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Evaluating the teaching of writing in advanced EFL classes in the context of competency-based approach: Case of some secondary schools of Benin republic

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Abstract

This article aims fundamentally at investigating into the teaching of writing in advanced classes in some secondary schools in Benin. It also attempts to survey advanced EFL learners' attitudes towards the writing skill. In Benin context, one can notice that students give up merely and simply the writing composition during national exams. This paper intends to find out the possible factors that hinder the teaching and the practice of writing respectively by EFL teachers and advanced EFL learners. Field survey is used and the target population was teachers and students in advanced EFL classes of some secondary schools in Benin. The findings reveal that most EFL teachers do not focus on the teaching of writing and EFL learners do not take that skill seriously and even fail to deal with it during examinations. The work concludes that a change in mind and attitude is necessary for both teachers and students to improve the teaching/learning of writing skill in the context of the Competency-Based Approach in Benin Republic.

Keywords: evaluating, teaching, writing, advanced EFL classes, competency-based approach

Introduction

Nowadays, the fast progress of science and technology has turned the world into 'a global village.' Consequently, there is a pressing and growing need for people of different nations to communicate with one another. In fact, this communication can be achieved more easily through a common language spoken worldwide. In that respect, English appears to be a language that has conquered the world in almost every field. It has become the language of science and technology as the best scientific materials (books, articles, etc.) are published in English. Moreover, the widespread use of English in business and international trade makes its learning a necessity for everyone for communication purposes. But, the English language can be useful if only the learners can easily talk.

Unfortunately, that is what is going on in Beninese secondary schools with advanced E.F.L learners. Indeed, the majority of the advanced or senior students complain that writing in English is a difficult skill. They struggle with many structural issues including selecting proper words, using correct grammar, generating ideas, and developing ideas about specific topics. Although the Competency-based Approach is implemented in the Benin educational system, many EFL teachers still emphasize the teaching of grammar on the detriment of writing. This paper generally aims fundamentally at investigating into the teaching of writing in advanced classes at secondary level by EFL teachers on the one hand, and at surveying advanced EFL learners' writing attitudes. Through this article, I intend to find out the possible factors that hinder the teaching and the practice of writing respectively by EFL teachers and advanced EFL learners. I also intend to raise EFL teachers' awareness on the importance of writing skills teaching in advanced EFL classes. The specific objectives are the following:

- To suggest a note of flexibility to teachers in order to reduce their rigidity with regard to their learners' writing.
- To prompt EFL teachers to create an atmosphere conducive for a better writing learning in their EFL classes.

- To prompt secondary schools' authorities to promote the teaching of writing skill when designing EFL syllabi and when training EFL teachers.
- To share with my colleagues some techniques and strategies for a successful teaching of writing in order to help learners improve their writing skills.

Indeed, advanced students' failure in English for various examinations in Benin secondary schools has become a matter of concern for people involved in Beninese educational system. This paper stands for a contribution to the improvement of the situation. It can raise people awareness on what may cause failure in students' work, which is an important step in the quest of solution to the problem. It also enables teachers to identify advanced students' problems' in the area of writing and to search for better strategies when teaching writing in their advanced E.F.L. classes. In addition, it also gives learners opportunities to improve their writing skills significantly.

Research Questions

This paper aims at finding answers to the following questions:

- How do EFL teachers and advanced EFL students deal with writing in Beninese secondary schools?
- Why do advanced EFL learners display negative attitudes towards writing?
- What could help to get learners interested in writing tasks successfully?

Scope of the study

The present article is within the framework of teaching writing in the C.B.A. context. It shows the importance of teaching writing skill in English teaching as a foreign language (E.F.L.) and not as a second language. I do not have the intent to develop the Competency-Based Approach specifically, the process of writing of the different types of topics. My paper is carried out within a sample of some secondary schools in Benin.

To sum up, as it is clearly demonstrated in this section a student's

ability to organize ideas and express them in his or her own words is a skill essential for real-life communication. Unfortunately, there are problems that hinder the development of students' writing skills. This paper is devoted to find solutions to these problems.

