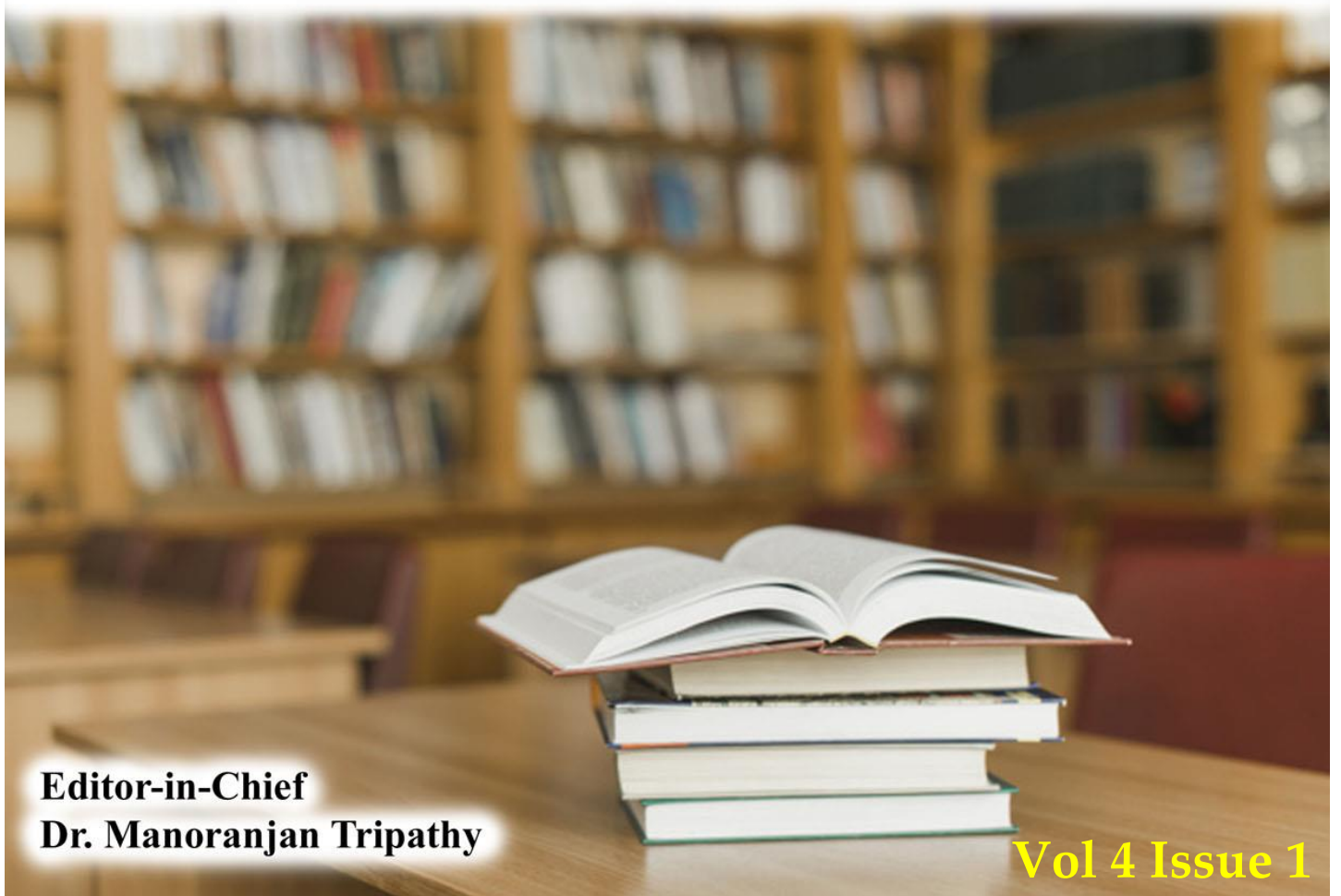


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## Is Lack of Classroom Participation in EFL Classrooms a Sign of Passivity? The Need for a Constructive Pedagogy

Coffi Martinien Zounhin Toboula<sup>1\*</sup>; Hamissou Ousseini<sup>2</sup>; Moussa Tankari<sup>3</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The definition of the phenomenon of non-participation in the classroom seems to be subject to several trends. Many educational stakeholders still seem to be divided on the issue of comparing this attitude to passivity. This question was the focus of this exploratory study and adopted a mixed research methods approach. Different data types (quantitative and qualitative) were collected from 282 intermediate EFL learners through a 44-item questionnaire, focus groups, and a case study. Data collected from these students randomly recruited from two universities in the Republic of Benin (UAC: 80, UP: 47) and Niger (UZ: 121, AMU: 34) were analysed using the descriptive interpretation statistical method of SPSS 26 software (quantitative data) and through inductive content analysis method (qualitative data).

The results obtained from these different analyses revealed that the lack of class participation could not be systematically considered as a sign of passivity because it is of two kinds (verbal and non-verbal). Moreover, there are two types of passive participation (negative and positive). These findings, among others, showed that this phenomenon is caused by the nature of EFL courses, the learning environment, anxiety, fear of public speaking, and natural cognitive, psychic, psychosomatic, climatic, economic, social, parental, occult (African superstition), and physiological factors. Several recommendations and suggestions were made in the light of these findings to prevent this phenomenon.

**Keywords:** *EFL, factors for non-participation, passivity.*

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper presents empirical insights on classroom participation in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). This interest emerged from personal experiences one of the authors lived in an inner circle [1, 2] academic institution. In general, psychologists have linked low classroom participation or silence to personality traits, including low self-esteem, inhibition, introversion, and anxiety [3], but there are other explanations as well. While classroom participation may also depend on the nature of classroom interaction, the latter would rely on the approaches embraced by the teacher. For decades, teaching paradigms including behavioural psychology, cognitive theory, and constructivism [4, 5] have guided English language teaching (ELT) method development. In addition, they helped to shape how teachers should behave in their classrooms [6, 7]. However, their application in the EFL setting is still problematic. These approaches are tightly linked to research in second language acquisition (SLA) undertaken in the context of native speakers and are likely to be irrelevant to EFL contexts classrooms [8, 9]. The evoked irrelevance of SLA theories to EFL contexts may reveal helpful in explaining the diversity of pedagogical problems; yet, this is hampered by the scarcity of research in EFL contexts, mainly in the Sub-Saharan African countries. For example, research on classroom participation or silence adopted by EFL learners from countries like Niger and Benin is quite non-existent. The existing literature on such issue tended to focus on English as a second language (ESL) students' experiences in inner circle institutions. This rationale justifies the need for the current research study to address the following key research questions on the causes for non-participation or silence in some educational institutions of two West African countries (Benin and Niger).

- What causes non-participation or silence in higher education EFL classrooms?
- What are the natural factors contributing to non-participation in EFL classrooms?

The next section deconstructs the concept of non-participation (silent) in English language classrooms, drawing primarily from studies conducted on native speakers. It is followed by a description of the methodological procedures used to collect and analyze data. The paper ends with a presentation and interpretation of findings generated from the study.

## Deconstructing Classroom Participation

Classroom participation is an issue that most concerns non-native speaker learners of English, mainly in contexts that are culturally and linguistically different from their own. As a matter of fact, EFL learners may find it challenging to maintain participation in inner circle English language classrooms. In some EFL contexts, such as Niger and the Benin Republic, the teaching culture tends to place the instructor as the only authority to decide which learner can talk, when the learner can talk, and even what the learner is permitted to say. In such a context, active participation through questioning may be regarded as a sign of stupidity or lack of intelligence. Another characteristic of participation in specific EFL classrooms is that group works are not standard practices. Strategies used by native speakers during classroom interaction for turn-taking [10] to share ideas with peers or with the teacher may also be regarded as impolite in some contexts. These situations may help explain non-native speaker learners' difficulties in American and British universities. They usually experience in those institutions what Norton [11] describes as *peripherality*, the situation of non-membership to a community and non-familiarity with the practices of that community. In other words, classroom participation is determined by contextual realities, not entirely dependent on learner factors.

To expand on the above, the main difficulties experienced by non-native speaker learners in inner circle contexts come from the fact that oral participation is crucial to the classes. Their fear and anxiety generally originate from the requirement to demonstrate understanding through discussions and questioning. As Lee [12] asserted, "In the U.S. academic culture, students' demonstration of critical thinking abilities, problem-solving skills, and assertive oral participation is highly valued and rewarded" (p. 29). Students who were culturally groomed to listen and understand the teacher's talk [13] might find this situation very uncomfortable. Unfortunately, their choice to remain silent during classroom sessions is likely to be interpreted in that context as a sign of weakness and passivity. It may require a relatively long process of socialisation [14] in the mainstream context before they get used to the new practices.

Linguistic difficulties or language proficiency issues may also explain the lack of active participation in inner circle language classrooms. Because English is not their mother tongue, learners may be concerned about making grammatical errors or sounding incomprehensible while expressing themselves verbally [15]. This situation generally happens in classes where students are required to make sense of particular input through discussions with others or to answer questions from the teacher. This problem has constituted the focus of several studies [12, 14]. Most of these have shown linguistic difficulties as the most common reason non-native speaker learners remain silent in native-speaker settings. When learners view themselves as non-proficient in the target language, there are chances their verbal participation in class will be quasi-inexistent. This situation is generally aggravated by students' fear of negative evaluation by peers [12].

Peer exclusion is another reason exemplified by Yoon [16], who compared the teaching approaches in two different classes attended by two English language learners – *Natasha* and *Jun*. While these two learners were found active in Mrs. Young's class, their participation seemed undermined in Mr. Brown's. As Yoon [16] argued, their different participation "[...] appeared to be connected to their American peers' resistance. The non-English language learners positioned them as unacceptable members of the classroom community" (p. 220). In such a situation, it is disconcerting for non-native speaker learners, mainly when their accents become the subjects of labelling or questioning from native speaker members. Unavoidably, some of them prefer to distance themselves from the everyday practices of the host community. In this regard, lack of participation may be regarded as a result of *marginality* [11].

Norton [11] argued that marginality is generally expressed as a non-acknowledgement of "the imagined communities of the learners in our classrooms" (p. 171). For example, when teachers stick non-expected labels to their students, they are likely to feel marginalised and consequently adopt silence or withdrawal behaviour. Other forms of marginality generally arise according to how the teacher gives feedback to students or how much value he gives to their inputs. *Felicia* is a participant in Norton's [11] study. She never went back to one of her classes because of the way her teacher undervalued her outputs. As *Felicia* explained, the teacher had asked students to work on some tasks and share their contributions. Unfortunately, the teacher ignored that contribution. Even though this case is indicative of an extreme consequence of marginality (total withdrawal), it is exemplary of the ways teacher behaviour might constitute the core reason for non-participation by students.

It follows from the above that silence adopted by non-native speaker learners in inner circle classrooms is not always synonymous with passivity or lack of ability to understand materials and teachers' instructions. It is instead a sort of resistance or withdrawal behaviour towards the 'unfamiliar.' Other arguments provided by Zheng [14] are indicative of the fact that non-participation adopted by learners "doesn't always suggest passivity or agreement" but rather the opposite situation (p. 455). Participants in Zheng's [14] study have demonstrated sustainable skills of active listening, notes taking and developing functional thinking patterns throughout classroom processes. Based on his findings, Zheng [14] concluded that silence is not passive participation but rather an active phenomenon caused by many factors, such as cultural knowledge, academic knowledge, and identity negotiation. Similar conclusions are found in Morita [17], who

claimed that behind the reluctance of students are “multiple, interrelated issues, including not only language-related issues but also issues of culture, identity, curriculum, pedagogy, and power” (p. 596).

