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Editorial

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Secrétaire de rédaction

Judicaël A. AFFO

Adressez toute correspondance à :

gbaguidikoffijulien@gmail.com

judicaelaffo@gmail.com

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**EXPLORING LESSON PLANNING PRACTICES BY
EFL TEACHERS IN BENINESE SECONDARY
SCHOOLS**

IWIKOTAN Katchédé Etienne
Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Bénin

EXPLORING LESSON PLANNING PRACTICES BY EFL TEACHERS IN BENINESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

IWIKOTAN Katchédé Etienne
Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Bénin
ekiwikotan@gmail.com

Abstract

Lesson planning plays a pivotal role in instructional delivery in that it elucidates all the activities the teacher is supposed to carry out in the classroom. The primary objective of this paper is to explore lesson planning practices by EFL teachers in Benin. More specifically, this paper examines lesson plans by secondary school EFL teachers and identifies major challenges EFL teachers are confronted with in their lesson planning. A questionnaire was administered and a focus group discussion was organized in order to collect data for the study. Lesson plans were also collected for content analysis. The findings indicate that even though most lesson plans contain a heading, an introduction and instructional procedures, most of them lack components such as lesson plan evaluation after teaching and anticipated problems. Most of the objectives did not comply with the Bloom's taxonomy. The challenges include lack of training, lack of documentation and shortfalls in the teacher's guide. The respondents also mentioned the fact that it is difficult for them to tailor the language used in their lesson plans to their learners' level. Therefore, it is suggested

to make documents available to teachers to facilitate lesson planning, to train those who have not yet received any training and to retrain those who are qualified teachers.

Key words: Lesson planning, EFL, practices, challenges, secondary education

Résumé

La préparation des fiches de cours joue un rôle de premier plan dans l'enseignement dans la mesure où elle définit les activités que l'enseignant est supposé exécuter dans sa classe. L'objectif général de la présente étude est d'explorer les pratiques de préparation de fiche de cours par les professeurs d'anglais langue étrangère. Plus précisément, l'étude vise à examiner les pratiques de préparation des fiches par les professeurs d'anglais et à identifier les défis auxquels les professeurs sont confrontés en matière de préparation de fiches de cours. Un questionnaire a été administré aux enseignants et un focus groupe a été également organisé. Des fiches ont également été collectionnées en vue de l'analyse de leurs contenus. Les résultats montrent que même si la plupart des fiches contiennent une rubrique sur les informations générales, une introduction et les démarches pédagogiques, ces fiches ne prévoient pas une partie pour leur évaluation après les cours ni les problèmes potentiels qui peuvent survenir. Bon nombre des objectifs ne sont pas conformes à la taxonomie de Bloom. Au nombre des défis, on peut citer le manque de formation et de documentation et les insuffisances contenues dans les guides de l'enseignant. Les participants ont également fait cas des diffi-

cultés à adapter le langage utilisé dans leurs fiches au niveau de leurs apprenants. Il est donc suggéré que des documents soient mis à la disposition des enseignants pour faciliter la préparation de leurs cours, former ceux qui n'ont pas reçu de formation et de procéder au recyclage de ceux qui sont déjà formés.

Mots clés: Préparation des fiches, ALE, pratiques, défis, enseignement secondaire

Introduction

Good teaching starts from home or the school library where teachers plan their lessons. However, teachers do not always plan their lessons for various reasons. Lack of time can also account for absence of lesson planning. Some EFL teachers fail to plan their lessons out of negligence. In some cases, the lessons are poorly planned because the teachers lack adequate skills in lesson planning. In a developing country like Benin where education does not always receive the required attention, lack of documentation and limited internet connectivity can account for poor lesson planning.

