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## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' EXIT PROFILE IDENTIFICATION IN SEGBANA SECONDARY SCHOOLS (BENIN)

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### Résumé

Cette étude examine le profil des apprenants, c'est-à-dire leur identification à la fin des programmes d'anglais dans les établissements secondaires du Bénin. En adoptant l'approche de l'étude de cas, des sujets apprenants ont été sélectionnés sur la base d'observations, d'interview et de questionnaire administrés aux apprenants et enseignants. Les résultats ont révélé qu'il y a des raisons derrière les mauvais résultats des apprenants dans l'apprentissage et l'enseignement et évaluation de l'anglais dans les établissements secondaires de Ségbana et qu'en dépit des problèmes, il y a des apprenants qui réussissent quand même. Ils sont majoritairement issus des écoles rurales qui ne disposent pas suffisamment de moyens d'apprentissage et de médias. Ils étaient à la fois enclins à l'introversión et à l'extraversión qui, affichent une forte motivation pour apprendre l'anglais et certains ont des soutiens familiaux pour répondre aux besoins de l'étude. Pour réussir, tous les apprenants doivent utiliser davantage des stratégies à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de la classe.

**Mot clés :** Anglais ; Apprenants ; Identification ; Profil de sortie ; Ségbana.

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### Abstract

This research investigates the learners' profile at the completion of English programs in Benin secondary schools. Employing the case study method, this research about particular students involved subjects that were selected on the basis of observation, interviews and questionnaires given by researcher on both side learners and teachers. The data were collected through the interviews, questionnaires, and documentations. The findings revealed that there are reasons behind learners' poor performance in English language learning, teaching and evaluating in Benin secondary schools and that despite the problems, successful learners' appearance is registered. They are mostly from rural schools which notably has limited learning facilities and media. They were both inclined towards introversion and extraversion who have high motivation in learning English and they have supporting family in terms of supplying means for studies. To be successful students, all learners should use numerous strategies inside and outside the class..

**Keywords:** English; exit profile; identification; learners; Segbana.

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## **Introduction**

In many countries, English plays an important role. There are about 375 million people for whom English is first language and around 750 million who speak English as second language. English has official or special language status in many countries on the globe. This proves how important English is. In many countries and markets, knowing English opens opportunities to job employment. It is the communicative medium in fields such as science and aviation. Moreover, even countries where the main language used is French, people feel the need of English as tool of development to improve their relationships and partnerships all over the world. That's what certainly led Benin educational authorities to include it among the subjects taught in both primary and secondary schools.

Due to the position occupied by English as the most commonly used language among foreign language speakers, many scholars need to learn it. In Benin, for example, French is used as an official language but every Beninese recognizes English as a second foreign language because French is not the only language which can favor international exchange and reinforce bilateral and multilateral cooperation that exist between Benin and other countries. The expansion of English teaching program in Benin secondary schools is nowadays a

reality despite the different difficulties faced when carrying out these programs. Nevertheless, a great number of people have noticed the necessity to learn English language because of many opportunities it offers in international regions and markets, "it will open the job prospect and increase the standard of living" confessed many people in the community.

However, the way English language is used to communicate between learners and teachers in Benin reduce their capacity to be able to communicate freely after many years of studies because it is taught differently. There is too much emphasis put on writing (grammar) and not enough on oral presentation and giving students the skills they will need later on in life. Students should be able to explain in details orally what they have learned without writing it in a formal paper, which should be just as sufficient.

English learning in Benin has always been a great challenge for learners, due to their limited contact with native speakers and the lack of opportunities to practice English in their everyday lives. English teachers complain that students do not participate or take part in class and they are more active in learning other subjects.

There had been many complaints on the poor performances of students speaking English fluency in Benin secondary schools level. The problems of poor writing,

speaking, reading and listening skills have persisted and this revealed that the traditional methods, techniques, approaches, astuces of teaching and learning English language are ineffective. Hence, this current prevailing circumstance and the different opinions on the knowledge students acquired at the full completion of English program make investigation into ways of developing the students' skills for better performances.

Added to that, the time allocated (2 to 4 hours per week) devoted to teaching English in classrooms is far from enough and this is so problematic. In most Beninese schools, the teachers of English argued that these hours allocated are insufficient and in this respect it is really difficult for teachers to efficiency do their job by the way have their students be proficiency. These hours alloted to teach the language does not enable them to devote sufficient time to oral communication teaching or extra activities in which they can practice the language with their learners. The lack of studies that are being conducted in the field of learners profile identification in Benin is another reason for conducting this study.