Literature review

The domain this paper refers to is not a new one. Indeed, the field covered by writing teaching has been explored by many researchers. But, the fact remains that in Beninese secondary classes, teachers and students still have to face challenges arising from this area. That is why my study is focused on investigating into problems encountered by advanced E.F.L learners and their teachers while teaching writing.

This problem cannot be dealt with without any consideration of the work performed by some key figures in the given area. Such studies can enable teachers to expand their knowledge of the field under consideration, and consequently can help to seek and find alternatives to the problem. This reports all the appropriate and relevant readings I did in regard to the topic. Since writing tasks include some processes and require the writer's reflection, the first part of this section will deal with the importance of writing.

Importance of Writing

Language is an important part of cultures; according to Olson (1977) ^[15] quoted by Jill A, Singleton-Jackson (2003:1) ^[10], *The faculty of language stands at the center of our conception of mankind; Speech makes us human and literacy makes us civilized.* But, language use will be difficult without writing; so, writing is one of the important language skills to be taught. Luo (1989) ^[12] in Özbek (1995:43) states: *some of you wish to be writers, some of you wish to be correspondents, some of you wish to be translators, while others wish to be teachers. No matter what career you choose, the ability to write is a necessity in life.* Writing is a language skill that is essential to academic success. It is essential to language as the thumb is to the hand. Therefore, Grabe and Kaplan (2009) ^[7] claim: *Language is produced in contexts of use, and writing does not escape this constraint.* John Norrish (1983:65) ^[11] even emphasizes: *When writing is the only way of storing information, it was vital that people should be educated to construct grammatically acceptable sentences and be able to spell correctly.*

Thus, writing is used in the early stage of learning to aid the consolidation of learning; by the way, the ability to write effectively is becoming increasingly important to global community and especially to students. Additionally, Bacha (2002: 2) ^[1] has mentioned: *writing in the academic community is paramount. A student can't be successful without a certain level of academic writing proficiency.*

Furthermore, learners' success in writing brings them benefits not only in their English learning but also in their life careers as Glazier (1994) ^[6] quoted in Tuan (2010: 81) ^[19] explains, *"Being able to write in English is essential in college and it probably will be asset in your career."* This assertion is an additional proof that writing skills should be taught to learners and considered as a tool of communication. We distinguish two kinds of writers: good and novice writers.

Writing Process

I have found that a lot of writers have pointed out the nature of writing in the education field. Hamp- Lyons and Kroll (1997) ^[8]

state:

"Writing is an act that takes place within a context, that accomplishes a particular purpose, and that is appropriately shaped for its intended audience." Weir (2005) ^[18] also highlights: *"writing involves social and cultural dimensions and is not limited to the individual space of the writer."* He goes on: *"there are three ways to approach writing: textual, cognitive and contextual."* These quotations show that the essay topics submitted to students must meet a context related to the achievements of learners. While writing, students should refer to this context and set clear objectives to succeed in writing tasks. But, in order to know what writers do when face with a writing task, it is important to focus on writing as a cognitive activity. Writing is an exceptionally complicated task that requires the simultaneous functioning of several activities. Biggs et al. (1999) ^[2] cited in Jill and Singleton-Jackson (2003: 11-12) ^[10] clarifies: *"Writers have to generate ideas, which need to be monitored, selected, and prioritized; to translate the ordered ideas into text, using lexicon, grammar and genre rules; and to review the text in order to clarify meaning and eliminate errors"*. From this point of view, John (1983:78) recommends: *"writing needs to be more explicit than speech because communication is dependent on the words alone and the reader may be far removed in space of time"*. This proves enough that the implementation of a flawless writing requires a complete observation of certain rules and a thorough work from the writer. Furthermore, the process or concept of writing as an activity involves several components. Flower and Hayes (1980) in Jill and Singleton-Jackson (2003:12) ^[10] have studied writing by looking at the involved mental operations. They demonstrate that composing processes involve three major aspects: planning, translating, and reviewing. Preferably, it is worthwhile to find the difference between the components of writing. Flower and Hayes (1980) go on and explain: *The planning stage: establishing a purpose or goal setting, generation of ideas, and organization of ideas, at which time ideas, or content are logically arranged to make them comprehensible. Translating can be regarded as the transformation or concretization of ideas into their written form. Another process reflecting metacognition is reviewing which enables the writers to re-see what they have composed and "compare" them to their internal representation of intended text.*