Considering the above insights about the non-participation of English learners in native-speaker contexts and the scarcity of similar studies from sub-Saharan African countries, the current paper proposes to look into this phenomenon using an exploratory research design. It was achieved through a mixed-method approach, as described next.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Igwenagu [18] states that “*Research* is a combination of both inductive and deductive experience and reasoning and [may] be [considered] to be the most [suitable means] of [finding] the truth [...]” (p.4). Thus, *research methodology* is “an [collection] of [methodical techniques employed] in research” (Igwenagu [18], p.5). Exploratory research design, also known as an interpretative study design, was considered in this study to see how well the lack of classroom engagement in EFL classes indicates passivity. This research paradigm was selected because it allows for the investigation of issues that are not clearly defined and the acquisition of insight and information about an ongoing problem.

### Exploratory Research Design

According to Blanche *et al.* [19], “A research design is a strategic framework for action that [connects] research [issues] to research implementation” (p.34). They argued as Sellitz *et al.* [20] that “Research designs guide the [organisation] of [circumstances] for data collection and analysis in a [way] that [seeks] to combine relevance to the research [objective] with [efficiency] in [process]” (Blanche *et al.* [19], p.34).

On the other hand, an exploratory research design is adopted when the study’s goal is to solve an unknown or under-researched problem. This type of research is based on data collection to detect patterns to explain phenomena that are rarely studied [21, 22]. Some of the qualities that differentiate exploratory research from other types of study can be summarised as follows [21]. Exploratory analysis lacks structure; it is participatory, open-ended, and generally low-cost. It guides researchers in determining the researched issue, takes time, and necessitates endurance from them. Another of its characteristics is the fact that it is comprehensive, adaptable, and flexible. It requires the researcher to review all gathered information and data that are most of the time qualitative. However, explorative research may be quantitative in certain instances when the sample size is large and data is gathered through surveys and experiments.

Researching something about which one has little knowledge may seem challenging. Still, many techniques may help you decide on the appropriate research design, data collection methods, and study variables. The current study uses the primary research method, which is one of two major exploratory research techniques. The information is gathered directly from the respondents through survey questionnaires, focus groups, and individual interviews (case study) as opposed to a secondary research method that uses previously published primary research. Thus, given the size of samples from the different populations involved in this study and the data collected through surveys, this exploratory research employed both a quantitative and qualitative approach.

### Populations

A population is a set of individuals about whom information is to be drawn. For the sake of generalisation and the promotion of joint or multidisciplinary research, the study took place in four different geographical areas [Two universities from Benin – University of Abomey-Calavi (**UAC**) and University of Parakou (**UP**) – and two others from Niger – University of Zinder (**UZ**) and Abdou Moumouni University (**AMU**)]. Thus, four different populations of EFL learners (Beninese students in Bachelor’s degree programs from **UAC** and **UP**, Nigerien students in Bachelor’s degree program from **UZ**, and Nigerien students in Master’s degree program from **AMU**) participated in the study.

### Samples

A sample is a subset of the population from which data will be collected. The sample size is never more prominent than the total population size. Two hundred and eighty-two (282) intermediate EFL learners [01 in first-year, 180 in second-year, 60 in third-year Bachelor’s degree, 40 in fourth-year or first-year Masters’ degree, and 01 who did not disclose his level of study], randomly recruited from the universities mentioned above (**UZ**: 121; **AMU**: 34; **UAC**: 80; **UP**: 47), participated in the study. As presented in Table 1 below, 223 (79.0%) of them were males, and 58 (20.6%) were females. One (0.4%) of them did not disclose his/her gender. Moreover, seven (7) Nigerien EFL learners [four (three males and one female) from the University of Zinder (**UZ**) and three (03) males from Abdou Moumouni University (**AMU**)] omitted to disclose their citizenship. On the other hand, one (01) Beninese EFL learner did not indicate his level of study.

**Table 1:** Number of EFL Learners from the four Universities that were involved in the study

Gender	EFL Participants in the study																				Total
	Universities																				
	UZ					AMU					UAC					UP					
Level of Study	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	ND	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	ND	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	ND	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	ND <sup>o</sup>	Year(s)
Males	1	59	13	0	3	0	0	0	21	3	0	59	18	2	0	0	30	10	3	1	223
Females	0	30	13	1	1	0	0	0	9		0	0	1	0		0	2	1	0		58
GND									1												1
<b>Total</b>	121					34					80					47					282

**UZ:** University of Zinder (Niger); **AMU:** Abdou Moumouni University (Niger); **UAC:** University of Abomey-Calavi (Benin Rep); **UP:** University of Parakou (Benin Rep); **ND:** Non-Disclose (citizenship), **GND:** Gender Non-Disclose; **ND<sup>o</sup>:** Non-Disclose (Level)

### Instruments used to collect data

Data were gathered through a semi-structured questionnaire, focus groups, and individual open-ended interviews within the English departments of the four West African Universities based on the research questions presented earlier. The semi-structured questionnaire administered to the four samples of the EFL learners (UZ: 121; AMU: 34; UAC: 80; UP: 47) consists of four different parts and is made of forty-four (44) items. The first part, made of six (06) items, deals with demographic information. The second part consists of twenty-five (25) items used as benchmarks in the questionnaire. These items were developed to examine the nature of learners’ relationship with their EFL teacher, classmates, or anything else in their learning environment. In addition, they were designed to identify possible natural and chronic causes of non-participation in class that does not particularly interfere with any course. The third part of the questionnaire consists of seven (07) other items specifically designed to explore the frequency with which EFL learners participate in the various courses taught to them in the Bachelor’s and Master’s programs. Respondents could rate more than one course by filling in more questionnaires. The fourth and last part of the questionnaire comprises six (06) items elaborated to examine how the EFL teacher encourages the learner to participate in the course.

To gain more insight from the respondents, the seven (07) items of the third part of this questionnaire made of open-ended questions were rephrased to give them a new look and make them easier to understand for the informants. They were used to carry out focus groups. Moreover, three (03) other open-ended questions were added to conduct individual interviews (case study). The data collected by this venture are qualitative.

The reliability statistics (Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient) for the 44-item questionnaire is  $\alpha = 0,851$ , suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency (reliability), which is acceptable. The 44 items are then representative of the behavioural domain [23].

### Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

This exploratory study adopted a mixed-method approach. Therefore, quantitative and qualitative data have been collected to investigate the reasons for non-participation or silence in higher education EFL classrooms and the natural factors contributing to this phenomenon. The 44-item questionnaire consisting of semi-structured questions helped to gather quantitative data, whereas seven (07) of this 44-item questionnaire made of open-ended questions, designed to explore the frequency of participation of EFL learners in the various courses, allowed to gather qualitative data through focus groups and individual interviews (case study). They were rephrased before being reused. Indeed, to gain more in-depth knowledge about the probable and natural causes of university EFL learners’ non-participation in class, two respondents were randomly selected from each of the four samples of participants from the four universities mentioned above to be the subject of a case study. Based on the seven (07) specific and reworded items of the 44-item questionnaire mentioned above, they were interviewed. Three other open-ended questions were taken from the second and fourth parts of this questionnaire to deal with these interviews. In particular, they discussed the natural factors that can contribute to EFL learners’ non-participation in a course.

A statistical method of descriptive interpretation of the SPSS 26 software was used to analyse the quantitative data. The qualitative data was analysed using the inductive content analysis method popularised by Bogdan and Biklen [24]. It consists of a thorough description, analysis, and interpretation of the data through data reduction and coding strategies. The inferences from the different analyses were then cross-referenced for interpretation.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that a coding system was developed to facilitate data analysis. First, this system allowed harmonising the initially known identification codes for EFL teaching subjects in each of the four universities the respondents originated. Although each of these universities has recently (about a decade ago) switched to the LMD system, there is still no standardisation of the classification codes of the teaching subjects taught in the different training offers. Thus, in the context of this research work, for the courses of the first year of the EFL bachelor’s degree program (first semester and second semester included), it was decided to adopt a new code, that of “**ENG100**”. The teaching

subjects of this year of training vary from one (01) to eighteen (18), depending on the university. Therefore, they have been identified under “ENG101” to “ENG118” codes. The same goes for the teaching subjects of the other years of training whose new codes of recognition go from “**ENG200**” for the second year of Bachelor’s degree, “**ENG300**” for the third year of Bachelor’s degree, and “**ENG400**” for the fourth year or Master’s degree in EFL. On the other hand, this coding system’s second set of rules was employed to analyse the qualitative data through Bogdan and Biklen’s [24] inductive content analysis method mentioned above.

### Findings of The Study

This section of the research work presents the data collected from the different respondents regarding the research questions and the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

### Presentation of Findings

#### *What Causes non-participation or silence in higher education EFL classrooms?*

##### *Analysis of the Quantitative Data Collected from the Respondents through the questionnaire*

The data used to identify the causes of non-participation of the EFL learners surveyed are those obtained through the answers provided to the questions of the seven (7) items in part III and the six (6) items in part IV of the 44-item questionnaire administered to these respondents. The respondents voluntarily rated twelve (12) EFL teaching subjects out of the eighteen (18) of the first-year Bachelor’s degree program (including the first and second semester). The identification codes of these teaching subjects, adopted in the present research work for harmonisation and according to the LMD system in force in the four universities (UZ, AMU, UAC, UP) of origin for these learners, range from ENG101 to ENG112. As for the second-year Bachelor’s degree EFL program, eleven (11) EFL teaching subjects out of sixteen (16) were rated according to the identification codes ranging from ENG201 to ENG211. In the third year, Bachelor’s degree EFL program, twelve (12) EFL teaching subjects out of sixteen (16) were rated according to the following identification codes: ENG301 to ENG310, ENG312, ENG315. In addition, five (05) EFL Master’s degree teaching subjects out of a total of nine (09) were rated according to the identification codes ranging from ENG401 to ENG405. The terminology of these forty EFL teaching subjects voluntarily rated by these respondents to answer the first research question is summarised in Table 2 below.

