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Assessing EFL Students' Language Proficiency in Secondary School Classes in Benin

Ulrich Orlando Sèna Hindémè, Katchédé Etienne Iwikotan, and Arlette Joséline Viviane Hounhanou

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a study on assessing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' language proficiency in Benin secondary schools. Assessment and evaluation are indispensable components of English language teaching. Assessing students is crucial to both learners and teachers themselves in the sense that its basic function is to improve learning. However, much awareness has not been raised on the key roles of assessment in Benin secondary schools. This study aims at investigating how effective teachers' assessment of their learners' language abilities is in EFL classroom and to explore EFL learners' attitude towards assessment. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, 56 EFL teachers and 458 lower intermediate and upper EFL learners in the Atlantic region in Benin participated in this study. The field study revealed that many teachers wrongly mistake assessment for test and thus use both terms to mean the same thing. Teachers have not been able to see tests as a way of assessing their teaching methods and upgrading their students' language skills. Besides, most teachers stated that testing is the only tool they use in assessing their learners' language proficiency and it is mostly for the purpose of assigning grades at the end of the terms. Students declared that most tests consist of grammar questions. As this study draws attention to the close relationship between assessment and teaching, training workshops have been recommended to guide and train teachers on how to effectively assess their students so that teaching and learning in the EFL classroom meet expected objectives and goals.

Keywords: Assessment, test, evaluation, language proficiency, EFL learners.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Assessing one's learners is an everyday practice for a good teacher. Assessment and evaluation are important aspects of language teaching and learning because they enable teachers to measure the effectiveness of their teaching methods in accordance with specific learning objectives. In the process of implementing teaching procedures or classroom instructions, teachers are constantly assessing their learners' achievements, strengths, and weaknesses either intentionally or incidentally. In other words, there is a constant interaction between assessment and learning. Although assessment, testing and evaluation are terms often used interchangeably, there are differences among these three terms. Evaluation, which is judgemental, measures the overall performance of learners by finding out what students are able to do with the language. According to Gultom [1], assessment and test are subsets of evaluation, which means that evaluation is broader in function. While the term assessment refers to "a variety of ways of collecting information on a learner's language ability or achievement" [2], Brown [3] states that a test is a tool that measures students' ability or knowledge in a given area. In addition, Richards [4] gives a clear distinction between

assessment and testing, stating that while assessment refers to procedures a teacher uses to determine their students' learning and evaluate their teaching methods, a test is one of the forms of assessment that measures learners' learning at a specific point in time, which involves collecting information in numerical form.

With reference to what has been mentioned above, it is clear that assessment plays a significant role in the teaching and learning process. However, in Benin context, assessment has not received much attention on the part of teachers and learners. This article explores how well the language proficiency of learners is assessed by EFL teachers. It intends to find out the various forms of assessment used by teachers and to what extent teachers are aware of the importance of assessment in their students' learning process. Following a mixed methods approach, data were collected through classroom observation and a questionnaire was administered to EFL teachers and students.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

With the advent of communicative language teaching, teaching methods have shifted from teacher-centredness to

learner-centredness in most educational systems. Consequently, traditional forms of assessment have been dropped for other forms of assessment. Alternative forms of assessment are learner-centred and more efficient in the language classroom. Based on real life tasks, they focus on what students can integrate and produce with the language rather than on what students can recall and write down (Macias as cited in Ouahiani [5]). Also, in the era of communicative language testing, teachers “attempt to test real life language use, and use tasks where skills were integrated” [6].

Despite this significant change in language assessment, the language proficiency of EFL learners is not fully assessed by Beninese teachers. Quite a great number of Beninese EFL teachers do not understand the basic function of assessments which is to help students improve their learning. In most schools, especially public ones, tests are generally given to students for the sole purpose of grading. Moreover, teachers test what is easy to test instead of testing what is important to test. Teachers assess their learners only for the ultimate goal of nation-wide examinations. This has not helped in building students’ skills for real life communication purposes; it has only resulted in teachers’ focussing on what students have to do to go up to the next level rather than students’ grasping and using the target language itself. In addition, it has been observed that teachers do not see tests as a tool that helps them to assess and improve their teaching methods. This paper thus explores teachers and students’ awareness about the importance of assessment in learning and identifies ways that teachers can effectively assess their students in the EFL classroom.