Furthermore, it is truism that teachers are not well paid for the job they do anywhere in the world. For that reason, full time teachers are obliged to teach many other classes in private as well as public schools in addition to the number of hours they are required to teach. Therefore, they have limited time to plan their lessons. Even in situations where teachers are not in a position to find additional hours to complement their income, they feel demotivated and put less effort in their

teaching practices and lesson planning is affected. In other cases, the teachers resort to other activities such as farming and trading and sometimes. Because of such effort-intensive activities, teachers are often too exhausted to sit down and plan their lessons as they are supposed to do it. Given all those obvious hurdles affecting EFL lesson planning, it is critical to conduct deep inquiry into lesson planning practices by EFL teachers in Benin to have better understanding of the problems and difficulties they experience in the field. This study sheds light on problems confronting teachers in the area of lesson planning. For that reason, it is likely to draw teachers' attention to lesson planning issues they might have been overlooking or remind them what they already know but fail to put into practice. If disseminated, the practical suggestions it has led to are likely to bring important contributions to the improvement of EFL lesson planning in Benin. The study has been designed with a view to addressing two specific questions:

- (1) How do secondary school EFL teachers plan their lessons?
- (2) What are the challenges confronting secondary school EFL teachers in planning their lessons?

In order to address these two questions in an adequate manner, it is key to explore the literature on lesson planning. This exploration enabled to look into the importance, the key components of a lesson plan, and other issues related to EFL lesson planning.

2- Theoretical Considerations about Lesson Planning

A lesson can be defined as "a unified set of procedures that cover a period of classroom time, usually ranging from 45 to 120 minutes" (Brown, 2007, p. 164). It follows that the lesson plan is a document that describes those procedures. For the purpose of examining the key issues surrounding lesson planning, it is helpful to look into major components of a lesson plan, why it is important to plan lessons and some approaches to lesson planning.

2.1 Importance of Lesson Planning

Even though some teachers believe they can teach without prior planning, stepping into the classroom with a properly planned lesson can provide the teacher with psychological and pedagogical security insofar as it prevents from getting confused in providing explanations on a notion not mastered by the teachers themselves (Harmer, 2001). A lesson plan also enable the teacher to select what to teach and what is relevant and useful (Maxom, 2009). Ur (2012) views a lesson plan as a map which indicates what should be taught, the order in which it should be taught and the duration of the teaching. Furthermore, a lesson plan serves as record keeping for learner assessment as well as it shows that teachers are well organized and care about their work in the same way as they expect their learners to take theirs seriously (Maxom, 2009; Harmer, 2001).

From a different angle, lesson planning forces EFL teachers to think in concrete and practical terms about what they are going to teach and to make sure that nothing has been

left out (Ur, 2012). Even though a lesson plan guides but does not dictate the teaching process, it serves as a written proof of the lesson in case of classroom observation (Jensen, 2001; Anderson, 2015). According to Harmer (2001),

There is one particular situation in which planning is especially important, and that is when a teacher is to be observed as part of an assessment or performance review. The observer needs to have a clear idea of what the teacher intends in order to judge the success of the lesson. (p. 122)

As it appears, when a teacher is observed for teaching quality assurance, having a lesson plan is a requirement. Moreover, since teachers never know when a supervisor is going to visit them, it is better for them to go to class with a well-planned lesson. It follows from this that a lesson plan is a tool of professional discipline. What, therefore, does a lesson plan need to contain to fulfill its role as teachers' compass?

2.2 Components of a Lesson Plan

There is no universally agreed lesson plan format. According to Brown (2007), a lesson plan includes a goal, objectives, materials and equipment, procedures, assessment, and extra-class work. For Jensen (2001), a lesson plan contains “the background of students, the objectives of the lesson, the skills to be taught, the activities, the materials and texts, the time constraints, and the connections to previous and future lessons” (p. 404). While the first six components look straightforward, it might not be easy to establish the connection between a lesson, a previous lesson and a future lesson.