**Table 2:** Coding system of the EFL teaching subjects freely rated by the respondents

First to second-year Bachelor’s degree, EFL program teaching subjects rated			
	1 <sup>st</sup> year		2 <sup>nd</sup> year
Course code	Course Title	Course code	Course Title
ENG101	Introduction to Phonetics	ENG201	Phonetics and Oral Production
ENG102	Grammar and Writing	ENG202	Grammar and Writing
ENG103	Introduction to Translation Techniques	ENG203	Translation Theme/Version
ENG104	Introduction to Literature	ENG204	Political History (African, British, American)
ENG105	Literature (African, British, American)	ENG205	Literature (African, British, American novels): The novel
ENG106	Languages and English for Specific Purposes	ENG206	Applied Language and English for Specific Purposes
ENG107	Computer Science and Foreign Languages	ENG207	Scientific Research (Writing and Documentary Research Techniques)
ENG108	Fundamentals of Reading Skills	ENG208	Linguistics (Applied English Language)
ENG109	Introduction to Scientific Research	ENG209	Economic History (African, British, American)
ENG110	Linguistics and Applied Language	ENG210	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
ENG111	Civilisation (African, British, American)	ENG211	Civilisation (African, British, American)
ENG112	African and Modern Languages	ENG212	Phonology and Communication
Third-year Bachelor’s degree EFL program teaching subjects rated		Master’s degree EFL program teaching subjects rated	
	3 <sup>rd</sup> year		4 <sup>th</sup> year
Course code	Course Title	Course code	Course Title
ENG301	Phonetics and Phonology	ENG401	Phonetics and Phonology
ENG302	Syntax and Morphology	ENG402	Masterpieces of American and British Literature
ENG303	Translation Theme/Version	ENG403	Theory and Practice in Teaching Methodology
ENG304	Research Methodology	ENG404	Literary Theory and Criticism

ENG305	Statistics/Academic Research Methods	ENG405	Comparative Literature
ENG306	Reference Styles and Mixed Approaches		
ENG307	Introduction to SFL - Critical Discourse Analysis / Teaching Listening and Speaking		
ENG308	African Elections and African Constitutions / British Monarchy and British Elections / American Constitution and American Elections		
ENG309	Dramaturgy and Literary History (African, British, American)		
ENG310	Teaching and Learning Theories and Practicum		
ENG312	African, British, American Economics and Politics		
ENG315	Stylistics-Dialectology-Contrastive Analysis/Specialty English Teaching-Evaluation Techniques		

Students from UAC (Benin), UP (Benin), and UZ (Niger) mostly rated first, second, and third-year Bachelor's degree EFL program courses (ENG101 to ENG112, ENG201 to ENG212, and 301 to E315). Those from AMU (Niger) preferred to rate only third-year Bachelor's degree and Master's degree EFL program courses. The presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the data collected from the different respondents are as follows.

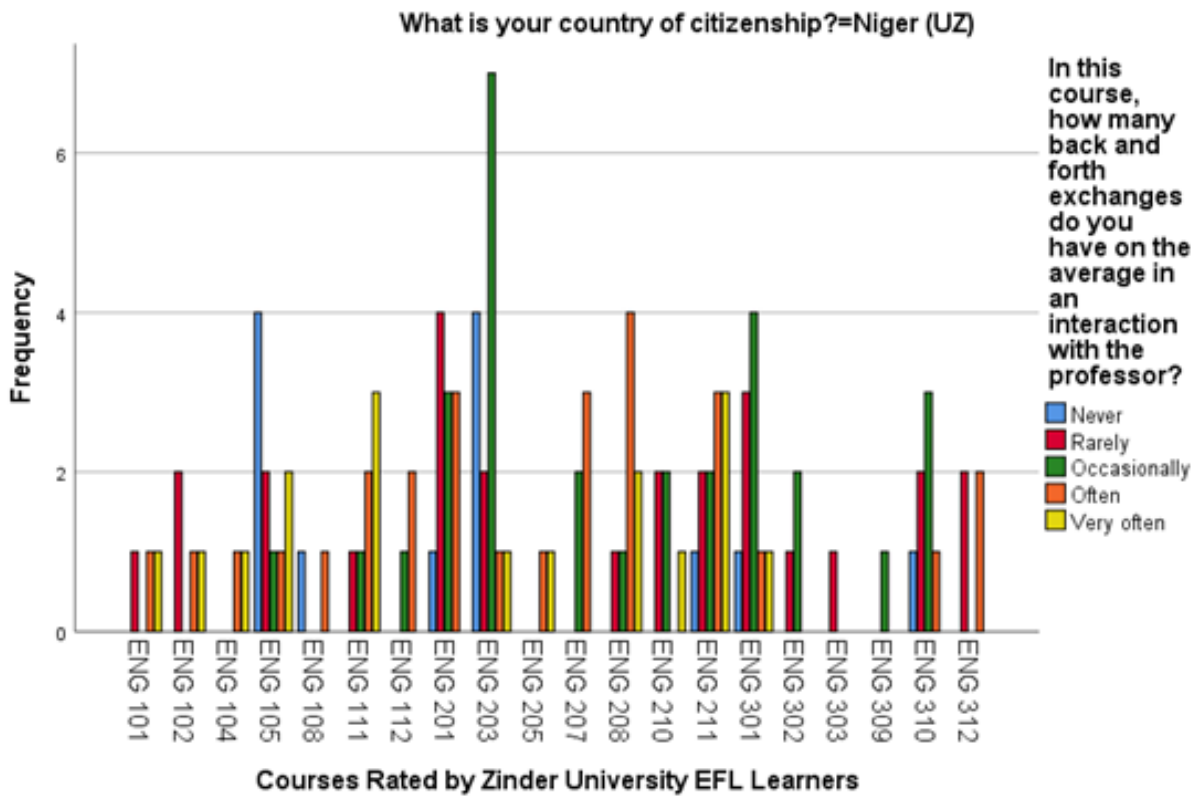
**Table 3:** Presentation analysis and interpretation of the first series of data

<b>PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FIRST SERIES OF DATA</b>	
<b>Data Analysis N°1</b>	From the 282 respondents, only one (01) did not indicate his level of study. Moreover, two (02) did not specify the course they were rating, and seven (07) have failed to mention their country of citizenship.
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These findings indicate that approximately 99.3% of the respondents made it possible to collect reliable data to identify the reasons for the non-participation of learners in the EFL class.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°2</b>	Twenty-six (26) of the forty (40) variables (EFL courses) rated by the respondents appeared to be more highly rated with a correlation coefficient greater than minus one and less than 1 ( $-1 \leq r \leq 1$ ). To perform a principal component analysis (a dimensionality reduction tool available in SPSS 26 software), variables with a commonality below a threshold such as 0.3 or 0.4 ( $0.3 \leq \delta \leq 0.4$ ) were deemed inappropriate and removed from the study. After exploring the relationships between variables (based on their correlations) and the similarities between individuals (based on their distances), the twenty-six (26) variables were reduced to eight (08). Therefore, the courses that were rated the highest were ENG101 (16.1%), ENG105 (4.6%), ENG108 (28.6%), ENG201 (3.9%), ENG203 (5.7%), ENG211 (3.9%), ENG301 (3.9%), ENG403 (5.7%).
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These findings suggest that these courses are the few that hold some interest for these learners or have less difficulty participating in the classroom activities. These courses [introduction to phonetics, literature, fundamentals of reading skills, phonetics and oral production, translation (theme/version), civilisation, phonetics, and phonology, theory and practice in teaching methodology] are the most mentioned by these learners. This attitude of theirs is simply for descriptive purposes. They only made use of noteworthy courses.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°3</b>	Indeed, they believed that <b>they never or rarely ask questions, make comments, and/or answer questions</b> during ENG 101 (92.7% of them), ENG105 (75.0% of them), ENG108 (97.4% of them), ENG203 (50.1% of them), ENG301 (45.5% of them), and ENG403 (50.1% of them). However, some believed they often and very often do it during ENG201 (54.6% of them) and ENG211 (63.7% of them).
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These results suggest that some learners tend to react more during phonetics and civilisations courses than other courses. This situation could be because phonetics courses are usually more challenging for learners to understand. Most of them have never taken a phonetics course before in their mother tongue or first language, so they are forced to ask enough questions to understand the linguistic principles and rules. More often than not, pronunciation and phonetic transcription of words in English seem like a daunting task in which they often get lost at first. As for civilisation courses, there is every reason to believe that learners admire them with an intrinsic motivation to learn more about</i>