In short, it is noteworthy that the main idea from both statements is the steps which should be followed while writing. The various drafting processes are successive and have a logic connection. They can even be compared to a string from the brainstorming stage to the perfection of the text. The use of the detailed rules for the implementation of these steps involved in writing process depends on the individual ability of students in writing skills. McCutchen et al. (1994:264) looking at the interactive nature of the writing process and the limitations of working memory, conclude: *"writing and all its component processes must be organized within the limits of working memory"*.

To some extent, we can infer from this statement that writing being an activity that requires thorough mental work, should be tailored to learners' age and level.

Besides, the observation of these processes is hardly performed because of their constraint on working memory. Torrance, et al. (1999) quoted in Jill and Singleton-Jackson (2003: 14) ^[10] explain: *"A traditional view of writing expertise suggests that the combined burden of generating content and finding*

appropriate words (planning, translating, and revising) in which to express it overwhelms our cognitive process.”

This quotation sheds more light on the complexity of writing. The implementation of these processes demands enough mental effort and affects the cognitive process. In fact, process that requires extensive self - regulation and attentional control. Writers must change ideas into text using appropriate cognitive mechanism to produce a coherent text.

After having dealt with the way writing is performed, it is essential to know what regulates the ability to perform writing. Some studies have established a relationship between writing process and the cognitive process. King (1995:16)^[11] clarifies: *“The cognitive skills operate with information and data, which are isolated, then encoded, integrated, organized, transformed, stored and retrieved. Metacognitive skills (...) are used in monitoring, controlling mental processes and the various states of knowledge.”*

This assertion shows clearly that cognitive and metacognitive skills are linked as the latter works on the former. Other studies have focused on the aspect of social context involved in writing process. Cumming (2001:2)^[4] investigates a number of pieces of research in the last two decades and concludes that learning to write involves first ‘*features of the texts that people produce*’; second ‘*composing processes that people use while they write*’ and third, ‘*the socio cultural contexts in which people write*’. According to Tribble’s (1996: 43)^[18] framework, writers require a range of knowledge when undertaking a writing task. This consists of:

- Content knowledge- the concept of the subject area;
- Context knowledge (sociolinguistic competence) related texts, reader’s expectations and cultural preferences;
- Language system knowledge (grammatical competence) – such as lexis and syntax which are necessary for completion of the task;
- Writing process knowledge (strategic competence) – knowing the appropriate way of preparing and carrying out a specific writing task;
- Genre knowledge (discourse competence) – a knowledge of genre and the rhetorical patterns that create them.

Both statements are alike in that they all share my view on the issues of proper context and linguistic competence that are prerequisites to a successful writing.

A good writing includes a series of progressive steps and globally, learners find it difficult to master these steps.

Problems Related to Writing

Writing is considered as a painful and anxiety-producing task by learners as well as EFL teachers. Sharples, (1993)^[16] as cited in Erkan (2005:166)^[5], demonstrates: *“The complexity of writing as a task tends to heighten anxiety levels in students who are taking courses. This anxiety can often demotivate students or lead to discouragement, and thus may result in negative attitudes towards writing”*. In similar words, Yavuz and Genç (1998)^[22] cited in Erkan (2005:166) reported that: *“Most students, low and high achievers alike, find writing difficult and view it as something they just persevere through in order to pass certain exams”*.

Thus, teaching students to write is an awesome task because they have negative idea towards writing. Likewise, the problem about writing proficiency is an age-old one. Hull (1987:8)^[11] explains: *“Over a hundred years ago, Harvard president, Charles W. Eliot complained that ‘bad spelling, Incorrectness as well as*

inelegance of expression in Writing and ignorance of the simplest of rules of punctuation are far from rare among young men of eighteen.”