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims at investigating the effectiveness of teachers’ assessment of EFL learners’ language proficiency. This research work has determined the effectiveness of EFL teachers’ assessment in their classes, explored learners’ attitude towards teachers’ assessment and found out how positive or negative the backwash effect is in EFL classes in Benin.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To reach the expected objectives, three questions have been framed for this study:

1. How effective is teachers’ assessment in EFL classes in Benin?
2. What are EFL learners’ attitudes towards assessment?
3. Is the backwash effect positive or negative in the EFL classrooms in Benin?

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review pinpoints previous researches on the differences among assessment, testing and evaluation. It highlights the various types of assessment as well as criteria for a good test.

A. What is Assessment?

Assessment is a general term that refers to various methods such as tests and observations that are used to gather information about students learning. According to Valva and Gokaj [7], “assessment is an ongoing process which lies in a much wider domain. Every time a student answers a question, gives a comment, or tries to pronounce a new word, phrase or concept, the teacher unconsciously makes an assessment of the student’s performance”. Assessment is the systematic collection, review and use of information regarding educational programs undertaken, for the purpose of improving learning and development (Palomba & Banta as cited in [8]). Assessment is an ongoing process that measures progress which is not limited to final or summative tests. It is not limited to the final achievement at the end of the term and can measure learners’ learning along diverse ways [9]. The main purpose of assessment is to find out how well students’ learning match the course objectives. It enhances teachers’ effectiveness. Unfortunately, assessment is often seen by most teachers as only quizzes or end-of-term tests. The National Research Council [10] stresses this point by stating that assessment often captures images of end-of-unit tests, examinations or quarterly report cards, these general aspects of assessment do not really capture the full extent of how assessment operates in the classroom. Classroom assessment is more about the everyday opportunities and interactions offered to teachers and students for gathering information about students’ achievements and using this information to improve both teaching and learning. In other words, assessment “is a natural part of classroom life, that is a word away from formal examinations- both in spirit and in purpose” [11].

B. Why do Teachers Assess?

The reasons for which teachers should conduct assessment according to Dr Alorvor and el Sadat [12], can be grouped into three. These are: helping the students, improving the teaching, and providing information for interested people.

- **Helping the students**
 - Diagnose learning difficulties.
 - Motivate learners.
 - Guide students and teachers.
 - Determine the progress and potentialities of students.
 - Allocate students to groups for special attention.
- **Improving Teaching**
 - Determine the extent to which objectives are achieved.
 - Compare progress of pupils under different teachers and different curricula.
- **Providing Information**
 - Screen individuals for promotion.
 - Certify students.
 - Inform parents about performance.
 - Inform institutions of high learning and employees of student’s attainment.

C. What should Teachers Test in a Language Class?

Teachers often give a ‘grade’ in terms of marks to their students in classrooms which shows their ability in English

(This may be expressed in various ways, e.g., ‘C+’ or $\frac{06}{10}$, or ‘tenth’ in the class’ or ‘above average’.) This situation does not really tell either the teacher or the students very much unless they know exactly what the grade is based on. It is not very useful to talk in general about ‘ability in English’: one student may be very good at listening but bad at writing; another students may speak fluently but make many grammar mistakes, and so on. So, in order to comment on a student’s progress, we need to test particular skills and abilities We can test **language** (to find out what students have learnt): Grammar, Vocabulary, Spelling, Pronunciation. We can also test **skills** (to find out what students can do): Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing.

Which of these are the most important for your students? Which are the easier to test? Obviously, there is not ‘correct’ answer: it depends on the type of class, what the students expect to do in the future, the examination system, etc. Get teachers to give their own ideas, and try to bring out these points:

1. Tests often focus on grammar and vocabulary; but if we expected students to develop the ability to understand and use English, it is important to test *skills* as well as knowledge of the language.
2. Most people would regard all the skills as useful in some way:
 - Listening, for understanding spoken English on radio and television;
 - Reading, for study purposes (books, journals, etc.), and for understanding written instructions in English;
 - Speaking, for social contact with foreigners;
 - Writing, probably only for study purposes.
3. In deciding what is important, we should not only consider students’ future needs; for example, most school students may never need to write English after they leave school, but it is still important because it helps in learning the language.
4. The receptive skills –listening and reading- are especially important because they will enable students to continue learning the language on their own [13].