This study investigates on the English language learners' profile identification in Benin secondary schools. Specifically, the purpose was to examine students' skills in writing, speaking, listening and reading and to demonstrate the reasons why students are so

weak in English language communication.

The following research questions were addressed to fulfill the objectives of the study:

- What is the English language learners' profile in Segbana secondary schools?
- What are the teaching strategies used by English teachers in their classrooms?
- What are the reasons behind learners' low performance in Benin secondary schools at the completion of English program?
- How learners performed in English language skills in Segbana secondary schools at the completion of English program?

Learning English as a second language should enable secondary schools learners to communicate with people who speak English in their countries and throughout the world. English as a compulsory course is being taught at junior and senior high school levels. Of course, the private sector and some public schools have already started introducing English at primary school. Teaching English starts at the first form in junior high schools and it continues up to university levels. In spite of studying English for a long period of time in schools (almost 7 years), students are not able to communicate in English in real contexts. Many reasons cause Benin secondary students poor performance learning English as a foreign language such as the weakness of curriculum design, lack of

qualified English teachers, and lack of students' learning motivation. As a result, the authorities and researchers have tried to investigate the reasons why, despite all the money and time spent and efforts taken, Beninese students are not as successful in learning English as they are expected.

Teba (2017) displays the need to re-assess the strategies used to teach English language in Benin secondary public schools. The collected data displayed those Beninese students after nearly seven years of education are enabled to neither speak fluently in English language nor interact with other people because of emphasis on grammatical structure.

Fema (2003) was of the view that the major cause of the poor performance in English used by students can be attributed to the interference of French or mother tongue with the English language. He added that students often use their native language or mother tongue in all their interactions and English is only used within the four walls of the classrooms and ends there.

Adedokun (2011) was of the view that poorly trained English and untrained teachers of English were employed to teach and prepare secondary school students for the school certificate examinations in English language. This situation contributed immensely in poor performance in English language among secondary school students.

Roger (1981) was of the view that instructional materials and facilities are important part of the process of learning as they provide practice and feedback in learning track. In addition to that even Sa'ad (2007) was of the view that teaching and learning take place effectively when classes are moderate. Ya'u (1993) categorically said that successful achievement of stated objectives in teaching and learning is always associated with using the right technique.

Mohammad, (2011) observed that the teaching of English language is bedeviled with many problems such as inadequate period of teaching, method of teaching and lack of adequate and useful resources. Abdullahi (2003) was also of the view that teachers mostly prefer to use traditional ways of teaching which they have been familiar with or as they were taught, which do not necessarily aid proper learning. Another important cause of poor performance in English language is the negative attitude of students toward the learning of English language. Students, particularly in secondary schools mostly show negative attitude toward learning of English language because they consider it foreign or not theirs. Mohammad (2011) was of the view that most students put a kind of negative attitude in learning and use of English language as well as making teachers task a difficult one indeed.

It is obvious that for any student to be

proficient in English language, mastering of skill of listening, speaking, reading and writing is necessary, and it requires a hardworking and dedication from the students. Therefore, it is clear that the negative attitude of students toward learning of English language is one of the causes of poor performance in the subject (English language).

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research Design**

Data for the study has been collected through qualitative approach. It has consisted in field investigation through classroom observation and questioning.

### **2.2. Area of investigation**

This study was carried out in the municipality of Segbana in the following secondary schools: CEG Segbana, CEG Sokotindji, CEG Liboussou, CEG Lougou, CEG Libante, and CEG Piami. The municipality of Segbana is located in North of the Republic of Benin, limited to the North by the municipality of Malanville, to the South by Kalalé, to the East by the Republic of Nigeria and to the West by both the municipalities of Kandi and Gogounou. In this District, students' performance at the final Examination in English leaves to be desired each year.

