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Dans un environnement marqué par la croissance, sans cesse, des productions scientifiques, la diffusion et la promotion des acquis de la recherche deviennent un impératif pour les acteurs du monde scientifique. Perçues comme un patrimoine, un héritage à léguer aux générations futures, les productions scientifiques doivent briser les barrières et les frontières afin d'être facilement accessibles à tous.

Ainsi, s'inscrivant dans la dynamique du temps et de l'espace, la revue « **AKIRI** » se présente comme un outil de promotion et de diffusion des résultats des recherches des enseignants-chercheurs et chercheurs des universités et de centres de recherches de Côte d'Ivoire et d'ailleurs. Ce faisant, elle permettra aux enseignants-chercheurs et chercheurs de s'ouvrir davantage sur le monde extérieur à travers la diffusion de leurs productions intellectuelles et scientifiques.

AKIRI est une revue à parution trimestrielle de l'Unité de Formation et de Recherches (UFR) : Communication, Milieu et Société (CMS) de l'Université Alassane Ouattara. Elle publie les articles dans le domaine des Sciences humaines et sociales, Lettres, Langues et Civilisations. Sans toutefois être fermée, cette revue privilégie les contributions originales et pertinentes. Les textes doivent tenir compte de l'évolution des disciplines couvertes et respecter la ligne éditoriale de la revue. Ils doivent en outre être originaux et n'avoir pas fait l'objet d'une acceptation pour publication dans une autre revue à comité de lecture.

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La revue *AKIRI* n'accepte que des articles inédits et originaux dans diverses langues notamment en allemand, en anglais, en espagnol et en Français. Le manuscrit est remis à deux instructeurs, choisis en fonction de leurs compétences dans la discipline. Le secrétariat de la rédaction communique aux auteurs les observations formulées par le comité de lecture ainsi qu'une copie du rapport, si cela est nécessaire. Dans le cas où la publication de l'article est acceptée avec révisions, l'auteur dispose alors d'un délai raisonnable pour remettre la version définitive de son texte au secrétariat de la revue

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Investigating secondary schools efl learners' difficulties in speaking acquisition: a case study of Tchaourou, Benin

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigating the problems and challenges in implementing speaking micro and macro skills among secondary school students. 100 third form EFL learners from 04 different pedagogical groups and 04 teachers of English of Tchaourou Secondary school are involved. The learners were selected purposively basing on their progress and motivation demonstration to the English language. This procedure was adopted after brief assessments during speaking lessons. The data were collected through questionnaire and interviews. The results have revealed that learners' performance has something to do with pedagogical experiences and the sub skills implementation procedures. In contrast, the disadvantage appears in the non- usage of major role played by specific lessons of pronunciation, accentuation and interactivity techniques during lessons delivery in classes. From that end, the majority of the learners do not have opportunities to demonstrate their know-how in Anglo-Saxon production where the official programs more or less take into consideration the indicators of conceptualization of knowledge in oral production when talking about language didactics

Keywords: Speaking skill, competences, learners, third form

Enquête sur les difficultés d'acquisition de l'expression orale chez les apprenants d'anglais langue étrangère du secondaire : étude de cas à Tchaourou, Bénin

Résumé

Cette étude visait à investiguer les problèmes liés au développement des compétences orales auprès des apprenants des classes de quatrième. Les apprenants impliqués dans cette étude viennent du Collège d'Enseignement General (CEG1) de Tchaourou. Ils ont été identifiés au regard de la particularité de leur niveau d'étude. Au total 100 apprenants pour 04 groupes pédagogiques de quatrième et 04 enseignants sont enrôlés. Les données ont été collectées sur la base de questionnaire ciblé et des interviews. Une méthode descriptive manuelle a permis de traiter les données recueillies auprès des apprenants et des enseignants. Les résultats ont montré que les expériences pédagogiques et didactiques des enseignants sont facteurs d'acquisition efficace des compétences de production orale dans cet établissement. En effet, des controverses didactiques militent aussi en défaveur du

rôle majeur que la prononciation, l'accentuation et l'interactivité des cours de production orale auxquels participent les apprenants. A l'analyse, la majorité des apprenants n'arrivent pas à acquérir un accent anglo-saxon même si certains programmes officiels exécutés tiennent approximativement compte de la notion de conceptualisation et de contextualisation des connaissances en didactiques des langues.