D. Educational Uses of Language Tests

It is important for the teacher before he can even begin to plan a language test, to establish its purpose or function. According to Harris [14], Language tests have many uses in educational programs, and quite often the same test will be used for two or more related purposes. The following list of six categories summarizes the chief objectives of language testing, which, for simplicity can be grounded under three headings: aptitude, general proficiency, and achievement. These three general types of language tests may be defined in the following manner:

An aptitude test serves to indicate an individual’s facility for acquiring specific skills and learnings.

A general proficiency test indicates what an individual is capable of doing now (as the results, of his cumulative learning experiences), though it may also serve as a basis for predicting future attainment.

An achievement test indicates the extent to which an individual has mastered the specific skills or body of information acquired in a formal learning situation. As the

students are progressing through the various stages of learning English, they are usually provided with formal tests and examinations from time to time. But in addition to these formal tests, the teacher can also give regular informal tests to measure the student’s language performance.

E. Assessment and Testing

Test is often used as a byword for assessment. This has raised hot debates among researchers and teachers’ advisers. Assessment is often mistaken for test in the educational practice [15]. A test is a “procedure designed to elicit certain behaviour from which one can make inferences about certain characteristics of an individual” [16]. A test is just an instrument for measuring students’ capabilities or proficiencies. However, according to Durairajan [6], tests do not often really measure the capacities of students because our judgement is based on just a particular test. For that reason, the test sample needs to be representative so that the inference is valid. Unfortunately, test samples are not always representative of the actual capability of the learners. It follows that assessments do not often measure students’ capabilities. Likewise, Karter [17] held that “assessment and testing are two different things”. Understanding the differences between these two terms and their functions helps teachers to get the most out of both and enables them to see how well they (teachers) are doing and how well their students are doing [11]. Furthermore, researchers such as Dendrinis [18] pointed out clearly that tests are not synonyms of assessment. According to Dendrinis [18], assessment which is a more “encompassing” term than testing is primarily concerned with providing teachers or students with feedback information in order to provide the next learning step. Also, Sah [15] argues that during teaching periods, teachers knowingly or unknowingly keep observing students’ interest and performance. Students themselves judge their improvements with regards to those of their peers, make comments on teachers’ teaching methods, ask questions and so on. All these activities and measures which are geared towards improving further teaching and learning are known as assessments. Therefore, one can conclude that tests are just one form of the various forms of classroom assessment in EFL teaching.

F. Purpose and Types of Assessment?

Assessment is very important in teaching. In fact, there is no effective teaching and learning without assessment. That is why “the primary purpose of the assessment is to inform better teaching and more efficient learning” [19]. In the same vein, Alvarez [20] states that assessment is necessary to monitor learners’ outcomes in a qualitative way and to establish a summative evaluation not only on the learners but on decision-making for educational programs.

Generally, there are two main types of assessment in language teaching: formative and summative assessments.

- Formative Assessment: According to [21], “assessment is formative when teachers use it to check on the progress of their students, to see how far they have mastered what they should have learned, and then use this information to modify their future teaching plans” (p. 5). In other terms, “assessment refers to observations which allow one to determine the extent to which students know or are able to

perform a given task” [18]. It refers to all those activities (assigned by teachers and performed by students) that provide information used as feedback so that teaching may meet students’ needs. It includes teacher assessment, feedback and feed-forward [11].

- **Summative Assessment:** Summative assessment is often carried out at the end of a course for the purpose of providing aggregate information on program outcomes to educational authorities (Chan as cited in [9]). Dendrinou [18] held that summative assessment is usually carried out at the end of a unit or units of instruction, activity or plan, to assess acquired knowledge and skills at that particular point in time. It usually serves the purpose of giving a grade or making a judgment about the students’ achievements in the course.

In conclusion, formative assessment aims at providing information about students’ strong and weak areas for teachers to improve their teaching methods or instructional procedures. On the other hand, summative assessment aims at determining the extent to which students have been able to master the overall learning outcomes at the end of the instruction.

G. Steps in Designing a Good Language Test

According to Dr Alovor and el Sadat [12], there are six steps to go through when designing a good test.

Step 1: Defining the purpose of the test.

The basic question to answer is, ‘why am I testing?’ Classroom tests serve several purposes. The nature of the test item is influenced by the purpose.

Step 2: Determine the item format to use.

Test items could either be essay type or objective type. Objectives types include Multiple Choice, Short Answer; Matching and True or False.

Step 3: Prepare a test specification table (blueprint).