Indeed, Byrn (1979)^[3] divides the problems that make writing difficult into three categories:

- psychological problems
- linguistic problems
- cognitive problems

Research methodology

To probe more into the issue of the teaching of writing skill in EFL classes in Beninese secondary schools in the context of CBA, a research was carried out for the collection of down- to earth and reliable data. The population of reference is made up of teachers of English in secondary schools and advanced EFL learners. Advanced learners are the students that really deal with the kind of writing tasks and practices because they are mature and can easily understand my questionnaire and provide adequate and reliable answers needed. Twenty teachers from an in- service training were then sampled to answer questionnaire. Only fifteen questionnaire sheets were returned. Twenty advanced learners were interviewed about the issue. The teachers and the students have shown great interest to the questionnaire I have handed to them. Therefore, they have provided objective answers to all the questions they have been asked

Research Instruments

A quick glance cast at the teachers’ questionnaire enables to notice that priority is given to open ended questions. I intend to let the respondents express themselves freely on the different issues under consideration so as to conduct the study objectively. The teachers’ questionnaire measures out the following information:

- Average size of the EFL classes
- Teachers’ qualifications
- Learners’ reactions toward writing skills
- Importance of writing skills
- How writing is taught
- Learners’ involvement
- Difficulties met by learners
- Setting wherein EFL teachers deal with writing
- Kinds of writing assigned to students
- Pedagogical problems met by EFL teachers in the field of writing
- Satisfaction with students’ books in the field of writing
- Link between reading and writing
- Impact of assessment on writing performances
- New ways to teach writing
- Suggestion for improvement

Twenty students, randomly selected outside the classroom, seem more efficient and more reliable for my study. They are mainly advanced EFL learners in Beninese secondary schools. The following interview schedule was used:

- How do you see writing in English?
- Apart from academic assignments, how often do you write personally?
- Do sometimes you keep personal diaries?
- What problems do you often encounter when you are assigned writing tasks?
- What methods or processes do you follow when you write?
- What do you do to tackle writing tasks easily?

Classroom Observations

The classroom observation is a very powerful and efficient tool for a research project data collection procedure in the field of education. It enables the researcher to make decisions from what he is personally a witness. Five teachers were observed. This efficient device revealed to me many of the reasons why advanced EFL learners resent writing and how EFL teachers tackle writing activities. Shortly after the observation, I held a private discussion with the teacher on issues related to my research theme. Also, I asked them to suggest solutions to remediate advanced EFL learners' lack of interest in writing activities.

The forthcoming chapter is devoted to the presentation and the discussions of the results of the investigations I have carried out.

**Presentation and Discussions of the Results
Teachers' Difficulties in the Field of Writing Teaching**

Asked to list their students' difficulties in the area of writing, teachers cite the following:

- difficulty in understanding writing assignments;
- poor vocabulary background;
- turning of writing into translation exercises;
- mother tongue and French interference;
- difficulty in building grammatically correct sentences and coherent paragraphs;

The listed difficulties suggest that learners are not adequately taught how to go about writing tasks.

They also show that learners have a very limited vocabulary. Indeed the very real problem of E.F.L learners is the lack of vocabulary. During my investigations, many learners acknowledged it. The sampling of their productions also revealed it. Learners' poor vocabulary push them to mix up English and French words in their writing production. Their difficulty in understanding writing topics is also an evidence for believing that they lack vocabulary. As a result, learners can get frustrated and reject writing tasks. Therefore, there is necessity to help learners extend their vocabulary and their writing strategies.

As can be seen, only 33. 33% of the teachers believe that writing assignment should be carried out within the classroom setting. This category of teachers thinks that when students take the assignment home, many of them will cheat. They believe that when they write in the classroom, they use their own intelligence. On the contrary, 66. 67% did not hold this belief and sustained that when students work individually at home, they will not be under time pressure and will be well inspired.