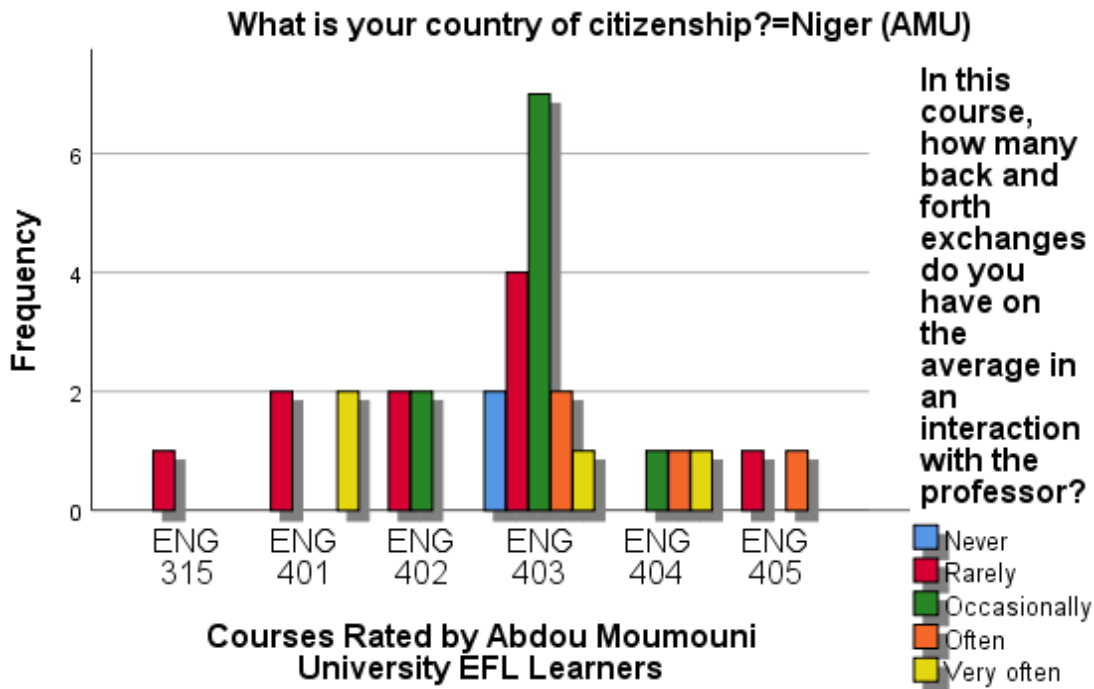
	<i>the culture, customs, and history of native speakers or peoples of various English-speaking nations.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°4</b>	They ( <b>93.2%</b> ) believed that they often and very often answer the question directed to them by their professor when dealing with ENG101 classes. Some other respondents pointed out that they occasionally do it during the ENG105 course ( <b>53.8% of them</b> ) and ENG301 courses ( <b>45.5% of them</b> ). Some ( <b>92.3% of them</b> ) admitted they often do it during ENG108 classes. Some again mentioned that they often and very often do it when dealing with the ENG201 course ( <b>54.6% of them</b> ) and when dealing with the ENG211 course ( <b>70.0% of them</b> ). However, <b>50.0%</b> of them noted that they never or rarely do it during ENG203 and when dealing with the ENG403 course.
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These results suggest that EFL learners tend to respond more to questions posed to them by their teacher than to decide on their own to participate in a class or ask questions. In other words, there is every reason to believe that these learners often respond to questions posed to them by their teacher out of obligation or fear of being punished. However, it should be noted that there are courses such as translation, theory, and practice in teaching methodology in which they prefer to remain silent. They behave in such a way for fear of giving wrong answers or simply because they lack confidence in themselves or background knowledge in those disciplines.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°5</b>	Many of the respondents noted that they often or very often get their professor's attention by raising their hand and waiting for the professor to choose them during ENG101 ( <b>93.2% of them</b> ), ENG105 ( <b>38.5% of them</b> ), ENG108 ( <b>98.7% of them</b> ), ENG201 ( <b>54.6% of them</b> ), ENG211 ( <b>90.9% of them</b> ) and ENG301 classes ( <b>50.0% of them</b> ). However, some admitted that they never or rarely do so when dealing with ENG203 ( <b>43.8% of them</b> ) and ENG403 classes ( <b>37.6% of them</b> ).
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>Based on these and previous results, it appears that courses such as translation (theme/version), theory, and practice in teaching methodology are those in which learners have the most difficulty participating either voluntarily or involuntarily in activities. These results suggest that the cause of EFL learners' non-participation in courses may be related to the nature of these courses or the excessive technicality that they often require.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°6</b>	Most indicated that they often or very often get their professor's attention, not by raising their hand, but rather by talking out when there is a pause in the conversation or lecture while participating in ENG101 ( <b>95.5% of them</b> ), ENG105 ( <b>46.2% of them</b> ), and ENG108 ( <b>97.4% of them</b> ) classes. Moreover, they ( <b>50% of them</b> ) admitted that they also behave in such a way while dealing with ENG211 classes. Furthermore, they mentioned they never or rarely do so during ENG201 ( <b>45.5% of them</b> ), ENG203 ( <b>50.1%</b> ), and ENG403 ( <b>56.3% of them</b> ) classes. However, some of them ( <b>50.0%</b> ) estimated that they occasionally do so during ENG301 classes.
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>In considering these results and those above, we realise that in addition to courses such as translation (theme/version), theory, and practice in teaching methodology for which participation seems more difficult for learners, phonetics and oral production is sometimes added to the list. It is no secret that pronunciation or articulation of words has often been a problem for EFL learners. Thus, these results suggest the technicality required in phonetics courses through the need to observe the rules of precision in pronouncing words and accuracy in transcribing them is among the likely causes of learners' non-participation in these courses.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°7</b>	Many of them mentioned that they often or very often get their professor's attention by breaking into the ongoing conversation or lecture to ask a question or to make a comment while participating in ENG101 ( <b>95.4% of them</b> ), ENG105 ( <b>46.2% of them</b> ), and ENG108 ( <b>88.0% of them</b> ) classes. They admitted that they also behave in such a way while dealing with ENG211 ( <b>40% of them</b> ) and ENG301 ( <b>50.0% of them</b> ) classes. Furthermore, they mentioned they never or rarely do so during ENG201 ( <b>54.6% of them</b> ), ENG203 ( <b>43.8% of them</b> ), ENG301 ( <b>50.0% of them</b> ), and ENG403 ( <b>68.0% of them</b> ) classes.
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>Based on these results and previous ones, we notice again that in parallel to courses such as theme/version, theory and practice in teaching methodology, phonetics, and oral production, the one known as phonetics and phonology is sometimes added to the list. However, opinions are divided regarding this last point among the respondents. Thus, these results suggest that the issue of technicality that phonetics courses generally require through the need to observe the rules of precision in pronouncing words and accuracy in their various transcriptions (phonetic and phonological) is among the probable causes of non-participation of learners in these courses.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°8</b>	Most of the respondents noted that they often or very often have multiple back-and-forth exchanges on the average in interaction with their professor when participating in ENG101 ( <b>97.8% of them</b> ), ENG105 ( <b>46.2% of them</b> ), and ENG108 ( <b>96.0% of them</b> ) classes. Moreover, they admitted that they ( <b>54.6% of them</b> ) behave in such a way while dealing with ENG211 classes. Furthermore, they mentioned they never or rarely do so during ENG105 ( <b>another 46.2% of them</b> ), ENG201 ( <b>45.5% of them</b> ), ENG203 ( <b>40.0% of them</b> ), ENG301 ( <b>40.0% of them</b> ), and ENG403 ( <b>37.5% of them</b> ) classes.

<b>Interpretation</b>	<p><i>These results are very significant. Compared to the previous ones, we can once again notice that the list of courses for which learners' participation in the activities that take place seems to be difficult is getting longer and longer. Thus, in addition to courses such as translation (theme/version), theory, and practice in teaching methodology, phonetics and oral production, phonetics and phonology, there is also sometimes literature (African, British, American). These findings indicate that one of the main reasons learners do not engage in EFL courses like literature is that they lack the technical knowledge required to participate easily in the activities that take place. Learners need, for example, to have a good command of literary theories to feel more confident to participate with great ease in the activities that take place in this course.</i></p>
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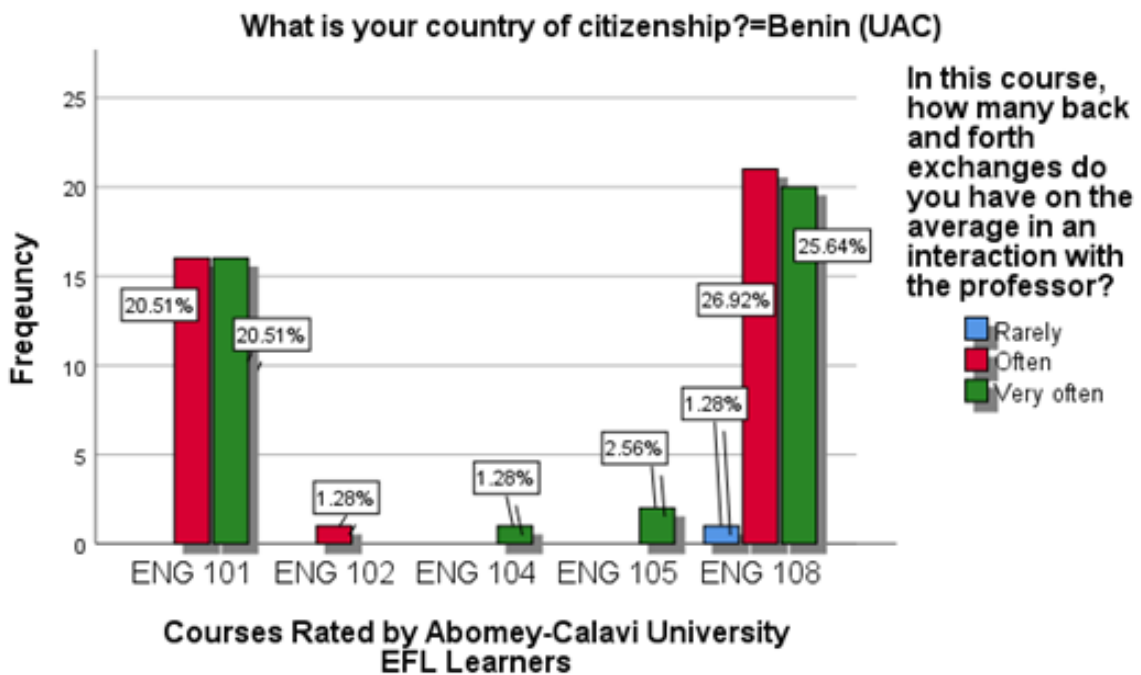
A synopsis illustration of the various data contained and analysed in Table 3 below is presented in the figures below.



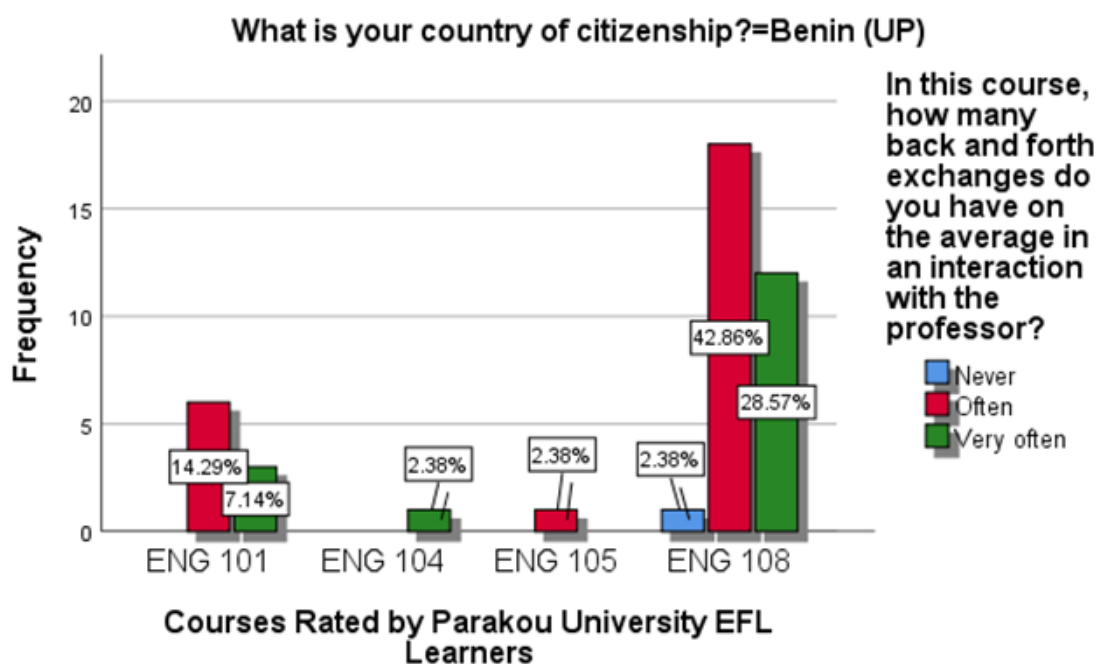
**Figure 1:** Illustration of the Responses provided by the EFL Learners from the University of Zinder, Niger to the frequency of their participation in EFL classes



**Figure 2:** Illustration of the Responses provided by the EFL Learners from the Abdou Moumouni University, Niamey, Niger, to the frequency of their participation in EFL classes



**Figure 3:** Illustration of the Responses provided by the EFL Learners from the Abomey-Calavi University, Benin to the frequency of their participation in EFL classes



**Figure 4:** Illustration of the Responses provided by the EFL Learners from the Parakou University, Benin to the frequency of their participation in EFL classes

ENG101, ENG105, and ENG108 were only rated by Benin Republic (UAC and UP) and Niger (UZ) informants. On the other hand, informants from Niger (UZ) only rated ENG201, ENG203, ENG211, and ENG301. In addition, respondents from Niger (AMU) only rated ENG403. These data prove that students from Benin (UAC, UP) were all in their third year Bachelor's degree program studies and have mostly rated the first year EFL courses. They also show that they all experienced many difficulties at the beginning of their university studies to participate in courses of this level of training. Similarly, these data display that students in Niger (UZ) are from the first, second, and third-year Bachelor's degree program studies. These statistics show that Abdou Moumouni University (AMU) students in Niger were exclusively from a Master's degree program.