A specification table matches course content with instructional objectives. To prepare the table, specific topic and sub-topic covered during the instructional period are listed. The major course objectives are also specified, and the instructional objectives defined. The total number of test items is then distributed among the course content and instructional objectives (behaviours).

Step 4: Write the test items.

In writing the individual items, the specific principles guiding the construction of each type of test must be followed for the item format.

Step 4: Review items.

Each individual item must be examined carefully at least a week after writing the test items. Items which are ambiguous and those poorly constructed as well as items that do not match the objectives must be reworded or removed. Generally, bad ones must be eliminated. The items, after review should be compiled in the final for administration.

Step 4: Writing Directions.

Clear, concise, and specific direction should be written. Directions must include number of items to respond to, credit for orderly presentation of materials (where necessary), and mode of identification of respondent.

Students must be aware of the rules and regulations covering the conduct of the test. Penalties for malpractices

such as cheating should be clearly spelt out. The sitting arrangement must allow enough space so that candidates will not copy each other work.

H. Criteria for a Good Language Test

There are different ways and methods of assessing learners. However, the most common method used by teachers is the test. Sah [15] held that testing as part of assessment, measures learners’ achievement. Tests are tools that “best fulfil its function as part of the learning process if correction performance is immediately confirmed and errors are pointed out” [22]. Therefore, it is important to outline what a test should represent and the criteria it has to fulfil before being administered to learners. Validity, reliability, practicability are basic features of a good test.

- **Validity:** Validity of a test refers to the “extent to which it measures what it is supposed to measure and nothing else” [23]. Validity also refers to how test scores correspond to some criteria such as behaviour, personal accomplishment or characteristic that reflect the attribute that the test is designed to gauge [24]. The validity of a test includes face and content validity. Content validity determines whether the test is representative of the entire skills or areas the test seeks to measure while face validity considers how suitable the content of a test seems to be on the surface [25].
- **Reliability:** According to Madsen (as cited in [26]) a reliable test is “the one that produces essentially the same results consistently on different occasions when the conditions of the test remain the same.” In other words, a good test must produce the same or similar results when administered to different testees and scored by different markers or testers.
- **Practicability:** A good test has to be practical or usable. When constructing a test, practical considerations need to be taken into account. Rehman [27] stated that a practical test has to be easy to **administer**, easy to interpret, economical and the time allocated for its administration has to be appropriate. Also, according to Benmostefa [28], a test is impracticable when:
 - a) It requires considerable financial means and therefore a considerable budget
 - b) It is time-consuming in the sense that it takes hours to complete
 - c) It cannot be administered on a one-to-one basis to hundreds of people with only a limited number of examiners.
 - d) It takes a few minutes for a student to complete and several hours for the examiner to grade;
 - e) It is too complex and sophisticated to the extent of not being of practical use to the teacher.

In short, the literature review has highlighted the difference between assessment and testing, the various forms of assessment, the reasons why teachers should assess in a language class, the items teachers should test in a language class, the educational uses of language tests, different steps in designing a good language test and the qualities of a good test. The next section explains the methodology used for this study.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims at finding out teachers' understanding of assessment and the approaches they use in assessing their learners. Moreover, the research work identifies students' attitudes and perception towards assessment and evaluates the effect of washback in the language classroom. In this regard, a mixed methods design has been used in carrying out this study. Fifty-six (56) EFL teachers and four-hundred and fifty-eight (458) EFL students participated in this study. The participants were randomly selected from nine (9) private and public schools in the Atlantic region in Benin. Questionnaires and classroom observation are the research instruments used to gather information about the topic under study. The teachers' questionnaire consisted of ten (10) items comprising five (5) multiple choice items, two (2) Yes/No questions and 3 open-ended questions. A questionnaire was also administered to EFL students in lower intermediate and upper classes. This questionnaire had eight (8) items which includes one (1) Yes/No question, five (5) multiple choice items and two (2) open-ended questions. The students' questionnaire was originally written in French and learners' responses were translated into English by the researchers. Both the teachers and students' questionnaires have been designed to find out how assessment is perceived by both teachers and students and how learners' language proficiency is assessed by EFL teachers.

The second research instrument for data collection was classroom observation. In order to fully investigate teachers' assessment methods and to discover learners' attitude towards these methods, a classroom observation was conducted in six (6) EFL intermediate classes in both private and public schools.