Table 3: Kinds of Writing Activities Performed by Advanced Learners and their Frequency

Types of topics	Frequencies
Narrative paragraphs	Usually
Descriptive paragraphs	Usually
Argumentative paragraphs	Usually
Informative paragraphs	Often
Letter writing	Often
Poems writing	Rarely
Summaries writing	Often

This table suggests that learners are often assigned with narrative, descriptive, argumentative, letters, and summaries writing. This is quite understandable as local and nationwide EFL exam papers habitually test advanced students on one of these types of writing.

Writing-related pedagogical problems faced by EFL teachers

The results on this figure show that 28.57 % of respondent teachers do not have pedagogical problems.71.43 % of the questioned EFL teachers declared that they have pedagogical problems as far as writing teaching is concerned. It means that generally speaking, EFL teachers face pedagogical problems related to writing skills. They mentioned the following common problems:

- how exactly and when to start teaching writing with learners;
- how to make learners use the structures and vocabulary taught them effectively while writing;
- requirements to cover the syllabi before the end of the school year;
- necessity to have a real schedule in the area of English teaching as a whole and writing teaching in particular;
- oversized classes

Concerning the link between writing and reading, all the investigated teachers said reading contributes to the development of writing skills and assumed that:

- It helps learners to build up some vocabulary and familiarize them with various writing styles;
- We cannot become good writers if we do not read well;
- Texts can be used as models; imitating how they are built; would help to improve one's writing skills.

Impact of regular assessments on students' performance.

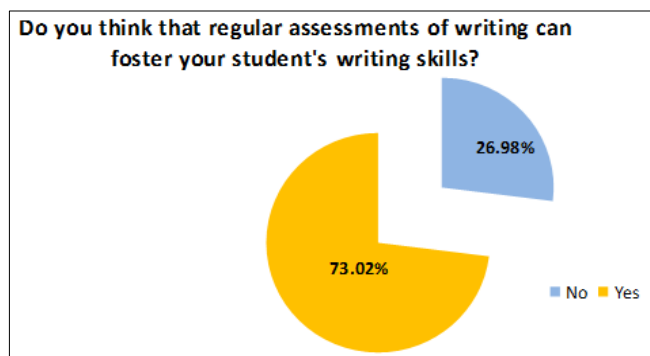


Fig 1: Impact of regular assessment on students' performance

This result indicates that 73. 02% of the respondents thought that strengthening the ability of students to write requires regular assessments whereas 26.98% are against this opinion. This category of EFL teachers advocated that regular summative evaluations on writing skills is demotivating because the learners fail to obtain good marks.

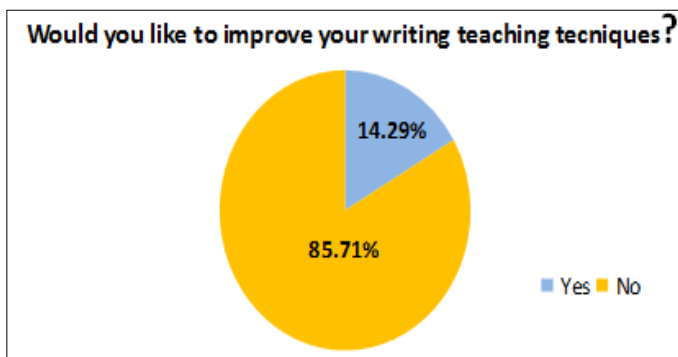


Fig 2: Teachers desire to improve their writing teaching techniques

The results on this figure show that 14.29% of respondent teachers would not like to learn new ways of teaching writing; 85.71% of them believe that it is necessary for them to learn new methods that may enable them to carry out the teaching of writing efficiently.

Analysis of the classroom observation

Through these observations I have distinguished two categories of teachers. The first category belongs to those who teach writing as a process and the second who do not teach it all. The former has learners go through the various writing stages starting from pre-writing level to the proof reading. This kind of EFL teachers is very few. The latter, the majority, write down the composition topic activity on the board and go and sit down until learners complete the task. After inviting two or three learners to read out their production, they personally provide them with the correct answer and students copy it in their copy book.

On the whole, in both cases, students showed very little interest to writing. Many were playing and chatting while the activity was going on. This attitude of the learners shows that they have not developed writing culture before. It is then the teachers' job to stimulate them by giving priority to writing skill.

