get your ideas and opinions about my research work. Please tick only the appropriate boxes which express most your answer.

1) Is learning English at school important?

Yes  No

2) Why do you learn English?

To communicate orally in it  to become an English speaker

3) Your objective in attending reading classes is:

to broaden your knowledge about the world  to kill time

4) Do you like your English teacher?

Yes  No

5) Is your English teacher of help to you?

Yes  No

6) Do you like how your English teacher manages his reading classes?

Yes  No

7) Does your English teacher often evaluate your reading performance?

Yes  No

8) Does your English teacher often motivate or stimulate you in his reading classes?

Yes  No

9) Do you like English reading classes?

Yes  No

10) Do you always attend your English classes?

Yes  No

11) You like to attend your reading classes because they are:

Friendly classes  imposed classes

12) How often do you miss your English reading classes?

Never  Always

13) Do you read English books and novels at home?

Yes  No

14) Do the English reading texts prescribed meet your needs?

Yes  No

15) Do you belong to an English reading club?

Yes  No

16) What is your attitude towards reading classes?

Positive  Negative

## QUESTIONNAIRE TO E.F.L. TEACHERS

The questions below are designed to help me to get your ideas and opinions about my research work. Please tick only the appropriate boxes which express most your answer.

1. How long have you been teaching reading classes?  
5 years  more than 5 years
2. What is your professional qualification?  
Qualified EFL teacher  Non-qualified EFL teacher
3. How often do you attend in-service training with regard to teaching reading?  
Sometimes  Never
4. Are your learners' interested in your reading classes?  
Yes  No
5. How do you arise your learners' interest for your reading classes?  
By meeting their expectation through the choice of your reading texts   
By insulting and rebuking them in your reading classes.
6. Do you like to teach reading lessons?  
Yes  No
7. Have you set up an English class library in your school?  
Yes  No
8. Do you often motivate your learners in your reading classes?  
Yes  No
9. Do you allow your learners to interest in your reading classes?  
Yes  No
10. Do you maintain a friendly atmosphere in your reading classes?  
Yes  No
11. How often do you give opportunities to your learners to practice reading activities in your classes?  
Sometimes  Never
12. Do you always provide opportunities for your learners to read after classes?

Yes  No

13. Do you always organize reading tests in your classes?

Yes  No

14. Are you happy about the prescribed textbook with regard to the teaching of reading?

Yes  No

15. What type of reading materials do you have in your English class library?

African novels and short stories

African and Non-Africa novels and short stories

16. According to you a reading text should be:

Learners' culture-oriented  culture free-oriented

17. Do all your students display a positive attitude toward your English reading class?

Yes  No

## **FIRST INTERVIEW**

- 1- Please sir, I am collecting information for a research work. I would want you to share your experiences with me on teaching of the reading skills.
  - Ok, I'll try to meet your hope. What do you exactly want to know about reading skills?
- 2- Are all your students interested in your reading classes?
  - I have been teaching for many years. You know that Benin is a French-speaking country. From the experience I have when teaching reading skills, I can say that not all students present positive attitudes during these classes. This is seen clearly through their poor performance to read English texts.
- 3- What are some of their attitudes during reading classes?
  - You know that students have difficulties today to read easily even in French! So, some students say before getting the text that it is too difficult for them to read. Thus, they do not make any effort to decode information from the text. Then, it's difficult for them to answer the teacher's on the text. In this way, it cannot be easy for the teacher to do his job.
- 4- Apart these attitudes, could you tell me other problems teachers encounter when implementing reading teaching?
  - I have talked about students' attitudes; let me say that most of these attitudes from the students often depend on the reading material, the teacher's motivation and his ability to know what his students read. For example, we had used a book called English for French-speaking Africa. I noticed that the English class was always vivid, students and teachers were happy to read stories contained in the texts. That book was very interesting and contains African stories. Unfortunately, such atmosphere doesn't exist in our today's reading classes.

5- Please sir, what could be the cause of such situation today?

- You know, I cannot blame the competency-based approach. Now, we are studying both Go for English and the “documents d’accompagnement” prescribed by our curricular conceptors. Even if these books present some enjoyable texts and the teaching approaches, it doesn’t totally meet my need, I say my need.

6- Could you shortly explain your opinion, please?

- Ok. In these prescribed books, there are some boring texts. If you are not an effective teacher who knows what to select and what to teach, your class atmosphere will be unchallenging and harsh. And students are unfortunately blamed.

7- So, you would prefer the former approaches to the competency-based approach, wouldn’t you?

- No,no,no...The competency-based approach in itself is the appropriate approach nowadays. It wants from teachers to center teaching/learning on the students’ background and knowledge. But our conceptors do not early set that teachers are free to choose any texts since they are related to the topic of the learning situation. And our new colleagues are rigid and want to teach what is prescribed in documents regardless the students’ concern. So, if students do not show positive attitudes during reading classes, it is up to the teacher to know how to manage his classes.

## **SECOND INTERVIEW**

1- Please sir, I am collecting information for a research work. I would want you to share your experiences with me on teaching of the reading skills.

- Ok. What information do you need about reading skills?

2- Are all your students interested in your reading classes?

- I have been teaching English for more than fifteen years and I remark that our students mostly prefer grammar lessons to reading classes. They usually think that grammar is more important than reading when learning a language. But since our job is to bring students to know that English is taught for many purposes, we often try to carry out some interesting reading activities.

3- What are some of the students' attitudes during the reading classes?

- While dealing with the reading classes, some students are doing exercises may be of mathematics or physics. For them, the teacher is there to give answers to the questions on the text (teacher-centered process). Some of them also say, without reading it, that the text is too structurally complicate. These attitudes from students led some teachers to avoid reading teaching.

4- Apart these attitudes, could you tell me other problems teachers encounter when implementing reading teaching?

- For me, all problems teachers encounter with teaching of the reading skills lie in the learners' attitudes. But these attitudes mostly depend on the reading material and the teaching method. I personally notice that students enjoy reading the texts which develop topics related to their concern, easy and short to read. That's why I usually start with short and interesting texts before dealing with long texts. In so doing, I prepare them to grasp the meaning of the text.

For the teaching method, I can say that some of our colleagues don't know how to motivate students. All things they know are to insult learners

and to blame them. In such condition, you know, learners hate these teachers and their classes. And learners finally conclude that reading classes are boring and only an occasion for English teachers for insults.

5- What comparison could you make between reading teaching in the former approach and the competency-based approach?

- In the former approach, it was not so difficult for me to teach reading. The former students were good in reading French and they use that ability to read English text fluently. With the competency-based app