In addition to the foregoing, Thaine (2010) believes that a lesson plan needs to have “main and subsidiary lesson aims, timetable fit, anticipated problems and solutions, materials and resources, language analysis, class profile, procedures, interaction, timing” (p. 32). Although many of the components of the three lesson planning frameworks look similar, their contents may differ from one context to the other. It is also necessary to mention that lesson plan needs to encompass anticipated difficulties and their solutions (Jensen, 2001; Thaine, 2010; Anderson, 2015), a reserve or emergency package (Ur, 2012), and a space for the evaluation of the lesson. Whatever format teachers choose to plan their lessons, there are some approaches that they need to follow for an adequate planning.

2.3 Approaches to Lesson Planning

Contrary to popular beliefs, EFL teachers do not just sit down to plan lessons. Lesson planning is influenced by many factors such as teachers’ personal philosophies of education and guidelines provided in the implemented curriculum. Depending on teachers’ philosophies, they may choose different approaches to plan their lessons.

The first approach is the formality vs informality approach. Formality and informality are related to the level of details contained in a lesson plan. Some teachers, especially experienced ones, believe that they do not need a written lesson plan inasmuch as they have the capacity to be thinking about their lessons and teaching them at the same time (Harmer, 2001). Thus, they adopt an informal approach to les-

son planning. Informality may also mean writing down only the major titles of the lesson without any details on the activities. On the other hand, a formal lesson plan is a written plan, which includes extended details on what teachers want to teach and how they intend to teach it (Jensen, 2001; Harmer, 2001).

Another set of approaches worth mentioning concerns teacher-centeredness and learner-centeredness. As stated earlier, lesson planning depends on teachers' philosophies and views of education in general and EFL teaching in particular. More and more, language teaching theorists and practitioners advocate for student-centeredness in a language classroom, which implies that learners should be at the heart of the construction of their own knowledge. However, Jensen (2001) cautioned that "the percentages of teacher-fronted time and student-centered activities should vary from lesson to lesson; there are days when we want our students to participate and be active, but there are other days when we want them a bit calmer in order to be receptive to new materials or practice a listening or reading strategy." (p. 407) In other words, Jensen encourages a combination of the teacher-centered and the learner-centered approaches. The only problem here is that for her, teachers are to use the learner-centered approach some days and the teacher-centered one on other days. I contend that both approaches need to be combined during every single lesson to cater for different learning styles.

Furthermore, Ur (2012) is almost of the same opinion as Jensen but he seems to give precedence to teacher-

centeredness over student-centeredness. For him, “effective language teaching therefore, should arguably be based on a substantial amount of teacher-initiated instruction; though student-centred activation has an essential place as well.” (Ur, 2012, p. 16) All in all, too much teacher-centeredness is as counterproductive in the same way as too much learner-centeredness is. Consequently, in planning their lessons, EFL teachers need to use both approaches (Brown, 2007) but the percentage of each approach will depend on what the teacher wants to achieve through the lesson.

Apart from the formality and informality approaches to lesson planning, other approaches include outcomes-based and affordance-based approaches (Anderson, 2015; Pang, 2015). It is worth indicating that one of the most important components of a lesson plan is ‘objectives’ because it is the one that show the direction of the lesson. However, Anderson (2015) is against the outcomes-based approach to lesson planning which requires the development of objectives using the Bloom’s taxonomy. In fact, the taxonomy includes verbs that describe what learners will be able to do at the end of a lesson. This approach is deemed unrealistic because it does not take into account the learning pace of each individual learner and it gives rise to an unrealistic rush against the hour as teachers try their best to reach the instructional objectives they set. Anderson rather promotes the affordance-based approach. Affordance describes how the learning environment provides learning opportunities for the learners and it follows that there is a close relationship between the learner and that learning

environment (Anderson, 2015; van Lier, 2004). In planning their lessons on the basis of this approach, teachers need to factor in the learning environment. The use of this approach also implies that teachers are to let the instructional environment guide the teaching in the classroom. For the proponents of the affordance-based approach, learning can occur during or after