Mots clés : expression orale, compétences, apprenants, classe de quatrième

Introduction

Many EFL learners find it challenging to express themselves in spoken language. They are generally facing problems to use the language to express their thoughts effectively. They stop talking because they face psychological obstacles or cannot find the suitable words and expressions (F. Leong and M. Ahmadi, 2017: 34-41). Also, teaching many EFL teachers find speaking class difficult. The present research intends to investigate the difficulties and the challenges in speaking classes in secondary school

In traditional practices, community language learners tend to ask their neighbor which foreign language do you speak? Between French and English? This means that if the community can undertake rationally face to face discussions in English or in French. The success of producing and articulating a foreign language like English is a motive of its acquisition. This acquisition could be demonstrated through language interaction among the community of speakers whether in schools or in any institution.

The capability to maintain an interactive discourse in any circumstances of life. And (J. Richards, 2008: 158 - 177) demonstrated the speaking class is an element of enigmatic teaching attitude. The objectives and the astuces for implementing such skill are exceptionally in variety depending on the actors or stakeholders (teachers and learners).

The major difficulties that learners attempt to solve in speaking act sound to be the varieties of sounds, words, phrases and forms of speech manipulation. All these particles are characteristics of language production. The focus is also on 'the what to say it' in every context and situation. Also, they are facing to the 'how to say it'

(E. Tarone, 2005: 485-502) re-addressed the fundamental role for communicative strategies in participating to conversational lessons in class to French speaking contexts. 'The what' is the effect to the ears of the interlocutors and stands as an indicator to accomplish the act of communicating in the language. That means that in English as a Foreign Language applied to secondary schools.

EFL teaching searches on speaking programs have supplied with many paradigms for designing methods and approaches (P. McCarthy & M. O’Keeffe, 2010: 212-218, A. Lazaraton, 2014: 106-120). The necessity to differentiate language pronunciation classes, Fluency and precision speech, the types of spoken language in secondary schools.

1. Problem Statement

Among the four basic language skills, speaking is the most important. It holds the core position for the language mastery.

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2. Objectives of the study

The global objective (GO) of this research is to investigate the difficulties encountered by secondary school learners in speaking English. Specifically it aims to:

- Identify the difficulties and challenges in speaking classrooms.
- Evaluate teachers’ strategies and methods in speaking classroom.

2.1. Research questions (RQ)

To reach the above objectives, some questions need to be asked.

RQ1: What are major issues and concepts in didactical research applied to speaking tasks?

RQ2: What might make speaking programs difficult for learners in secondary schools?

RQ3: What is the place of speaking session in an EFL learning process?

RQ4: Is there any adopted principles, formats and procedures in designing speaking programs?

2.2. Hypotheses (H)

By answering to the research questions, some hypotheses have arisen.

H1: The major issues have to do with the sub skills, the components speaking classes and methods of teaching

H2: students are confronted to cognitive difficulties, fear to errors and anxiety

H3: The speaking sessions are the important in the learning process to EFL classes.

H4: There are numerous pedagogical principles in the design of speaking lessons

3. Literature review

Some observed that learners could produce sentences accurately in classes but could not use them appropriately when genuinely communicating outside of the class. Other scientific observations that being able to communicate requires more than mastering linguistic structuration, due to the fact that language was fundamentally social. Within a social context, language users in secondary schools needed to perform certain functions, such as inviting for lunch, diner, breakfast, declining invitations as whole, asking for permission, organizing festival etc. Learners may know the rules of language usage, but be unable to use it.

So, being able to communicate required more than linguistic competence; it required communicative competence and knowing when and how to say what to whom in a context of speaking activities in classes. These research observations contributed to a shift in the field in the late 1970s and early 1980s from a linguistic structure –centered approach to a communicative via Action Research Approach (S. Savignon, 1997: 261-277).

Applying the theoretical perspective of speaking skill development and its difficulties aiming to broaden the communicative competences, the goals deployed in the course of teaching. Considering the fact that in some speaking classes, teachers contributes and teaches the way they were taught; it calls upon the concept of Apprenticeship of observation in language class.