Analysing Interviews

Most of the interviewees confessed that apart from the writing assignments they receive from their teachers, they do not personally undertake any writing activity. Learners meet various problems when they face writing tasks. At times, some uncommon words or phrases in the topics statement hinder the comprehension of the tasks to be carried out. In addition, the topics or the tasks are not related to their background knowledge. As far as the strategies they follow to write is concerned, they have said that they first translate the topic into French and do the whole writing in French and finally translate it into English. Very few students really write directly in English.

They believe that reading could help them to tackle writing tasks easily. In short, one can say that writing in English is crucial and impact seriously on learners' desire to learn English. The reasons for these difficulties raised by the respondents have various sources and of course, the consequences are not profitable to them. It is then urgent to find out solutions in the common interest of English language teaching in general and writing in particular.

Discussions of the Results

The findings of the current studies reveal that a number of factors and contexts lie behind problems faced by both EFL teachers and advanced EFL learners as far as writing in English is concerned.

Oversized classes

The results of our investigations show that there is an average of 58 advanced learners per class in our schools. It means that there is a lack of infrastructures or there is a shortage of EFL teachers in those classes, so, school authorities are obliged to create oversized classes. Oversized classes are not easy to manage for any teacher. All the learners cannot benefit from the teacher's attention. Many of them shirk the tasks assigned to them and engage in chatting with their mates. The teacher will then spend the time initially devoted to teach to establish discipline in the class. As a result, it will be very hard for both teachers and learners to carry out writing tasks successfully in such a context.

Lack of qualified teachers

The results of my investigations revealed that 84% of EFL teachers have no pedagogical background and have been recruited on the basis of their academic qualifications. It means that access to professional qualifications in the area of EFL teaching is not easy at all or the educational system at secondary level does not promote the employment based on professional qualifications. So, it is not surprising when 71.43% of teachers acknowledged that they have pedagogical problems related to writing skills and 85.71% would like to improve the strategies they use to teach writing in their advanced EFL classes. The lack of qualified teachers in our EFL classes, at the national level, is due to the freeze of recruitment in secondary schools. The empowerment of school principals by the government to employ teachers on a part time basis generates these problems. These headmasters do not take into account standard criteria for part-time teachers' recruitment.

Where there is no professional qualification, they do not at least employ teachers who are B. A. holders in English. Unfortunately, these principals (not all of them) turn this aspect of their job into a lucrative activity. In fact, they offer vacant positions to the candidates who offer them bribes even though they do not meet the required profile to fill in the position. Lower degree holders (Baccalaureate, DUEL) and candidates qualified in other subjects (sociology, geography, economics; biology etc.) are entitled to teach English in our advanced EFL classes. In such a context, it will be hard for our learners to grasp such a complex skill like writing.

Impacts of teachers' teaching methods on learner's motivation and performance regarding writing skills

The findings of my studies have revealed that 73.24% do not like English; 85.21% of them have a disgust for writing tasks, one of English four skills, which is the most difficult because of its complexity (Erkan 2005: 166)^[5]. So, learners dislike for writing has its origin in their dislike for English on the whole. In addition, the way teachers handle writing tasks does not help learners to become good writers. In fact, findings obtained from questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews have revealed that teachers in majority do not teach writing skills well. Concerning what they do not like about their teachers' methods of teaching writing, 69.37% of respondent learners declared that they are sometimes assigned with writing tasks as homework. The teacher corrects the tasks personally instead of guiding learners to find out the right answers. Moreover, respondents in majority (71.83%) think that writing tasks have little to do with their background knowledge. In the case learners do not grasp the meaning of words contained in the tasks or they do not know what to do, they may think that the tasks are beyond their capacity which is not necessarily true.

This treatment of writing skill by EFL teachers is justified by the following factors: teaching workload, limited course duration, lack of teachers' professional development, teachers' negative attitudes towards the teaching of essay writing, etc.