**Table 4:** Presentation of the second set of data collected from the eight specifically rated EFL courses

ENG	Univ	ITEM33					ITEM34					ITEM35				
		VN	N	Ne	P	VP	Ne	R	O	Of	V Of	NeV	R	O	Of	V Of
101	UZ	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%
	UAC	12.5%	68.8%	0.0%	12.5%	6.3%	15.6%	31.3%	6.3%	37.5%	9.4%	9.4%	6.3%	9.4%	50.0%	25.0%
	UP	0.0%	55.6%	0.0%	33.3%	11.1%	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%	77.8%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	88.9%	11.1%
105	UZ	20.0%	50.0%	20.0%	10.0%	0.0%	30.0%	40.0%	0.0%	20.0%	10.0%	70.0%	0.0%	30.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	UAC	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	UP	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
108	UZ	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%
	UAC	19.5%	26.8%	14.6%	26.8%	12.2%	14.6%	39.0%	7.3%	29.3%	9.8%	9.8%	19.5%	9.8%	39.0%	22.0%
	UP	6.5%	25.8%	3.2%	58.1%	6.5%	3.2%	22.6%	9.7%	58.1%	6.5%	0.0%	9.7%	9.7%	58.1%	22.6%
201	UZ	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%	63.6%	27.3%	0.0%	0.0%	18.2%	27.3%	54.5%	0.0%	45.5%	18.2%	27.3%	9.1%
203	UZ	18.8%	50.0%	18.8%	12.5%	0.0%	18.8%	50.0%	18.8%	12.5%	0.0%	53.3%	26.7%	6.7%	13.3%	0.0%
211	UZ	0.0%	9.1%	9.1%	18.2%	63.6%	9.1%	0.0%	9.1%	27.3%	54.5%	0.0%	18.2%	9.1%	18.2%	54.5%
301	UZ	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	77.8%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%	90.0%	0.0%	30.0%	40.0%	10.0%	20.0%
403	AMU	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	62.5%	31.3%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	62.5%	12.5%	43.8%	12.5%	6.3%	25.0%	12.5%
ENG	Univ	ITEM36					ITEM37					ITEM38				
		NeV	R	O	Of	V Of	NeV	R	O	Of	V Of	NeV	R	O	Of	V Of
101	UZ	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%
	UAC	9.4%	18.8%	3.1%	53.1%	15.6%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	53.1%	40.6%	93.3%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	UP	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	88.9%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	88.9%	11.1%	87.5%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
105	UZ	40.0%	10.0%	40.0%	0.0%	10.0%	55.6%	11.1%	22.2%	11.1%	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	10.0%	10.0%	20.0%

	UAC	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	UP	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
108	UZ	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%
	UAC	14.6%	19.5%	4.9%	39.0%	22.0%	0.0%	14.3%	9.5%	45.2%	31.0%	90.5%	9.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	UP	0.0%	16.7%	16.7%	56.7%	10.0%	0.0%	9.7%	0.0%	64.5%	25.8%	93.8%	6.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
201	UZ	9.1%	9.1%	18.2%	36.4%	27.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	63.6%	36.4%	0.0%	9.1%	36.4%	27.3%	27.3%
203	UZ	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%	0.0%	43.8%	18.8%	12.5%	6.3%	18.8%	25.0%	31.3%	25.0%	6.3%	12.5%
211	UZ	0.0%	9.1%	9.1%	36.4%	45.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30.0%	70.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%	9.1%	81.8%
301	UZ	11.1%	22.2%	44.4%	0.0%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30.0%	30.0%	40.0%
403	AMU	14.3%	14.3%	21.4%	50.0%	0.0%	6.7%	13.3%	20.0%	20.0%	40.0%	0.0%	13.3%	20.0%	46.7%	20.0%
Codes	<p><b>Item 33:</b> How does the professor react to the questions or comments you make in this course? <b>Item 34:</b> In this course, does the professor smile, nod, and generally communicate interest and approval in what you have to say?</p> <p><b>Item 35:</b> How often does the professor call you by name in this course?</p> <p><b>Item 36:</b> In this course, does the professor probe for elaboration or further extension when you answer a question or make a comment? <b>Item 37:</b> The professor encourages and facilitates my participation in this course. <b>Item 38:</b> In an overt and/or subtle way, the professor shows confidence in me and/or the value I embody as a student. <b>VN:</b> Very Negatively; <b>N:</b> Negatively; <b>Ne:</b> Neutrally; <b>P:</b> Positively; <b>VP:</b> Very Positively; <b>NeV:</b> Never; <b>R:</b> Rarely; <b>O:</b> Occasionally; <b>Of:</b> Often; <b>V Of:</b> Very Often; <b>Univ:</b> Universities.</p>															

**Table 5:** Analysis and interpretation of the second series of data

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE SECOND SERIES OF DATA	
<b>Data Analysis N°9</b>	<p>Analysis of the answers (Cf. Table 4 above) provided by the informants the <b>item 33</b> question in Table 4</p> <p>ENG101 (UZ: <b>66.6 % positively</b>, UAC: <b>81.3% negatively</b>, UP: <b>55.6% negatively</b>); ENG105 (UZ: <b>70.0% negatively</b>, UAC: <b>50.0% positively</b> and <b>50.0% negatively</b>, UP: <b>100.0% positively</b>); ENG108 (UZ: <b>33.3% positively</b> and <b>33.3% negatively</b>, UAC: <b>46.3% negatively</b>, UP: <b>64.6% positively</b>); ENG201 (UZ: <b>90.9% positively</b>); ENG203 (UZ: <b>68.8 negatively</b>); ENG211(UZ: <b>81.8% positively</b>); ENG301 (UZ: <b>100.0% positively</b>); ENG403 (AMU: <b>93.8% positively</b>)</p>
<b>Interpretation</b>	<p><i>These findings indicate that most Nigerien professors seem to react more positively to comments made by their EFL learners in class than Beninese ones. The difference in teaching techniques may explain this situation. In Benin, EFL teachers, especially those who teach phonetics, seem to lack tact and patience with their learners, who often struggle to integrate the courses of this discipline that are new to them.</i></p>
<b>Data Analysis N°10</b>	<p>Analysis of the answers (Cf. Table 4 above) provided by the informants to the <b>item 34</b> question in Table 4</p> <p>ENG101 (UZ: <b>66.7 % very often</b>, UAC: <b>46.9% never</b> and <b>46.9% often</b>, UP: <b>88.9% often</b>); ENG105 (UZ: <b>70.0% rarely</b>, UAC: <b>100% rarely</b>, UP: <b>100.0% rarely</b>); ENG108 (UZ: <b>33.3% often</b> and <b>33.3% never</b>, UAC: <b>53.6% rarely</b>, UP: <b>64.6% often</b>); ENG201 (UZ: <b>81.8% often</b>); ENG203 (UZ: <b>81.8% very often</b>); ENG211(UZ: <b>81.8% very often</b>); ENG301 (UZ: <b>100.0% very often</b>); ENG403 (AMU: <b>75.0% often</b>)</p>
<b>Interpretation</b>	<p><i>These outcomes show that in Niger (UZ and AMU), most of the professors, contrary to those of Benin Republic (UAC, UP), tend to generally react positively toward their EFL students by expressing interest in whatever they have to say or by smiling at them. They behave in such a way to make them have more confidence in themselves or feel valued. Therefore, if some instructors tend to adopt this pedagogical approach more frequently than others during their teaching, there are reasons to believe that they do so to make their students feel free and relaxed to participate in their EFL classes. Thus, the secret of classroom participation would lay in the flexibility of the learning environment offered by the teacher to the EFL learner.</i></p>
<b>Data Analysis N°11</b>	<p>Analysis of the answers provided by the informants to the <b>item 35</b> question, presented in Table 4</p> <p>ENG101 (UZ: <b>66.6 % rarely</b>, UAC: <b>75.0% often</b>, UP: <b>100.0% often</b>); ENG105 (UZ: <b>70.0% never</b>, UAC: <b>100.0% rarely</b>, UP: <b>100.0% never</b>); ENG108 (UZ: <b>66.7% never</b>, UAC: <b>61.0% often</b>, UP: <b>80.7% often</b>); ENG201 (UZ: <b>45.5% rarely</b>); ENG203 (UZ: <b>80.0% very often</b>); ENG211(UZ: <b>72.7% very often</b>); ENG301 (UZ: <b>30.0% very often and 30% rarely</b>); ENG403 (AMU: <b>56.3% never</b>)</p>
<b>Interpretation</b>	<p><i>Based on these results, we can assume that Beninese teachers tend to call their students by their names as much as their Nigerien colleagues do, even if this is not always the case during literature, phonetics and research methodology courses. This pedagogical attitude would help to build learner confidence. There is reason to believe that the absence of this attitude would lead to silence among learners or to their reluctance to participate in the course.</i></p>

<b>Data Analysis N°12</b>	Analysis of the answers provided by the informants to the <b>item 36</b> question, presented in Table 4 ENG101 (UZ: <b>66.6 % often</b> , UAC: <b>68.7% often</b> , UP: <b>100% often</b> ); ENG105 (UZ: <b>50.0% never</b> , UAC: <b>100% rarely</b> , UP: <b>100.0% rarely</b> ); ENG108 (UZ: <b>33.3% never</b> and <b>33.3% often</b> , UAC: <b>61.0% often</b> , UP: <b>66.7% often</b> ); ENG201 (UZ: <b>63.7% often</b> ); ENG203 (UZ: <b>50.0% rarely</b> ); ENG211(UZ: <b>81.9% very often</b> ); ENG301 (UZ: <b>44.4% occasionally</b> ); ENG403 (AMU: <b>50.0% often</b> )
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These results indicate that professors in both Beninese and Nigerien universities (UAC, UP, UZ, and AMU) more often do <b>probe for elaboration or further extension when their EFL learners answer a question or make a comment</b>. However, many of them sometimes lack doing so, especially when dealing with courses such as literature. Indeed, the background knowledge of these learners in the teaching subjects taught to them is limited enough for them to have or come up with ideas to comment on. The lack of incentive from the instructor to get the learner to speak or get involved in the course activities could be considered as a potential cause of the non-participation of students in class.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°13</b>	Analysis of the answers provided by the informants to the <b>item 37</b> question, presented in Table 4 ENG101 (UZ: <b>66.6 % often</b> , UAC: <b>93.7% often</b> , UP: <b>100.0% often</b> ); ENG105 (UZ: <b>66.7% never</b> , UAC: <b>100% very often</b> , UP: <b>100.0% often</b> ); ENG108 (UZ: <b>33.3% occasionally</b> , UAC: <b>76.2% often</b> , UP: <b>90.3% often</b> ); ENG201 (UZ: <b>100.0% often</b> ); ENG203 (UZ: <b>62.6% rarely</b> ); ENG211(UZ: <b>100.0% very often</b> ); ENG301 (UZ: <b>100.0% often</b> ); ENG403 (AMU: <b>60.0% very often</b> )
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These results indicate that most respondents believe that <b>their EFL instructors encourage and facilitate their participation in classroom activities</b> quite often, with a few exceptions. Indeed, some informants from Niger (UZ) mentioned that is not always the case in literature and translation (theme/version) courses. This situation implies the need to understand how they feel or are not encouraged by their EFL instructors through more in-depth or detailed information from focus groups with these respondents.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°14</b>	Analysis of the answers provided by the informants to the <b>item 37</b> question, presented in Table 4 ENG101 (UZ: <b>66.6 % often</b> , UAC: <b>100.0% never</b> , UP: <b>100.0% never</b> ); ENG105 (UZ: <b>60.0% rarely</b> , UAC: <b>100% never</b> , UP: <b>100.0% rarely</b> ); ENG108 (UZ: <b>33.3% occasionally</b> , UAC: <b>100.0% never</b> , UP: <b>100.0% never</b> ); ENG201 (UZ: <b>54.6% often</b> ); ENG203 (UZ: <b>56.3% rarely</b> ); ENG211(UZ: <b>90.9% very often</b> ); ENG301 (UZ: <b>70.0% very often</b> ); ENG403 (AMU: <b>66.7% often</b> )
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These findings display that most Nigerien respondents (UZ, AMU), contrary to their peers from Benin Republic (UAC, UP), believe their <b>EFL instructors often show them, in an overt and/or subtle way, their confidence in them and/or the value they embody as students</b>. It would be more appropriate to gather information individually or in groups from these different informants through a case study or focus groups to appraise better the reasons for this difference or situation. Overall, while awaiting subsequent ones, these results suggest that one of the causes of EFL learners' non-participation in class is the lack of motivation or valuing of these learners by their instructors.</i>