3- Methods and Procedures

This study uses a purely qualitative approach in that there are many approaches to lesson planning and teachers choose the approach or combination of approaches that work best for them. A qualitative method was used because the sample size is small and it is useful to understand complex situations as suggested by Dörnyei (2007). A sample of five teachers from two urban secondary schools was selected. The snowball sampling strategy was used inasmuch as one EFL teacher was identified and he was requested to select the other four (Cohen et al, 2007; Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006). Two data collection instruments were used. The first one was the questionnaire, which was preferred because of its ease of administration (Cohen et al, 2007). It contains two close-ended items including one multiple-choice item and one yes-no item and seven open-ended questions (Cohen et al, 2007; Dörnyei, 2007). The questionnaire is intended to collect data on the importance of lesson planning, the key components of a lesson plan, difficulties in lesson planning, and ideas for improving lesson planning.

The second data collection instrument used was the fo-

cus group discussion in order to capture participants' additional perceptions and alternative viewpoints about some of the questionnaire items (Goldenkoff, 2004, p. 342). During the focus group discussion, issues such as the importance of lesson planning, the components of a lesson plan, and risks related to lack of lesson planning were further explored.

As far as data collection procedures are concerned, all five participants were gathered in a venue at the University of Abomey-Calavi. The questionnaire was circulated to them and for the reliability of the data to be collected, the objectives and the content of the questionnaire were explained to the participants. A particular emphasis was put on the confidentiality of the data. The researcher and his research assistant left the room after the explanation and participants were given ample time to complete the questionnaire. After all five participants had completed the questionnaire, the focus group discussion was organized and it lasted 77 minutes. During the discussion, the researcher and his assistant took extensive field notes in order to capture most of the conversation, given that the discussion was not recorded. Each of the participants was given the floor on each question and where necessary, probing questions were asked.

Apart from the two aforementioned instruments, sample lesson plans were also collected for content analysis. The objective here is to find out how the participants actually plan their lessons on a daily basis and the main components of their lesson plans.

With regard to the data analysis, it should be noted that I

anticipated the analysis by designing the data collection instruments bearing in mind the research questions (Caudle, 2004). On the whole, the data were analyzed using mainly the analytical framework suggested by Cohen et al (2007). In fact, they suggested setting objectives for the data analysis. In this case, the data analysis consisted in describing lesson planning processes and procedures and generating themes related to various aspect of lesson planning. The coding of the data enabled to identify issues across all participants (Caudle, 2004; Cohen et al 2007). The coding was done using index cards and an MS Word table. Verbatim quotations were provided to illustrate the identified themes in order to “keep the flavor of the original data” (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 462). Some of the data from the questionnaire were also triangulated with those from the focus group discussion. In other cases, the data from the focus group were used to complement information obtained from the questionnaire.

4- Findings of the Study

The data collected revolved around the lesson planning practices of the respondents and the difficulties they encounter in lesson planning.

4.1 Lesson Planning Practices

Good teaching starts with lesson planning as it gives the teacher the opportunity to reflect on what is to be taught and how to teach it. The importance of lesson planning cannot be overemphasized. For the respondents, the importance of les-

son planning is twofold. First, lesson planning is a classroom management tool that enables teachers to avoid problems. According to one respondent, the lesson plan serves as a compass for the teacher in the classroom: “For an EFL teacher, lesson planning is a very important tool in order to conduct his/her class in a very good way. It has to be the teacher’s guide.” Another respondent made it clear that “It is important for EFL teachers to plan their lessons because it avoids problems when the teacher is performing his/her different activities. Moreover, teachers feel free when they plan their lessons.” Not only does the lesson plan enable teachers to avoid problems while teaching, but it also helps teachers to feel relaxed in their classrooms. The following respondents indicated that lack of lesson planning can give rise to discipline problems in a classroom: “When students notice that you hesitate, you take too long to decide what to do or say, then you are in trouble”; “It’s important because if teachers enter their classroom unprepared, they will face problems of discipline”. The underlying statement here is that students are keen observers of their teachers’ behaviors and they can detect whether the teacher has a clear agenda or not and react accordingly.