The data gathered from the questionnaire have been carefully analysed and interpreted. Tables and figures were designed to display and analyse the numeric data. The findings from the classroom observation have also been stated.

VII. FINDINGS

The findings from the various questionnaires and the results of the classroom observation carried out in the various schools are displayed. It is important to highlight the fact that over the fifty-six (56) EFL teachers who participated in the study, only forty-nine (49) teachers filled the questionnaire and returned it. Therefore, the remaining participants were excluded from the analysis presented below.

A. Data related to Questionnaire Administered to EFL Teachers

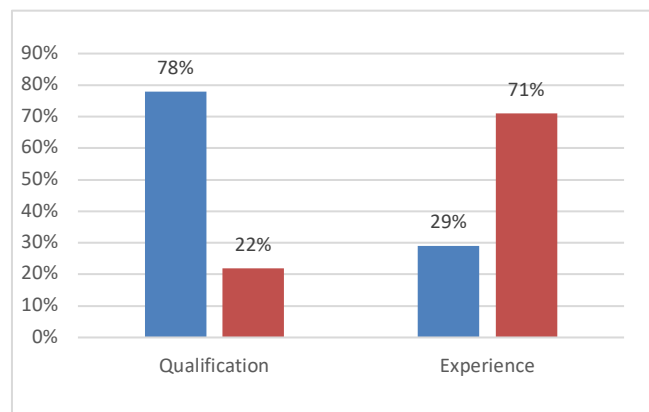


Fig. 1. Teachers' Qualification and Experience.

According to Fig. 1, 78% of the EFL teachers have academic qualifications while only 22% of them have professional qualifications. This indicates that most of the teachers do not have the required training for the teaching profession. This could be a challenge for an effective teaching and proper assessment in secondary schools. This figure also discloses the teaching experiences of the respondents. Only 29% of them have more than five years of teaching experience in the English language and the majority (71%) have been teaching English for less than five years.

In response to the next question on assessment frequency and methods, all the forty-nine (49) teachers' answers stated clearly that they assessed their learners. Here is the assessment frequency in the chart below.

TABLE 1: TEACHERS' METHODS OF ASSESSING EFL LEARNERS

Means	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Tests	28	57.14
Oral presentations	3	6.12
Individual assignments	6	12.24
Group work	12	24.48
Total	49	99.99

The results on the table above shows that 57.14% of teachers mostly assess their learners through tests. 6.12% revealed they prefer oral presentations or projects. Some of the teachers claimed they prefer assessing their learners through individual assignments whereas 24.48% of the teachers declared that they assess their students through group work activities. This table shows that tests are the common forms of assessment EFL teachers use in their classroom.

TABLE 2: REASONS WHY TEACHERS ASSESS THEIR LEARNERS

Reasons	Frequency	Percentages (%)
To give grades	21	42.85
To improve learners' performance	16	32.65
To evaluate teaching methods	12	24.48
Total	49	99.98

Table 2 shows that 42.85% of the respondents assess their learners in order to assign them grades. However, 32.65% stated they conduct assessment to provide their students with relevant feedback regarding their learning and finally, 24.48% held that they assessed their learners in order to

check their teaching methods.

TABLE 3: AREAS OFTEN ASSESSED BY EFL TEACHERS

Areas	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Grammar	17	34.69
Writing	5	10.20
Speaking	6	12.24
Reading	11	22.24
Vocabulary	10	20.40
Total	49	99.77

The results on Table 2 show the aspects of language proficiency that are mostly used by EFL teachers in assessing learners. In fact, the majority of the respondents (34.69%) focus on grammar. 10.20% assess writing skills and unfortunately, only 12.24% of the 49 teachers assess speaking. Also, 22.24% of the EFL teachers focus on reading skills and 20.40% give priority to vocabulary acquisition. Grammar is tested by most of the respondents simply because grammar test papers are easier to grade than test papers on other skills and macro skills.

B. Data Related to Questionnaire Administered to EFL Students

Apart from the data collected from EFL teachers, the researchers also tried to mainstream students' opinions about assessment. With regard to the frequency of assessments, their opinions are presented in Fig. 2 below.