### Inference One

<b>Inference from the cross-analysis of the results of the first and second sets of quantitative data</b>
<p><i>Based on the quantitative data, probable causes of non-participation or silence of learners in higher education EFL classes would be:</i></p> <p>The fear of public speaking. Most learners would rather speak under pressure than do it on their own</p> <p>The nature of EFL courses (e.g., phonetics, phonology, oral production, translation, literature, research methodology) or the excessive technicality that they often require</p> <p>The attitude (facial expression, expression of interest) of the EFL instructor toward questions or comments made by the learner</p> <p>The lack of encouragement, motivation, and empowerment of the learner by the instructor</p> <p>The instructor's lack of tact in avoiding putting the learner in a troubling, humiliating or embarrassing situation by making him/her show his/her limitations or weaknesses to his/her classmates</p> <p>The instructor's lack of subtlety in encouraging the learner to participate in class</p> <p>The professor's lack of confidence in his/her student.</p>

### **Analysis of the Qualitative Data Collected from the Respondents through Focus Groups and Case studies.**

#### **Focus Groups**

The focus groups design, presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the relevant data collected are presented in table 6 below.

**Table 6:** Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of the First Series of the Qualitative Data

<b>Design</b>	After defining the purpose of the focus groups, respondents were randomly selected from each of the four (04) universities (UZ, AMU, UAC, UZ) and from their initial training group to be put into new
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	groups of five (05) informants. This arrangement was made to limit their chances of knowing each other behind closed doors or being tablemates. Ten (10) focus groups were conducted at each university. With the help of a moderator, the different participants tried to come up with very descriptive answers to the seven (07) questions consisting of engagement (probe), exploration (follow-up), and exit questions that made the discussions held in a very relaxed and friendly atmosphere. No discussion exceeded 30 minutes. From the forty (40) discussion groups thus constituted, only two (02) of the relevant data from the informants of which they were formed merit our consideration.
<b>Data Analysis N°15</b>	<b>What often keeps you from participating in the various class courses in your training programs?</b> There were very few responses to this question. However, from the few answers provided to this question by informants, it appears the most likely cause is fear of being stigmatized or made a laughingstock by classmates or even instructors. <b>Allagbé</b> , one of the informants from Benin Republic (UAC), pointed out one of his misfortunes that made him decide to stop participating in class. He stated, <i>“In the past, more precisely when I was a freshman, I tried very hard to participate in every class. However, one day, after class, some of my classmates physically and morally assaulted me. They warned me not to dare to react in class again or risk my life. To them, I always behaved like a learned man and, in doing so, I made them look like losers. My tormentors went so far as to threaten to harm me with the help of occult forces. That day, I had a fear of my life”</i> .
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These results suggest that in addition to the conventional causes of non-participation in class (e.g., fear of public speaking, lack of background knowledge or vocabulary), there are other causes of harassment or intimidation among learners due to jealousy, pettiness, and slander.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°16</b>	<b>How do your instructors encourage and facilitate your participation in classroom activities?</b> To this question, many indicated that the instructor gets bored easily and quickly in this endeavour. At the beginning of the course, Oumar from Niger (UZ) stated that <i>“they use innovative and engaging strategies to get the learner interested in what is being done in class.”</i> Sometimes, highlighted Gado from Benin Republic (UP), <i>“they reward in many ways (in-kind and cash) those who succeed in answering their questions or who ask questions on their initiative.”</i> <b>Allagbé</b> from Benin (UAC) pinpointed that <i>“when learners are reluctant to speak up because of language barriers, anxiety, or being made fun of, they prefer not to push too hard. Discouraged by this attitude of the learners, they prefer focusing on their instruction by prioritising to finish with the different chapters of the curriculum. For them, the teacher is not obliged to explain everything to the student. The latter also has to do his own research to understand better the course”</i> .
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These findings suggest that one of the significant causes of non-participation is the lack of a flexible learning environment to sustain learner-teacher interaction. The key to overcoming this problem is the instructor her/himself. S/he is the only one who knows what to do to revitalise her/his learners and motivate them to the task.</i>

### Case Study

The case study design, presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the relevant data collected are presented in table 7 below.

**Table 7:** Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of the Second Series of the Qualitative Data

<b>Design</b>	An exploratory case study approach was used in this study to understand better respondents' views on the causes of their non-participation or silence in class. Therefore, data have been collected through ten (10) open-ended individual interview questions from eight informants recruited from each of the four universities (UZ, AMU, UAC, UP) serving as research sites in the context of this study. Two (02) students from each of these universities were selected based on specific criteria. They would have to be EFL students showing evidence of non-participation in class. They should come from the groups that participated in the focus groups. They should take the class participation test adapted from Bean and Peterson [25] to check whether they have low-class participation. Of the eight (08) respondents thus selected, only the relevant data provided by three of them deserve to be mentioned in this research work. They come from participants who are quite particular in that they are one blind, another stutterer, and the third who has a real self-esteem problem.
<b>Data Analysis N°17</b>	<b>Yetou</b> is a 25-year-old student from Benin (UAC) in his third year of the EFL Bachelor's degree. What makes him different from the other students is that he has a loose tongue. In other words, he stutters. His disability often causes him to withdraw from his classmates and all forms of classroom activity. When asked what prevents him from participating in-class activities, he states, <i>“I am often afraid of making a fool of myself in front of my friends. We, stutterers, have a hard time communicating. I know that not everything in the class is done verbally because, for example, the teacher may tell you to write on the board. However, I chose to remain very self-effacing. In addition, very few instructors encourage me to do this. Most of the time, they prefer to ignore me”</i> .

<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>This outcome suggests that one of the causes of non-participation in class is the physical disability (speech impediment), causing emotional and sociological problems for the learner.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°18</b>	<b>Fatou</b> is a 23-year-old and third-year EFL student at the University of Zinder (UZ) in Niger. Her biggest problem is the management of two-way communication. Although she has no speech impediment, she has always had difficulty expressing herself or saying what she wants or thinks, even among girlfriends. When asked what she thought might cause her difficulty participating in class, she remained silent for more than fifteen minutes. After insistence through words of encouragement to say at least one word about the question she was asked, she finally uttered four words “ <b><i>I do not know.</i></b> ”
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>Considering this result, we can suggest that non-participation in class is also due to an apparent unwillingness to do so, an emotional problem caused by previous power relationships experienced in particular since childhood or simply by being too full of oneself.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°18</b>	<b>Amèdé</b> is a student at the University of Abomey-Calavi in the Republic of Benin. He is 24 years old and one of the few second-year EFL students recruited to participate in the study. What makes him different from the other students in his department of study is that he suddenly became blind due to a genetic eye disease. He became blind ten (10) years ago and has always struggled to progress academically with his peers. However, his disability does not seem to make it easy for him to participate fully in his learning environment. When asked what prevents him from participating in-class activities, he states, “ <b><i>Many think that nothing good can come out of the mouth of a blind person. Moreover, most of my classmates are not often impressed with my achievements because, for them, I only benefit from the favours of the administrative and educational authorities given my disability. So why should I still bother?</i></b> ”
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>This finding further confirms the result above that the learner’s physical or other disability can be a source of non-participation in class.</i>

### Inference Two

<b>Inference from the cross-analysis of the results of the first and second sets of qualitative data</b>
<i>The two sets of qualitative data analysis revealed other possible causes for non-participation in class among informants. These are as follows:</i>
Harassment or intimidation among learners due to jealousy, pettiness, and slander
Lack of a flexible learning environment that can sustain learner-teacher interaction
Physical disability (speech impediment, blindness) causing emotional and sociological problems for the learner
Emotional problems caused by previous power relationships or the fact of being too full of oneself

#### ***What are the natural factors contributing to non-participation in EFL classrooms?***

*Analysis of the Quantitative Data Collected from the Respondents through the questionnaire*

The presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the quantitative data collected from the different respondents are as follows.

**Table 8:** Presentation analysis and interpretation of the third series of quantitative data

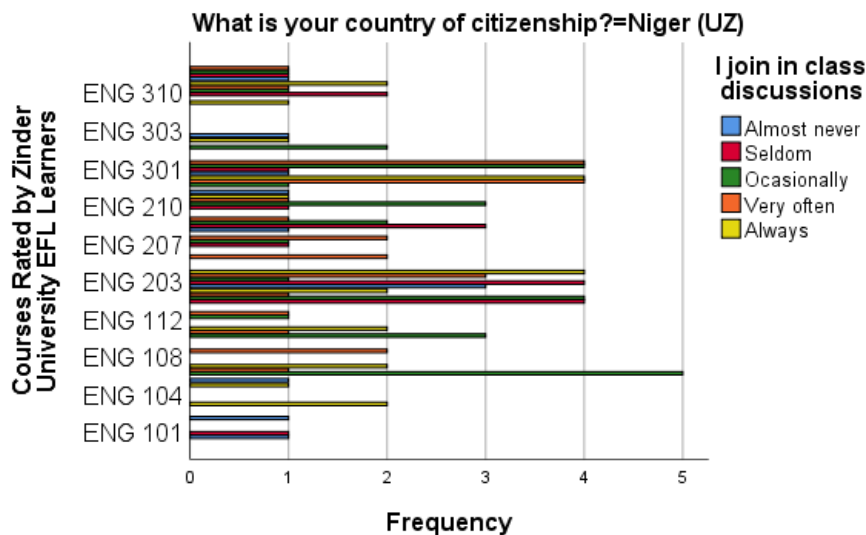
	<b>PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE THIRD SERIES OF DATA</b>
<b>Data Analysis N°19</b>	Based on the average score of the different answers provided by the respondents to the 25 items, we note that most EFL learners [mean score approximately ( $\mu \approx 4.00$ )] often understand their professors when being taught by them. They also mentioned ( $\mu \approx 4.00$ ) that they often have enough time to answer their professors’ questions, understand the homework assignments given to them, understand their professors when they answer other students’ questions or tell them what to study for a test.
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>This result implies that most students who enroll for EFL studies have some background knowledge of English vocabulary and grammatical rules, which the professor uses to communicate. Therefore, it is essential to understand why, despite their knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar, whether this is basic or not, they find it very difficult to participate in the course.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°20</b>	Most informants ( $\mu \approx 3.00$ ) noted that they occasionally understand other students in class, rarely join in class discussions and feel lonely when they cannot understand other students. In addition, they noted that they ( $\mu \approx 3.00$ ) occasionally feel frustrated when they cannot communicate with and be understood by other students or when their professors cannot understand them.
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>Suppose some learners feel frustrated when they cannot understand each other or what their teachers are talking about. In that case, this indicates that the natural factor causing their non-participation in class is not always voluntary. Thus, this situation could be caused by factors such as lack of language practice, fear of public speaking, lack of self-esteem, physical disabilities (speech impediments or other), lack of motivation or interest, or even poor teaching technique.</i>
<b>Data Analysis</b>	Unlike the above, some respondents ( $\mu \approx 4.00$ ) observed that they often understood other students