Another group of respondents is of the opinion that lesson plans facilitate effective teaching and time management. One of them stated that when teachers do not plan their lessons, they “make room for boredom, [and] teaching can’t be effective”. In the same vein, one respondent explained that lesson plans enable to avoid waste of time because when

teachers do not plan their lessons, they “might spend a lot of time looking for / thinking about what to do first, which words to use”. This last statement sheds light on various aspects of the importance of a lesson plan: “It is important for EFL teachers to plan their lessons because it helps the teacher to follow students, to know exactly what he/she is doing to respect the timing, to better organize the activities and provide more explanations to the students.” When teachers plan their lessons, they are more focused, manage their time better and provide better instruction and guidance to their learners.

From a different perspective, all the participants in the study are aware that when teachers fail to plan their lessons, they run a lot of risks in their classroom. Some of them view lesson planning as a classroom management tool that enables to avoid problems. For one of the participants, lesson planning is important “because if teachers enter their classroom unprepared, they will face problems of discipline”. In the same vein, another participant responded that “When students notice that you hesitate, you take too long to decide what to do or say, then you are in trouble.” For another respondent, it is important for EFL teachers to plan their lessons because it avoids problems... moreover, teachers feel free when they plan their lessons.” These three respondents make it clear that lack of lesson planning can bring about indiscipline in the classroom as it causes the teacher to lose control of the students. It is quite easy for students to detect teachers’ confusion when they go from one issue to the other without knowing which one to tackle.

Some of the respondents went further to explain that when teachers fail to plan their lessons, “it is in the class that [they] decide on what to teach.” In that case, teachers may come across words they do not know and find it difficult to explain such words to the students. As explained by one of the respondents, if you do not plan your lessons, you run the “risk of teaching wrong things and you will have problems with your colleagues.” The problems may arise during school-wide assessment often organized twice a semester in most secondary schools in Benin. Besides, the greatest risk teachers may run in case of failure to plan their lessons is the visit of a teacher advisor or an inspector. With the presence of a supervisor in the classroom, teachers who have not planned their lessons often find themselves in a great confusion. Some teachers even run away when they see an advisor or inspector in the school. One of the interviewees reported that in 2012, he finished his class at 10 am and saw a senior teacher out of the school because he saw an inspector in the school just because he saw an inspector in the school, without even knowing whether the inspector was going to visit him or not.

With this awareness of the importance of lesson planning and the potential risks related to lack of preparedness, the respondents indicated what a lesson plan needs to include even though there are some variations. Table 1 below shows the components of a lesson plan as indicated by the respondents during the focus group discussion.

Table 1: Components of a lesson plan as noted during the focus group discussion

| Teacher | Components |
|-----------|---|
| Teacher 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The heading (teachers' name, date, school, form, class size, lesson duration, materials, competencies, teaching objectives and learning objectives) • The introduction • The realization • The assessment <p>* These components depend on the lesson. For example, a reading comprehension lesson has pre-reading activity, while-reading activity and the post-reading one.</p> |
| Teacher 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date; class-size; The duration of the lesson; teacher's name; name of the school; learning situation; materials used; competences; strategies and the objectives • Implementation • Revision and brainstorming • Production • Practice • Assessment |
| Teacher 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The heading • The phases- teacher's instructions- students reaction - strategies • The introduction • The presentation • The practice • The production |
| Teacher 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The heading • The teaching process • The learning process • Classroom organization <p>NB: the content depends on the skill the teacher intends to implement.</p> |
| Teacher 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The specific objective • Materials • The strategies and timing • The competences • Teacher instruction • Students' role • Expected answer |