By considering what it is to be learned in terms of strategies involving interaction and manipulation of micro and macro skills applied to speaking programs? Also, learners, to some extent are actively involved in constructing their own knowledge through experiences and initiatives (J. Dewey, 1896: 357-370).

The issues regarding effectiveness of speaking programs may include:

Clustering, redundancy, reduced forms, performance variables, colloquial language, rate of delivery, stress, rhythm, intonation and accentuation, complexity and interaction procedures. Those subtasks are multidimensional or interdependent or even challenging in classes regardless of linguistic features (A. Robinson, 2001: 27-57; R. Ellis, 2009: 474- 509; P. Skehan, 2009: 510 -532).

On the other hand, (J. Richards, 1983: 158-177) developed the emergence of micro and macro-skills in oral communication focusing on the functions of language and its forms.



4. Methodology

This research is a descriptive study and it adopts an Action Research Approach (ARA) in language education field. It is carried out in Tchaourou secondary school (CEG1) in Northern-Benin. It describes the difficulties faced by EFL learners in speaking skill. This approach is applied to the existing practices for the purposes of implementing speaking programs in the language educational system. The exploration of learners' aptitudes and attitudes versus the teachers pedagogical techniques to the leading of communicative classes are the indicators of performance assessment to the decision –taking for the benefit of stakeholders.

4.1. Participants

The participants to this research are EFL teachers and EFL learners from third form. Those learners are targeted because they are no more at the beginning of English language learning, and then can give reliable information to the researcher. Learners are selected purposively basing on their willing. As far as teachers' respondents are concerned, only those teaching third form classes are selected. A total of 100 learners from four pedagogical groups (A- B- C- D) and 04 teachers (T/A- T/B- T/C- T/D) were selected to participate to the study.

Due to parallel formulation and harmony in the search, also pertinence and the notion of balanced research process, 25 learners were in priority identified in each pedagogical group their respective official teacher of English.

4.2. Instruments and method

4.2.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed and addressed to the participants to the study. The reliability of data has to do with thinking of the participants responses towards the same questions in the same way. (D. Nunan, 1989: 17- 18) stated that through using questionnaire, one can inquire into any aspect within teaching/learning speaking process. The one addressed to the learners aimed to collect their motivation about English language in general and about speaking class in peculiar. It also helped to collect their difficulties in acquiring Speaking skill. The students' questionnaire contains 12 questions designed in a soft way so as to help learners fill it easily. The teachers' questionnaire is made up 05 questions and aimed to collect their demographic data such as graduation, level of qualification and experience, and the challenges that they encounter in speaking classroom as well. The questionnaire sheets were distributed to the teachers and returned back once filled one week later. Learners' questionnaires were filled instantly with the researcher as help for the learners (respondents).

4.2.2. Interview

Interview was carried out with all the teachers together to have a common view of the difficulties and the challenges they are facing when teaching speaking activities. And the interview is as closely connected to the questionnaire for meeting learning objectives and pedagogical ones for consideration.

5. Data presentation

To process the data collected, a descriptive approach was used. It has to combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches consisting in discourse analysis, percentage calculation and identification the numbers of respondents between all the stakeholders of the communicative skills acquisition and delivery methods used.

The collected data are presented as follows:

- From teachers

Table 1: Speaking EFL teachers in Secondary school of Tchaourou

Teachers and groups	Experience of teaching/ years	Speaking class frequency/week	Macro = 10 & Micro skills = 05	Observation
T/A	03	01	Accentuation	N/A
T/B	03	01	Interactivity	N/A
T/C	07	01	pronunciation	N/A
T/D	10	02	Intonation	N/A

Source: Investigation data, Tchaourou 2024.