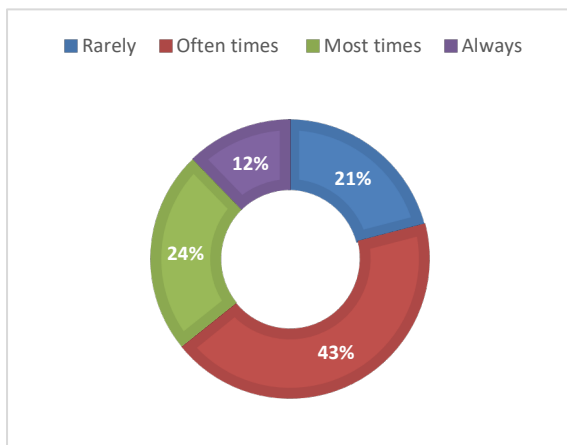


Fig. 2. Students' Opinion on the Frequency of Assessment.

From Fig. 2, 21% of the participants stated they are rarely assessed by their teachers whereas most of the students (43%) acknowledged that they are often assessed. However, 24% of the learners claimed their teachers assessed them most of the time while only 12% of the students revealed they are constantly assessed by their teachers.

TABLE 4: EFFECTS OF TESTS ON EFL STUDENTS

Effects	Frequency	Percentages (%)
It motivates me to learn my lessons	226	49.34
It gets me so nervous that I can't concentrate	221	48.25
None of these	11	2.40
Total	458	99.99

Since tests are commonly used by teachers as means of assessment, learners in lower intermediate and upper EFL

classes were asked the effects tests generally have on them. A large number (49.34%) of the students stated that they feel motivated to learn their lessons when they have tests while almost the same percentage (48.25%) of them said they get nervous when they have a test, which makes them unable to concentrate and read. Yet, 2.40% of the learners stated that tests do not have any effect on them. From Table 4, one can notice that there are two nearly equal groups of students. Those who view test in a positive light and those who think that tests make them so nervous that they are unable to concentrate. For this last group, the nervousness certainly has a negative impact on their grades.

TABLE 5: MOST FREQUENT TYPE OF QUESTIONS

Questions	Frequency	%
Grammar	189	41.26
Vocabulary	108	23.58
Reading comprehension	86	18.77
Writing	75	16.37
Total	458	99.98

On the issue of most frequently asked questions, 41.26 percent of the respondents indicated that grammar questions are more frequent while 23.58 % mentioned vocabulary as the most common type of exercise they are submitted to during assessments. Still, 18.77% stated exercises on reading comprehension as the most frequent while 16.37% of the students declared their teacher lay stress on writing when testing them.

TABLE 6: ASSESSMENT PREFERENCE OF EFL STUDENTS

Responses	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Teacher's Assessment	371	81.00
Self-Assessment	64	13.97
Peer Assessment	23	5.02
Total	-	99.99

Table 6 shows learners' preference regarding who is to assess their learning performances. A large number of students (81%) preferred being assessed by their teachers. This could be due to the general belief that only teachers are the ones in charge of students' learning. Nevertheless, 13.97% of the students stated they preferred self-assessment while only 5.02% held that they preferred peer assessment. These results suggest that teachers are still viewed by their learners as the central authorities when it comes to assessment.

C. Data Related to Classroom Observation

The classroom observations conducted revealed that teachers do not often prepare students psychologically for tests. In most classrooms observed, as soon as teachers entered, they asked the learners to take a piece of paper without any introduction to announce the assessment. After this announcement, students were stressed out because it was at that time that some would start begging their classmates to give them a piece of paper or even a pen for the test. Some students could not even succeed in finding a piece of paper before the teacher finished writing the quiz on the board.

In some cases, the quiz was administered as a punishment for a student's misbehaviour in the classroom. On one occasion, the teacher entered the classroom and just because

the students did not rise to greet him, he admonished them for failing to greet him and afterwards, he asked them to take a piece of paper. Most of the students were sweating and looked very concerned. Their concern might be due to the fact that, under the influence of anger, the teacher would give them questions very difficult to answer. The quiz lasted fifteen minutes and he kept intimidating the students, shouting the number of minutes remaining and threatening to expel any student that might cheat from the classroom.

Out of the 10 classrooms observed, four teachers administered a quiz. It is also important to mention that three out of the four quizzes were on grammar, which confirms the data from the questionnaire on the frequency of grammar testing in EFL classes.

VIII. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This section discusses the findings of the field investigation. It provides answers to the research questions stated at the beginning of this paper.