Four out of the five respondents suggested that a lesson plan needs to include a heading. However, only two respondents provided information on the content of the heading. For Teacher 1, the heading includes teacher's name, date, school, form, class size, lesson duration, materials, competencies, teaching objectives and learning objectives and for Teacher 2, it includes Date, class-size, the duration of the lesson, teacher's name, name of the school, learning situation, materials used, competences, strategies and the objectives. The difference between the two is that Teacher 2 failed to mention the form but added the learning situation and strategies. However, the strategies are part of the instructional procedures and need not appear in the heading. Furthermore, only Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 mentioned assessment as the last component of a lesson plan. While assessment is not the last component of a lesson plan, it plays a critical role in the instructional procedures. None of the respondents cited homework as a component even though it provides the learners with the opportunity to continue working on a given lesson after class.

As far as the other components are concerned, Teacher 1 made it clear that the components depends on the lesson to be taught and for that reason, a reading comprehension lesson would include pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading components. The other components as stated by the respondents are as follows: the introduction, the realization, the assessment; implementation, revision and brainstorming, production, practice, assessment; the introduction, the presentation, the practice, the production; the teaching process, the

learning process, classroom organization; teacher instruction, students' role, expected answers. As it appears, two teachers indicated that a lesson plan needs to have an introduction without specifying what is to be included in the introduction. Two indicated that production and practice should also be included but the order in which these two components appear is not the same. The last two also have two common elements even though designated by different names: teacher instruction/teaching process and students' role/learning process diversified and not easily interpreted. This diversification may be due to the respondents' lack of theoretical knowledge of lesson planning. A review of samples of their lesson plans has enabled to determine how they plan their lessons on a daily basis and to have better insight into the actual components of the lesson plans.

The first lesson plans by the same teacher include a heading (date, form, class size, duration, school, teacher's name, learning situation, sequence, syllabus, strategies), phases, teachers' instructions, students' reactions, strategies, emergency package, and observation but no objective. While the heading remains the same, two lesson plans by the same Teacher 1 do not include phases but have teaching process, learning process, content (strategies and competences) and observation. Teacher 2's single lesson plan encompasses a heading (teacher's name, school year, name of the school, form, size, class organization, learning situation, sequence, general objectives, specific objectives), stages, teacher's instruction, strategies and timing, students, expected answers

emergency package, and teacher's remarks. Another teacher's lesson plans include a heading (date, form, class size, duration, learning situation, sequence, competences, objectives, strategies, materials, reference books), phases, teacher's instructions, learners' reactions and expected answers, strategies and timing, and emergency package. In the last lesson plan, there is a heading (teacher's name, date, school, form, size, lesson duration, materials, competences, and objectives), learning process, teaching process, classroom organization, and timing.

The first comment to make about the lesson plans is that all of them include a heading even though the level of details is not the same. In some cases, the titles are written but the corresponding information is not provided. What is also striking about all the lesson plans analyzed is that they include a section called emergency package but none of them contain any information about the package. It can also be noticed that the timing and the strategies appear as one component. Most of the lesson plans do not include the materials to be used to teach the lesson. The only lesson that provides details includes only chalk and board as materials. The grouping of the strategies and timing would also enable teachers to assign a timing to each of the strategies used to perform activities.

After the scrutiny of lesson plan components from theoretical and practical perspectives, the next question to be asked is to know when teachers plan their lessons.

With regard to the period when the teachers plan their lessons, one respondent reported that the lesson is planned a

few days before teaching it whereas four (4) respondents reported that they plan their lessons at least one week beforehand. Planning lessons ahead of time enables teachers to solve potential problems or to look for appropriate documentation in order to avoid the last minute hurdles which may lead to improper lesson plans.