### **2.3. Samples and Sampling:**

Both English teachers and students have

consisted the target population to the study. A total of 120 students, randomly selected, from Segbana secondary schools were involved in the study with gender consideration. They were twenty (20) learners from CEG Segbana, twenty (20) from CEG Piami, twenty (20) from CEG Liboussou, twenty (20) from CEG Sokotindji, twenty (20) from CEG Libante and twenty (20) from CEG Lougou. Students provided information on school and home environment as well as attitudes towards learning the subject. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the six (06) secondary schools in Ségbana since they had poor results in English National Examination. As far as teachers were concerned, twenty (20) English teachers were included into the study whereby eighteen (18) were male and two (02) were female. The aim of including teachers in the study was to investigate the way they applied knowledge and skills in the classroom whereby emphasis was put on competence in handling the subject matter, methods of teaching, and use of teaching and learning

### **2.4. Materials and research instruments**

#### **2.4.1. Class observation**

The class observation procedure helps to realize the real problems students faced in English language learning either because they use the mother tongue instead of English in the classroom, lack of learning and

teaching materials or because they have unqualified teachers of English. The class observation also allows realizing how learners and teachers interact when teachers carried out the curriculum. Indeed, it really helped to see how the four (04) English language skills activities are carried out with students from 6ème to Terminale. It aimed at collecting non-verbal responses such as students' way to answer questions and their interaction with instructors. The observation was done in four classes to get the data needed.

#### **2.4.2. Interview**

Concerning the interview, Dornyei (2007) points to the effectiveness of this type of procedure in that it paves the way for the researcher to elaborate on the issue and collect necessary data concerning the purpose of the study while no pressure seems to be on the participants. Then, an interview with some English teachers and students has been done. Teacher interviews were used to encourage them to reflect on their beliefs and language teaching practices. Participant's perceptions of how language should be taught and how languages are learned were also of interest. The main purpose of giving interview in the study is to know in depth about the way learners learn English; it is also done to investigate their motivation, and learning environment. The interviewees have willingly accepted to participate to the

interview. Nine (09) English teachers and thirty (30) students have been interviewed. Each interview has lasted about one hour for both teachers and students.

#### **2.4.3. Questionnaire addressed to the learners**

The instrument to collect the data about the profiles of English language learners was questionnaire. For developing the questionnaire, the researcher referred to information gathered from the writer's observation on the learners' submitted questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of items regarding students' experience as well as how their efforts to be successful as English learners. The learners' questionnaire comprised eleven items in three clusters of (a, b, c) out of hundred questionnaires distributed to students, all of these questionnaires were returned. In fact, I have made my enquiry about students in both junior and senior secondary schools; this explains the high number of questionnaires to students.

#### **2.4.4. Questionnaire addressed to the teachers**

Teachers' questionnaire was developed by the researcher after thorough review of literature. The questionnaire comprises ten items in three clusters of (a, b, c) on which the respondents were requested to indicate their opinion. It contains eight (08) questions with the proposal of answers. Ten (10) questionnaires were given to the teachers to

fill and all have been returned.

## **2.5. Method of Data Analysis**

After collecting, the data was computerized in Excel and processed with SPSS software. Qualitative method has been used for data analysis and has consisted in speech analysis and frequency calculation.

## **3. Results and discussion**

### **3.1. English learners profile**

The findings have demonstrated that learners showed a great interest in their community context of learning on which many experts have already opined. As for their enthusiasm to the English program learners revealed a weak state since they were not able to express the feedback of the competences they have acquired. As a consequence, their curiosity and creativity have decreased. Most of them have the feeling and the motivation to find out more information about some skills contents but they came across their own limits.

The common work they carried out during English sessions in some levels addressed a lower performance at a time of evaluation since the language individualization process on production sub-skills (repetition drills, or language articulation, phonetics and phonology of the language) through 'Look and listen' or 'Listen and repeat' tasks

implementation time.

Learners were not eager to take an active part in every activity and became non-enthusiastic about expressing themselves with confidence. They were afraid of giving opinion in front of the whole class. Normally, all of them were looking forward to having their say on competences taught in class for the purposes of communication. It is important to mention that the relative interests on the competences sharing in class in terms of 'content words' learning or 'grammar words' learning are identifiable.