The analysis has revealed that the teachers' experiences are varied. 50% ; 02 teachers have between 1 and 3 years' experiences, 25%; 01 teacher between 3 and 7 years and 25%; 01 teacher between 7 and 10. No teacher is more than 10 years' experience. All of them reply that they teach to learners the importance of Spoken English. One (01) teacher said that he teaches speaking class every week versus 03 of them; 75%. They did it depending on the planning they set monthly. Also, half (02 teachers) of the sample; 50%, asserted that their learners feel interested in their classes whereas the other 50% said that learners are not interested in their teaching practice. To get the learners' interest, all the respondents' teachers motivated them. As teaching method used in speaking class, all the teachers attested to have been using text books only. They make learners read the texts after they read and correct the mispronunciations. Concerning the different steps in teaching speaking class, 2 teachers; 50% said they stress more on pre-speaking step while 50% consider all the steps. To prepare their classes, all the teachers reply that they consider not only learners' need, their interest but also their level. Dealing with the challenges that they face in teaching speaking class, 02 teachers; 50%, mention learners' lack of interest, 01 teacher; 25% points out the lack of modern

materials, and 01 teacher; 25% who pinpoints learners' lower vocabulary background and the fear of making mistakes. To overcome those issues, 02 teachers; 50% vary their strategies and the other 50% rephrase the activities. All the teachers said that only some learners do not like speaking classes because they find it difficult.

- **From learners**

The table below identifies the micro and macro skills in communicative lesson and also are connected to the performance made by all pedagogical groups during the whole survey.

Table 2: Learners in context of communicative classes

Speaking skills (Mi & Ma)	Micro skills	Macro skills	Number (n= 100) of learners performing in A-B-C-D	Equivalent percentage (%)	Codification
Chunks of Lang	X	-	095	95	CL
Phonemes and allophonic variants	X	-	039	39	PAV
Reduced form words & phrases	X	-	040	40	RWP
Suitable lexical units for pragmatics	X	-	015	15	SLUP
Speech at different rate delivery	X	-	043	43	SDD
Monitoring devices, pauses, self-corrections	X	-	050	50	MDPSC
Grammar words classes use	X	-	062	62	GWCU
Producing natural constituents speech	X	-	060	60	PNCS
Particular meaning in divers grammar forms	X	-	017	17	PMDGF
Cohesive devices in discourse	X	-	035	35	CDD
Com. Function to situations	-	x	005	05	CFS
Appro. Registers, implicatures,	-	x	061	61	APRI
Links and connections between events	-	x	060	60	LCBE
Body language, facial features	-	x	075	75	BLFF
Battery of speaking strategies	-	x	057	57	BSS
Total (N=15)	10	05	15	15	15

Source: Investigation data, CEGI Tchaourou, 2024

The data from learners have revealed that the majority of them, that is 95% like English language. Only 4 learners; 4% dislike it. This demonstrates learners' great desire and motivation toward Spoken English, knowing its importance in nowadays' life and society. All the learners unanimously said they have English class only one time a week. They stated that this is not enough to help them to really learn the language. Four kinds of activities are conducted in classroom according to the learners: cohesive devices in discourse and communication functions in situation, grammar words classes' use, and producing natural



constituents' speech. Among those activities, 39 learners; 39% prefer particular meaning activities, 15 learners; 15% for listening, 40 learners; 40% for chunks of language and 5% for phonemic and allophonic variants. Moreover, 43% find speaking class boring, 50% find it frustrating versus 6%. Concerning the difficulties encountered in speaking class, 20% of the learners pointed pronunciation, 62% lack of vocabularies and 17% people's judgment. To deal with the issues, 60% ask for help from teachers, 35% ask for help from their classmates and 4% make their own research. Furthermore, no one of them has the entire English handout. Only 45% have some of the handout recommended. The reason advanced is the lack of financial mean as expressed by 32 students; 32% and the parents' refusal as expressed by 67 learners; 67%. Asking the question whether only classroom activities are sufficient to improve their language skills or not, the majority of the learners; 80% against 19%. To better improve their speaking skill, the learners themselves in great majority said they should practice outside classroom activities.

6. Analysis and Discussion

The findings also show that all the teachers let their learners know the importance of English language speaking. This practice is essential to raise their motivation toward the language. It can also contribute to the learners' personal commitment in their learning process. Likewise, 25% of the teachers teach speaking class every week against 75% who did it depending on their monthly planning set. This demonstrates that learners are not submitted to frequently speaking class. Instead, regular speaking practice will foster learners' capacity and build up their language background. Only 50% of the respondent teachers confess that their learners feel interested in their classes. The other 50% are not motivated in speaking classes. As method adopted to teach speaking class, the teachers use only text books that learners read after them. This method is unsuitable for speaking class since it does not promote the learners' autonomy and strengthen their vocabulary background. This has raised the problem of teaching materials on the one hand and the lack of competence, that are common to many EFL teachers. Moreover, 50% of them mention learners' lack of interest, 25% the lack modern materials, and 25% learners' lower vocabulary background and fear of making mistakes as challenges faced during lesson. Likewise, only few learners like speaking classes because they find it difficult. These observations confirm the ones of (P. Islam and M. Stapa, 2021: 1-31) who go further by asserting that the reasons for low development of spoken English among learners include complex nature of speaking, unsuitable application of instructional methods, teachers' low proficiency in spoken English and controlling behavior,