In addition to planning their lessons ahead of time, teachers follow a number of procedures. The first step is to take into account the learners' level in order to tailor the language used to that level as it appears in the following statements: "I take into account my learners' level/ background"; "Take into account the level/strength of your learners"; "He must take into account the level of the class because class language is very important". The next important step is to look for the documents to be used to plan the lesson. All the respondents underscored the importance of documentation in lesson planning. For one respondent, "First, we get necessary documents, as much information as possible about the theme, structure or function we are going to teach. (read a lot)". This statement shows that the teacher gets the information to be used to plan lessons through reading available documents available on the content of the lesson. Another respondent suggested going to the Internet to search for information on the lesson to be planned.

Even though the importance of lesson planning is well known to EFL teachers, they are often confronted with some challenges in the process. The first category of challenge is lack of materials. The following statement summarizes very

well the type of materials that are not often available: “Lack of materials (realia) audio/tape-recorder/pictures to make the teaching and learning more true to life and effective”. This statement highlights not only the materials teachers often lack but also the paramount role those materials play in language teaching. They enable to make lessons less abstract and learning much easier for learners. Some respondents also stated that apart from the student book and teacher’s guide, no other documents are available to teachers to plan their lessons. Some complain that the syllabi are poorly written, which does not facilitate their work. In terms of complaint, some respondents reported that answers in the teacher’s guide are wrong in some cases. In those cases, teachers may waste time trying to find solutions to exercises in the student book. Sometimes, they may not even know the answers at all and this can be quite frustrating.

Even though many of the respondents recognize the need to have adequate documentation, some made clear that lesson planning is a risky exercise inasmuch as “even if we have all the materials, it is still difficult”. The difficulty here may arise from the learners’ level in English. The teacher still needs to tailor the language used in the materials to the students’ level as rightly pointed out in the following opinion: “how to break it down to the level of the students; how to make the English language accessible to learners.” This can be a major challenge in situations where the documents used to teach the language have not been properly designed as is often the case in developing countries.

Furthermore, some respondents explained that they are also confronted with time management issues. During the focus group discussion, one of the respondents reported that “lesson planning is not an easy task. It is time-consuming but it is a must”. This implies that teachers need to set enough time aside for planning their lessons. It is worthwhile to note that lesson planning is a professional obligation for teachers. The main issue is how to assign appropriate timing to the different activities to be carried out as part of the lesson. Difficulties related to the framing of lesson objectives were also raised. These difficulties transpire clearly in the following objectives taken from the lesson plans provided by the respondents after the focus group discussion. Sample objectives include: (1) “At the end of the lesson, learners should be able to give and accept advice”; (2) “At the end of this lesson (session), the students should be able to report what somebody has said in a real life situation using the simple past and the past perfect tenses”; (3) “At the end of this sequence, learners should be able to ask people and answer questions about what is wrong with them”; (4) “At the end of the lesson, learners should be able to talk about city life” (in comparison with village life); (5) “At the end of this lesson, my learners of 1^{eres} AB should be able to understand the concept of *vi-domègon*, have ideas about children’s life/duties, match pictures, ...”. Lesson objectives are stated in terms ABCD (A meaning Audience; B meaning Behavior; C meaning Condition, and D meaning Degree). Using the ABCD approach to analyze the five sample objectives, it is noted that all of con-

tain only audience and behavior. The condition and degree are missing. Furthermore, the verbs used in the objectives are not verbs that express observable behaviors.

The last category of challenges has to do with training. One respondent reported the following: “We are not well trained to do the job.” This is one of the true causes of all the problems reported by the respondents in their lesson planning process. That is the main reason why time management is an issue for most of the.

5- Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this research work have shown that all the respondents are aware of the importance of lesson planning in their teaching. They view a lesson plan as a guide that enables to avoid discipline problems, boredom, and hesitation in the conduct of the lesson. According to Woodward (2001), one of the effects of a lesson plan is that it builds confidence in the learners and develop in them a sense of purpose. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to bear in mind that lesson planning is critical in their activities. Not only are they aware of the importance of lesson planning but they also indicated that there are risks attached to lack of lesson planning such confusion in case of visit by an inspector or a teacher advisor and indiscipline in the classroom.