A. Effectiveness of Teachers' Assessment in EFL Classrooms in Benin

One of the aims of this work is to discover the extent to which learners' language proficiency is assessed by EFL teachers. In light of the findings of the study, teachers' understanding of assessment is not quite broad. This is because the majority of the teachers do not have the required professional qualifications. All the teachers who participated in the study stated that they assessed their students on a regular basis. However, their construction of assessment is limited to summative assessment (mainly tests) intended to assign grades to the learners. A few mentioned oral presentations, assignments or group work as means of assessing their students. This means that tests are viewed as the major if not only the one type of assessment by EFL teachers. Moreover, 21 out of 49 teachers who answered the questionnaire disclosed that they assessed their learners in order to assign grades to be taken into account for the computation of means or averages in their subjects at the end of the semester. Nevertheless, a reasonable amount of them stated that assessment is carried out to improve student learning and a few of them claimed they assessed their learners to evaluate how effective their teaching methods are. This implies that the respondents do take into account formative assessment in their instructional practices. In addition, despite new approaches to testing, most teachers still adopt the traditional grammar and writing tests. Most of the respondents revealed that they focus on grammar assignments while others mentioned vocabulary, writing, and reading comprehension. None of the teachers mentioned listening and speaking which are very important because the ultimate goal of teaching EFL is to enable learners to communicate orally in the language. Teachers teach and assess what students need to pass their exams and not what they need to speak the language. Moreover, findings from a study by Ouahiani [5] suggested that assessment cannot be effective "unless the teacher takes time to assess students gradually following a set of steps and appropriately designed procedures." The idea here is that teacher need to follow specific procedures to administer assessment. That is

the reason why the behaviours observed during the classroom observations are not to be promoted or encouraged.

B. Learners' Attitudes towards Assessment and Backwash Effect

The study has revealed that EFL learners' perceptions about assessment are not accurate. Most of the intermediate students stated that their teachers often assessed them through tests which is a confirmation of what the teachers stated. 48.25% of the learners view testing as the only way their teachers could assess their learning. Besides, learners also revealed that grammatical structures are the most tested items. On the other hand, the study has shown that tests have some effects on learners. Although, a significant percentage (49.34%) of the learners stated that tests motivate them to learn their lessons more, a higher percentage (48.25%) revealed that they get so nervous during tests that they find it difficult to concentrate. As stated earlier, the nervousness is partly due to teachers' behaviours during the administration of the tests and also to the significant influence of tests on the learners' promotion from one form to the other. The fear of getting a poor mark and ultimately failing at the end of the school year may also account for the nervousness experienced by learners during tests. It can also be inferred that the washback of the tests is negative. This means that if tests are viewed by teachers and students as the main means of assessing learners' proficiency, then there is a need to be cautious because these learners might be proficient but due to the negative effect that tests have on them, they will perform poorly on those tests. Besides, most students stated they preferred teacher's assessment to self or peer assessment. Lack of appropriate feedback has been highlighted by the learners' feedback plays a critical role after assessments because it provides guidance to students. Beyond the grades assigned in summative assessments such as quizzes and tests, it is important for teachers to draw students' attention to their strengths and weaknesses. By providing feedback, teachers give their learners the opportunity to make adjustments in their learning styles and become better learners.

IX. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objectives of this study were to determine the effectiveness of EFL teachers' assessment in their classes, to explore learners' attitude towards teachers' assessment, and to find out how positive or negative the backwash effect is in EFL classes in Benin. In order to collect relevant data, a questionnaire was administered to learners and another one to EFL teachers. Classroom observations were also conducted.

The results of the study revealed that tests are the most common forms of assessment. Teachers often assess their learners in order to assign marks and most tests are grammar-based. Teachers have been encouraged to view assessment in a positive light, which is to ensure that teaching and learning are in line with expected goals. The findings also raised issues related to the training of teachers in the fields of language testing. It was found that almost all of teachers are not well prepared to face the challenges

related to language proficiency assessment because some of them did not have the opportunity to learn to do so. The study found that English language teachers still have very limited knowledge about the educational value and the use of assessment in English language classes.

On the basis of the findings, it is recommended that teachers should be sensitized on the importance of language testing and evaluation in the teaching and learning processes mainly at secondary school level. Teachers' awareness should also be raised on the need to assess their learners on a regular basis in order to make the necessary adjustments in their instructional procedures. Finally, teachers should be encouraged to vary the forms of assessment administered to their learners in order to cater for different learning styles in their classrooms.

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