Regarding sociological and territorial involvement to the study, all the learners who took part in this survey are aware of the proximity of Nigeria with the use of Naira, a currency used in this neighbor country of Benin. They are also conscious with the mixing of the other local dialects and the English language. They all confessed that reading English in class is an interesting opportunity for them and their community. Also, understanding a key content of a reading text by the medium of pre-tasks and post-tasks facilitate the success of learning in context. So, it is important to mention that reading exercises they have practiced in classes included reading comprehension, vocabulary and situation –problem tasks were successfully conducted by the teachers. Learners were sometimes not able to answer the comprehension questions by using

sophisticated grammar points and acceptable vocabulary from the text. Learners wrote the right answers according to the text proposed, being able to focus on the questions after having analyzed the text deeply. All the participants agreed on the fact that learning new words and expressions in context was easier than learning them by heart from a list since they were able to build new sentences with new words correctly. Also, new words were easy to remember when participants took them from text instead of using a vocabulary list of words. As for language registers, learners were asked to face the big amount of colloquialisms and dialectal varieties (local languages influence on English). They had to challenge some texts with different registers (e.g. Learning situations: sociocultural heritage & Human beings and health etc) idioms because their program requires. Such fact arose their curiosity and all of them felt the need of learning more about idioms and slangs in contexts.

### 3.2 Recommendations and Suggestions

It is important that language instructors should recognize that such weakness is a main cause impact on students' English proficiency. Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations and suggestions can be made in order to improve and facilitate the learners the teachers, the government, and other education

stakeholders.

- The curriculum designers should think about the learners' needs in language learning when they plan to design curriculum.
- Course writers and Task designers would come to the realizations that the learner-centeredness of this approach might call for different orientations and new approach in the planning of the course work as well as designing workable tasks that promote independent writings.
- Government should help in procuring books, journals and other facilities that can help in the development of the English learning skills.
- The government should as well introduce some incentives in schools like presidential award, scholarships to reward both students and teachers who put in more efforts to improve the performance in the English language.
- Introduce the teaching of English in primary public schools in Benin, because very young children are more motivated in learning a language, and able to speak it in a relatively short-time.
- Make some materials need available for both, teachers and learners.

- School administrators could see through the Process approach advocated for in this research work that practicing the skill of writing would extend beyond the usual time allotted in the school time table. It might become necessary to find ways of incorporating this in the school timetable.
- Curriculum planners might find it necessary to see how the multi-draft nature of this approach could be planned and made fit into our serialized educational system.
- There might be the need to publish new course books and encourage the writing of books that employ the Process approach in the writing skill development.
- University lecturers who train secondary school teachers should help the secondary school teachers on how to use the Process Approach in writing classrooms.
- Curriculum designers should incorporate process activities and teaching auxiliaries in their work.
- Enough time should be allotted to the writing classroom practices to enable students to participate well.
- The Process approach may be of assistance to Language teachers in over-bloated classes.
- The school management to ensure that teachers of English prepared adequately for the lessons by preparing necessary documents such as lesson plans.
- Schools would as well be forced to admit the number of students that consume rate with the number of teaching and learning material available.
- Students should be motivated to acquire a confidence whenever they make mistakes in language classrooms
- Students should be encouraged by their parent to actively involve in learning the English language at home and schools.
- Students should be encouraged to practice English language with native speakers in both inside and outside classrooms.
- Students should be made to undergo oral exams to qualify to move up the educational ladder.
- The classroom teachers could see the issue of knowledge updating as a necessity in the bid to achieving the desirable goals.
- Encourage “Pair work” or “Group



work” it is one of the successful ways to motivate his/her students to participate in the lesson because Language is best learned through the close collaboration and communication among students.

- Be aware of when to correct errors and how to do that without any hurt and humiliation. In a learner-centered classroom, it should be better to correct errors, which students make unconsciously, whenever there is a gap of communication or when not treating the error will result in a misunderstanding of the idea expressed.
- Create a meaningful context for students by accompanying new information with figures, illustrations, and photographs. Associate new information with a mental or printed image to help you learn it.

### **Conclusion**

The growing economy and international relationships and agreements call for language skills. English language because of its importance has become a requirement in today’s life.

This research has highlighted a wide range of issues faced in learning and teaching English in Segbana secondary schools. The findings revealed that learners were confronted

with lack of vocabulary mastery, low concentration, lack of discipline, and speaking problem. Also, teachers lack sufficient training combined with limited mastery of teaching methods, inadequate facilities and resources, and time constraint. However, this study found the strategies for both learners and teachers to overcome their teaching and learning challenges in classroom, like English clubs and teachers’ capacity building.

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