With regard to the components of a lesson plan, the data obtained during the focus group discussion were a bit different from the ones collected through the questionnaire. During the focus group discussion, almost all the respondents stated

that a lesson plan needs to include a heading but only two of them indicated what the heading has to include, general information such as school name, learners' level, date, class size, lesson duration, lesson objectives, to mention but a few. The other components mentioned by the respondents are diversified. One major issue is the divide between the components of a lesson plan mentioned during the focus group discussion and the actual components read in the sample lesson plans submitted by the respondents. This inconsistency shows lack of systematic training of the teachers in lesson planning. In addition, the components stated do not contain critical elements such as instructional procedures, prerequisites, follow-up activities, assessment or closure, self-assessment (Stella, 2012, Kizlik, 1997). Furthermore, the lesson plans analyzed do not even fall in the simplified format suggested by Anderson (2015) that includes "aims, objectives, learning outcomes, context, personal aims, procedure or activities, anticipated problems" (p. 230). Anticipated problems are very critical in the process of lesson planning but none of the lesson plans has that component.

As far as the period of lesson planning is concerned, many respondents stated that they plan their lesson days before they teach it in the classroom. Even though this practice enables them to think about potential problems and solve them in time, it is also recommended to plan a lesson immediately after the previous lesson when ideas about the previous lesson are still fresh in the teacher's mind (Stella, 2012, Das, 1992). It is also worthwhile to indicate that the respondents

follow some procedures such as looking for documentation and trying to tailor the language to be used in their lesson plans to their learners' level. The absence of libraries in most secondary schools in Benin makes it difficult for teachers to get additional documents for their lesson planning. Some respondents also suggested reading a lot in order to find the appropriate content for the lessons. Lack of internet connectivity equally poses a major challenge to getting appropriate documentation.

In terms of challenges confronting the respondents in their lesson planning, all of them identified lack of materials as the major one. The respondents explained that apart from the student book and teacher's guide, no other documents are available. As mentioned in the above paragraph, lack of internet connectivity and libraries in most of the secondary schools is at the root of this challenge. Besides, most of the respondents specified that even the teacher's guide contain some wrong answers to the suggested activities. For this reason, teachers who do not have a strong academic and professional background may teach wrong notions to their learners. Ross (2007) emphasized that the selection of materials is critical for lesson planning. Lack of therefore, this lack of documentation makes the selection of materials even more difficult. In addition, the lesson objectives as worded by the respondents do not express clearly the behaviors expected of students at the end of the lessons. This is consistent with findings by Boikhutso(2010) whose study revealed that teachers frame objectives that lack performance criteria.

6- Conclusion and Suggestions

This study was designed to find out how secondary school EFL teachers plan their lessons and the challenges confronting them in the process of lesson planning. Data were collected through the administration of a questionnaire and a focus group discussion. The exploration enabled to realize that all the respondents are aware of the importance of lesson planning and plan their lesson some days before teaching those lessons. The analysis of some lesson plans submitted by the respondents after the focus group discussion revealed that those lesson plans lack some critical components such as anticipated problems and evaluation of the plan after teaching. Most objectives did not include verbs that express the behavior expected from the learners at the end of the lesson. Verbs used do not fall within the Bloom's taxonomy.

The challenges confronting teachers include lack of documentation. In addition, the teacher's guides contain wrong answers to some of the activities, which compounds the process of lesson planning. The respondents also raised the issue of time management. It is difficult for most of them to assign the appropriate timing to the activities to be performed as part of the lesson.

Good teaching starts with adequate lesson planning. For that reason, secondary school administrators need to make an effort in order to provide appropriate documentation to EFL teachers even if they are not able to establish libraries in the school. Above all, EFL teachers should be trained. Even those who had been trained before starting the job should be retrain-

edin order to fine-tune their lesson planning practices and be in a position to provide guidance to younger teachers. The training should also be practical to give the teachers hands-on experiences.

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