<b>N°21</b>	during group discussions when asking or answering questions from the professor. In addition, they observed that they ( $\mu \approx 4.00$ ) feel good and happy with the way they communicate in class, relaxed when talking to other students and their professor during group discussions in class.
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These results indicate that the issue of non-participation in class is not observed in all language learners. Some with a natural inclination for public speaking have had the chance to practice their target language better in the past remain more confident and willing to interact in class with their peers or instructors. Thus, the lack of a natural disposition to public speaking or the absence of a flexible environment that could facilitate the easy practice of the target language could also be considered as other factors causing non-participation in class.</i>

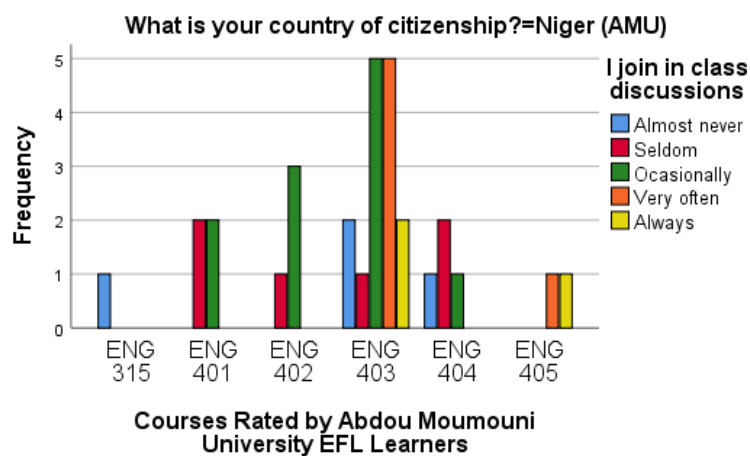
**Inference Three**

<b>Inference from the analysis of the results of the third series of quantitative data</b>	
<i>The third series of quantitative data analysis revealed the following natural factors causing non-participation in class among informants.</i>	
Factors such as the lack of language practice, fear of public speaking, lack of self-esteem, physical disabilities (speech impediments or other), lack of motivation or interest, or even poor teaching technique	
Factors such as the lack of a natural disposition to public speaking or the absence of a flexible environment that could facilitate the easy practice of the target language	

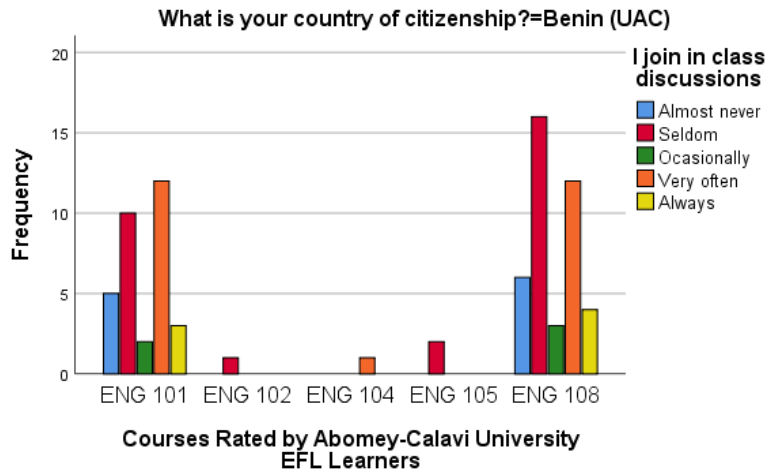
A summary illustration of the various data contained and analysed in Table 8 below is presented in the figures below.



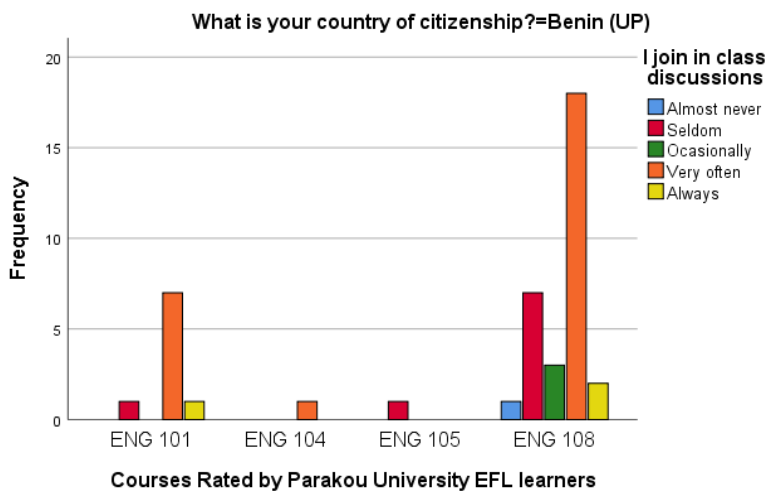
**Figure 5:** Illustration of the Responses provided by the EFL Learners from the University of Zinder, Niger, when investigating the natural factors contributing to their non-participation in EFL classes



**Figure 6:** Illustration of the Responses provided by the EFL Learners from the Abdou Moumouni University, Niamey, Niger, when investigating the natural factors contributing to their non-participation in EFL classes



**Figure 7:** Illustration of the Responses provided by the EFL Learners from the Abomey-Calavi University, Benin, when investigating the natural factors contributing to their non-participation in EFL classes



**Figure 8:** Illustration of the Responses provided by the EFL Learners from the Parakou University, Benin, when investigating the natural factors contributing to their non-participation in EFL classes

**Analysis of the Qualitative Data Collected from the Respondents through Focus Groups and Case studies**  
**Focus Groups**

The presentation, analysis, and interpretation of two (02) of the relevant data collected are presented in the table below.

**Table 9:** Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of the Third Series of the Qualitative Data

<p><b>Data Analysis</b> N°22</p>	<p><b>What are the natural factors causing non-participation in EFL classes?</b></p> <p>There were quite a few responses to this question, and all were consistent. Almost all mentioned that several factors could naturally cause non-participation in class. According to <b>Oumar</b>, one of the respondents from Niger (UZ), “[...], <i>the weather or climatic conditions can be one of the causes</i>”. <b>Gado</b>, from the University of Parakou (UP), Republic of Benin, noted, “<i>Another factor is the responsibility that parents should assume in the education of their children. Many of them are ignorant of the regulations or procedures to be followed to encourage their children to study or participate in English classes</i>”. <b>Allagbé</b>, from the University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC), added, “<i>The countries of West Africa still have this concern for economic development. Thus, not having an adequate public transportation system to facilitate the movement of learners from their homes to the university, the latter who do not always have the means or fees for transportation, prefer to miss classes or go late. Knowing that lateness is not tolerated anywhere, many do not dare to show up in front of the instructor to assume their fault (lateness), which is not really of their will. He also made the following statement, “Apart from that, the other cause is occult or the fear of being bewitched by</i></p>
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	<i>detractors</i> ". <b>Latif</b> , from Abdou Moumouni University (AMU) in Niamey, Niger, mentioned, " <b>Among these factors are also the learning environment, the classroom configuration, the fact that students are in faculty, the fear of public speaking and the phobia of the crowd</b> ". <b>Tayè</b> of the Republic of Benin (UAC) also indicated some factors that can be categorised as follows: <b>(1) the impairment of hearing or vision organs, (2) psychological disorders (anxiety, depression, etc.) and psychic disorders (mental imbalance, sexual behavior disorder, etc.), (3) psychosomatic disorders (ulcer, contagious diseases, etc.)</b> .
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These results indicate that the issue of non-participation in class is diverse and may even have cognitive, psychic, psychological, climatic, economic, sociological, demographic, somatic, parental, occult (African superstition), environmental, physiological, and drug/alcohol addiction causes.</i>
<b>Data Analysis N°23</b>	<b>How can the non-participation in-class problem be resolved or prevented?</b> To this question, many responded, "[...] it will not be a piece of cake or an easy task". <b>Allagbé</b> from Benin Republic (UAC) believed that " <b>[...] the best way to achieve this is to change the education policy by giving enough scholarships to students</b> ". <b>Oumar</b> from Niger (UZ) said, " <b>It is up to the teacher to coordinate everything. He is the one who has to do the major part of the work. He must have patience and be willing to help his students in whatever way he can within his resources and professional ethics</b> ". <b>Latif</b> from Niger (AMU) indicated, " <b>[...] the instructor must vary his activities and use those that are very attractive. He must develop or use motivational techniques for his/her learners daily. He must also create a very flexible and accessible learning environment for them (a learning environment free of rules, punishments, and surprises or stressful evaluation tests)</b> ".
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These results suggest that responsibilities at various levels (political and administrative decision-makers, educational actors, especially teachers and parents) need to be taken to effectively address non-participation in the classroom.</i>

### Case Study

The presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the relevant data collected are presented in the table below.

**Table 10:** Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of the Fourth Series of the Qualitative Data

<b>Data Analysis N°24</b>	<b>Yetou</b> [a 25-year-old third-year EFL Bachelor's degree student at the University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC) Republic of Benin], <b>Fatou</b> [a 23-year-old third-year EFL student at the University of Zinder (UZ) in Niger], and <b>Amèdé</b> [a 24-year-old second-year EFL student at the University of Abomey Calavi (UAC) in the Republic of Benin] all confirmed the previous findings. They affirmed that the main factors of non-participation in class stem from socio-economic, psychological, auditory, visual, and psychic impairment issues. On the other hand, they confirmed that the instructor has to create a dynamic and flexible learning atmosphere, free from criticism, judgment, punishment, and unannounced performance assessment to mitigate this problem.
<b>Interpretation</b>	<i>These results indicate that the issue of non-participation in class is a general one and does hinder the effectiveness of EFL teaching in West Africa. Therefore, appropriate solutions must be developed to help EFL learners become more engaged in learning their target language.</i>

### Inference Four

<b>Inference from the cross-analysis of the results of the third and fourth sets of qualitative data</b>	
<i>The cross-analysis of the third and fourth sets of qualitative data revealed new possible natural factors and confirmed those mentioned above as causing informants' classroom non-participation.</i>	
Impairment of hearing or vision organs, psychological disorders (anxiety, depression, etc.), psychic disorders (mental imbalance, sexual behaviour disorder, etc.), and psychosomatic disorders (ulcer, contagious diseases, etc.)	
Drug/alcohol addiction, overcrowded class sizes, the climate, the temperature,	
Economic, sociological, demographic, somatic, parental, and occult (African superstition) issues	

### DISCUSSION

According to the American Psychological Association dictionary, passivity is "a form of adaptation, or maladaptation, in which the individual adopts a submissive, dependent, and withdrawn pattern" [26]. This study set out to explore the world of EFL learners with the primary goal of finding an explanation for this phenomenon to answer whether lack of classroom participation in EFL classes is a sign of passivity. Therefore, it encouraged its respondents to speak freely and anonymously about possible reasons for non-participation or silence in EFL classes and the natural factors contributing to this phenomenon. To help the informants better present these natural causes and characteristics,

they were asked to rate their level of participation in each of their EFL courses. The results obtained from analysing and interpreting the various quantitative and qualitative data collected were very significant.