students' psychological factors, sociocultural factors, students' inadequate linguistic resources, L1 interference, and micro and macro skills promotion in communicative classes.

Besides, almost all the respondent learners questioned attested to like English language. Only 4 learners dislike it. This is important as asset to develop English for communicative purposes among learners. From that end, motivation is an influential factor in the teaching-learning situations since the success of learning depends on whether or not the learners are motivated. They suggested teachers to motivate learners because students' mere presence in the class is of course, not a guarantee that learners want to learn. In effect, the learners in majority said they have English class one a week, which is not sufficient for language learning. Indeed, as a foreign language, English needs enough time and frequent contact to be learned. The results also revealed that 39% of the learners prefer reading class, 15% prefer listening class, 40% for writing class and 5% for speaking class. In addition, 43% find speaking class boring, 50% find it frustrating. Only 5% find speaking activities interesting. These results show how tricky is speaking teaching. 20% of the learners pointed pronunciation, 62% lack of vocabularies and 17% people's judgment. These observations confirm (S. Al Hosni, 2014: 22-30) who finds out three major speaking difficulties encountered by the learners such as linguistic difficulties, mother tongue use, and inhibition. The interviews have reported some factors that can lead to those aforementioned difficulties. They are teachers' perceptions and tacit beliefs about teaching speaking, the teaching strategies, curriculum, extracurricular activities, and the assessment rules.

7. Pedagogical implications

The findings of this Action Research survey call upon pedagogical implications in the streamline of speaking classes; these could not be effective for the improvement of learners' performance in oral production and also for the teachers' teaching practices to the achievement of professionalism as well. The following recommendations could be helpful to boost teaching speaking practices in the secondary schools

Materials selection procedure and outcomes should a matter of necessity by the teachers. The non- respect of such recommendation is an open door to the disinterest and demotivation at the level of learners. This attitude stands for the promotion of non-original materials for suitability.

Promotion and provision to extra-curricular programs. Such approach is contributive to the higher proficiency in speaking demonstrated by the majority of the learners involved in such program of speaking.

Language education teachers are recommended to become familiar with the Action Research Approach in every conveyance of knowledge, know-how and the how-to applied to speaking session of EFL/ESL. In adopting such mechanism, learners encounter originality of every language programs by carrying and reviewing varieties of programs and competences acquisition.

Providing much more opportunities for learners to speak English in context. The opportunities of digitalization of learning is an asset for language program and consequently to speaking programs in third forms to secondary schools in the commune of Tchaourou in Republic of Benin.

Conclusion

This study has aimed to uncover the difficulties and challenges encountered in speaking classroom at secondary school by the medium of Action Research Approach. The study also showed that although the learners like speaking programs in class after all, still feel disoriented in the course of pedagogical and didactical processes.

The findings of learners' and teachers' progression or proficiency in that point of view was helpful to redefine the missions and contents as pragmatic of the speaking classes in third form. This approach is contributive to the practicality of lessons process conducting to speak the language in exclusivity. The learners' talking time has been subject matter in discussion with teachers and learners during the research procedure. The new approach demonstrates the new calculation of timing allotted to the learners for personal expression during a language class with focus on speaking activities.

Learners demonstrate an origination of frustration when they are in lack of words to express their thought in the course of lessons allied to speaking. They lack sufficient vocabularies and feel demotivated while practicing the speaking activities. Learners in their request claim for Teacher Talking Time reviewing as an element of barrier to produce the language in context and some engaging active conversation with their teacher in class.

Learners indicate the nature the atmosphere developed during a speaking class. This stands as a motivation to decide policy development towards principles, micro and macro skills activation and methods of delivering the class in speaking programs.

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