### **Reasons for non-participation or silence in higher education EFL classrooms**

The cross-analysis of the different quantitative and qualitative data obtained based on the respondents' beliefs on the potential reasons for non-participation in class generated two types of inferences (One and Two). The merging of these two types of deductions provides much information to answer this first research question. This information deal with the fear of public speaking, the nature of EFL courses, or the excessive technicality that they often require Fritschner [27], cited in Mustapha, Abd Rahman, and Yunus [28]. As discussed by Nelson [15], most of the time, learners are deathly afraid of public speaking, even in their mother tongue. Therefore, when speaking in a foreign language such as English, in which they have not yet had good command, their chances of participation are further diminished. They are often afraid of making a fool of themselves or fear negative evaluation by their peers [12]. Only those who are not shy will be able to say a few words or make an effort to participate in class discussions. Even then, it is not always easy.

The other reasons for non-participation in class, as discussed by the informants, have to do with the,

- EFL instructor's (facial expression, expression of interest) attitude toward questions or comments made by the learner [example of *Felicia* who was a participant in Norton's [11] study]
- EFL instructor's lack of encouragement, motivation, and empowerment of the learner
- EFL instructor's lack of tact in avoiding putting the learner in an alarming, humiliating or embarrassing situation by making him/her show his/her limitations or weaknesses to his/her classmates. As pointed out by Norton [11], such a situation may be regarded as a consequence of marginality
- EFL teacher's lack of subtlety in encouraging the learner to participate in class
- EFL instructor's lack of confidence in his/her student
- Issue of harassment or intimidation among learners due to jealousy, pettiness, and slander
- Lack of a flexible learning environment that can sustain learner-teacher interaction
- Physical disability (speech impediment, blindness) causing emotional and sociological problems for the learner
- Emotional problems caused by previous power relationships or the fact of being too full of oneself

These results are consistent with Hamouda's [29], who believes that most students want to learn spoken English properly because it is what they most commonly seek to achieve. They want to participate in spoken English courses. However, for different reasons such as lack of experience or practice, poor command of English, lack of confidence, anxiousness, cultural beliefs, self-image, and "fear of losing face, more than [two-thirds of them frequently stay quiet unless specifically asked questions]" [29]. From the above, it follows that the silent attitude that EFL students usually decide to adopt in inner circle classes "doesn't [necessarily imply] passivity or [acquiescence]" [14] because, in general, classroom participation implies verbal and non-verbal attitudes [30]. This situation can be easily explained by the fact that these learners do not always behave like that during all courses. According to the results obtained in this study, respondents rated courses as those in which they find it easier to participate [such as ENG101: *Introduction to Phonetics*, ENG108: *Fundamentals of Readings Skills*, and ENG211: *Civilisation (African, British, American)*]. Similarly, there were those in which they considered their participation less easy [such as ENG105: *Literature (African, British, American)*, ENG201: *Phonetics and Oral Production*, ENG203: *Translation (theme/version)*, ENG301: *Phonetics and Phonology*, ENG403: *Theory and Practice in Teaching Methodology*]. In addition, there are courses they consider as those in which their participation is almost non-existent (rest of their EFL courses mentioned in this study or not).

Thus, inattention does not necessarily imply inactivity or a lack of capacity to comprehend materials and instructors' directions. It can be described as a kind of resistance or retreat from the 'unfamiliar.' Anxiety, the learning environment, various types of disabilities, a lack of practice and experience, and a lack of English grammar or vocabulary background mostly cause it. That silence is not a passive phenomenon, as Zheng [14] and Morita [17] argued, but rather an active phenomenon caused by a variety of factors such as cultural knowledge, academic knowledge, and identity negotiation, or, more simply put, a variety of interrelated issues.

### **Natural factors contributing to non-participation in EFL classrooms**

The cross-analysis of the different quantitative and qualitative data gathered based on the perception of the informants on the natural factors for non-participation in class generated two types of inferences (Three and Four). The merging of these two types of inferences provides several pieces of information to answer this second research question. There are,

- Factors such as the lack of language practice, fear of public speaking, shyness, lack of self-esteem, physical disabilities (speech impediments or other), lack of motivation, interest, or even poor teaching technique [29]
- Factors such as the lack of a natural disposition to public speaking or the absence of a flexible environment that could facilitate the easy practice of the target language

- Factors such as the impairment of hearing or vision organs, psychological disorders (anxiety, depression, etc.), psychic disorders (mental imbalance, sexual behaviour disorder, etc.), and psychosomatic disorders (ulcer, contagious diseases, etc.)
- Factors such as drug/alcohol addiction, overcrowded class sizes, the climate, the temperature,
- Factors such as Economic, sociological, demographic, somatic, parental, and occult (African superstition) issues

These results corroborate those addressed by some literature such as the one of Susak [31], in which those factors are categorised as follows: student traits (anxiety, fear of public speaking, lack of interest), preparation for class (good preparation helps to develop more confidence among learners), course types, policies and classroom size (large classrooms foster anonymity and avoidance among students). Another category pointed out by Susak [31] deals with grading (when the learner is afraid of bad scores), the role of faculty (when faculty authorities such as a non-easy-going EFL instructor lack the tact to motivate learners to develop an interest in attending the course).

In sum, student involvement in the classroom is necessary for successful learning [32]. According to Mustapha and Abd Rahman [33], classroom participation can be classified into four types:

- Active participation (natural desire to participate with spontaneity, pleasure, and confidence),
- Selective participation (focus on the content of the course or activity rather than the language),
- Minimal participation (students with minimal oral responses and non-verbal responses),
- Passive participation (*positively passive*: learn more when they are silent, *negatively passive*: not concerned about class activities or not interested in the lesson, view participation as being present in class)

Therefore, non-participation in an EFL course cannot be considered systematically as passivity and, even if it should be passivity, it could probably be due to positive passive participation. Moreover, good participation in class can also be non-verbal. Consequently, the issue of non-participation in class must be approached with a great deal of perspective.

EFL learning is “a [participatory] process [involving both lecturers and students] in the classroom” [32]. It also helps instructors detect inactive students and develop strategies to encourage them to engage actively in class (p.68). Thus, one can suggest that “both lecturers and students must actively [participate] in the classroom to [generate] more [enjoyable] and meaningful learning experiences” [32].

## CONCLUSION

The overarching aim of this exploratory study is to compare non-participation in the classroom with that of passivity. In other words, this study attempted to explore the issue of passivity in EFL classes. Using quantitative and qualitative data collected from two hundred and eighty-two (282) randomly recruited intermediate EFL learners in two universities in Benin (UAC: 80, UP: 47) and Niger (UZ: 121, AMU: 34), this study attempted to examine the potential causes of learners’ non-participation in EFL classes and explore the natural factors leading to such a phenomenon. A statistical method of descriptive interpretation of the SPSS 26 software was used to analyse the quantitative data collected using a 44-item questionnaire. In addition, the qualitative data collected through focus groups and a case study were analysed using the inductive content analysis method popularised by Bogdan and Biklen [24]. Afterward, the inferences obtained from the different analyses were cross-referenced for interpretation.

The different results revealed that the causes of the lack of participation are diverse and include the nature of the learning environment (when non-flexible), the type of EFL courses, the policies of the courses, lack of preparation and motivation, the learners’ attitude and that of the language instructor. They also indicated that this issue might be due to natural cognitive, psychic, psychological, climatic, economic, sociological, demographic, somatic, parental, occult (African superstition), environmental, physiological, and drug/alcohol addiction factors.

Furthermore, it was noted that while there are EFL courses in which learners find it easier to participate (ENG101: *Introduction to Phonetics*, ENG108: *Fundamentals of Reading Skills*, ENG211: *Civilisation (African, British, American)*), there are many others in which they have low participation (ENG201: *Phonetics and Oral Production*, ENG301: *Phonetics and Phonology*, and ENG403: *Theory and Practice of Teaching Methodology*).

Therefore, the present study has shown that the lack of class participation cannot be systematically considered a sign of passivity because it is of two kinds (verbal and non-verbal). Thus, what is deemed to be passivity may not be passivity at all. The student may adopt an attitude of positive passive participation in class for one reason or another to integrate the course better. Avoiding negative passive participation in the learner is then crucial. The following suggestions and recommendations can be considered to address these issues.

- EFL instructors should provide their students with a dynamic, flexible, and casual learning environment free from criticism, judgment, punishment, and unannounced performance assessment.
- Responsibilities must be taken at various levels (political and administrative decision-makers, educational actors, especially teachers and parents).
- Measures should be developed (by governments and educational authorities) to reduce the number of learners in each classroom.
- EFL instructors should rethink how they deliver their course content and provide feedback to their learners.
- EFL Learners should be encouraged to observe the norms of mutual respect among themselves or face the risk of being prosecuted.
- EFL instructors should often try to find out why participation is low in their class.
- EFL instructors should allow learners to have easy access to them. They must make themselves available to them at all times. Simply put, EFL learners should have no difficulty getting in touch with their teachers.
- EFL instructors often have to praise their learners for their excellent performance, behaviour, qualities, or attitudes and even reward them if necessary.
- The EFL teacher has to be a friendly and easy-going person. He has to engage his/her students in fun projects and activities.
- The EFL teacher should value his/her learners and call them directly by their first name

The limitations to this research revolve around three main points: sampling, reliability or honesty in the answers given by the respondents, and the absence of a prospective study. Indeed, the sample was not diverse enough as it only included students from four (04) West African universities based in two countries (the Benin Republic and Niger). In addition, no instructors took part in the study. It would have been appropriate to explore the views of educational stakeholders on the issue under investigation. Thus, the fact that the sample was not sufficiently diverse makes it challenging to generalise the results reached by this study.

The second limitation to this study is that some of the respondents were not cooperative enough to detail the likely causes of their lack of participation in EFL courses. Their lack of interest in the study indicates that some of their answers or views are superficial.

The third limitation to this research is that it only focused on the natural causes and factors of non-participation in the classroom but did not examine the impact of this problem on the quality of EFL teaching in the future. Thus, in light of these various limitations, the present study offers the opportunity for further research that could incorporate the views of EFL teachers to gain a deeper understanding of how issues of passivity and non-participation in the classroom are addressed. These limitations also offer the possibility of future studies in other educational institutions and countries and further development of the study. Furthermore, future studies on the same issue should consider data collection through classroom observations to get a deeper insight into this phenomenon and to establish adequate solutions that can help to prevent it.

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