As a matter of fact, teaching workload is one of the factors affecting advanced learners' performance in writing skills. Statistical data reveal that secondary education in Benin is made up of 80% of part time teachers with no professional qualification in majority. These teachers are employed in several schools to teach. Many of them exceed thirty-six (36) hours load per week. An appropriate academic workload is one among other

factors that contributes to efficient learning and teaching. When workload increases, learning and teaching might not be as efficient as it should be. In addition, it is implied that heavy teaching loads might hinder students' involvement in different writing activities.

Similarly, lessons on writing skills in advanced EFL classes in Benin are scheduled to last three hours for science students (once a week) and four hours for arts students a week. So, teachers who do not plan their lessons efficiently usually have the tendency to skip or to run badly writing tasks. EFL teachers lack training not only in classroom management techniques, but also in classroom interaction techniques and teaching methods. The above mentioned factors account for learners' inability to be successful in writing tasks.

Learners share responsibilities in their poor performance in writing skills

Learners also share responsibilities as far as their writing performance is concerned. First, 58.45% of respondent learners do not possess the required text-books for their level. This shows that there is a shortage of reading materials in our EFL classes. In such a context where English learning is fundamentally based on books, how can learners build sound knowledge without books? I think this is quite impossible. Second, the current studies reveal that 94.63% of learners do not know the value of keeping correspondence writing to pen-pals; 86.27% of respondent learners do not use media (TV, radio) to improve their English on the whole and their writing skills in particular; 75.71% of respondent students do not read and 94.01% of them do not keep journals or diaries. These findings suggest that learners do not know that diaries and journals keeping can help improve and increase substantially their vocabulary and make writing an easy task for them. It also means that they are not taught how corresponding with pen-pals can help them improve their writing skills.

Learners' lack of interest for reading English texts can be justified by their lack of motivation for the English language. Some people are also lazy in reading. This attitude of learners towards reading is responsible for their poor performance in writing. Stotsky (1983)^[17] shared my points of view when he pointed out: "There are correlations between reading achievement and writing ability. Better writers tend to be better readers".

Effects of evaluation and grading on learners' motivation to write

The findings of my studies reveal that the majority (73.02%) of EFL teachers believed that frequent testing of learners impacts positively on their writing skills. This approach may be effective especially in the case learners grasp the strategies that lead to a successful writing and usually score exciting grades. But if they always obtain disappointing grades, they will certainly be reluctant to face subsequent summative evaluations on writing skills. Only formative evaluations handled intelligently can really enhance learner's writing skills.

Recommendations

Necessities of Adequate Infrastructures

The increasing number of students requires the building of classrooms and their equipment with classroom furniture. The government is making an effort in the field. Nevertheless, much remains to be done. So, the government must give greater

priority to the building of classrooms equipped with tables, benches and electricity, to provide an adequate comfort and optimal conditions for good classroom management for teachers and a good learning environment for students.

Yet, authorities at various levels of education should reduce the number of students in classes since this plethora of learners per class causes several problems for teachers who have great difficulty in completing their job correctly. That is why I suggest thirty- five to forty students per class.

Obviously, this reduction in number of students per class requires the creation of new schools that can also bring students closer to their schools. Then, a program of massive recruitment of teachers should be implemented for a full coverage of these schools in teachers. Moreover, both teachers and students should improve their skills, which requires the use of documents. So, it is necessary to build libraries and cyber cafes in schools.

Necessity of recruiting inspectors and qualified teachers

One of the causes of the low level of learners is the shortage of qualified teachers. Nowadays, most university graduates unwillingly take up the teaching job simply to solve their problem of unemployment. The danger is that they do not teach in the very field in which they were trained in. For example, students who read geography, sociology or law at the university teach English in our secondary schools simply when there is no vacancy in their field of study.

To solve this problem, inspectors must organize regular seminars, conferences and training for teachers to help them improve their teaching skills. Moreover, school authorities, particularly, headmasters should reconsider their recruitment policy and accept part- time teachers by taking into account their university background.

Besides, educational inspectors and advisors are very important and very useful in the educational sector. During their visits, they supply teachers with practical and useful pieces of advice which allows them to improve their methods or teaching strategies. Unfortunately, these visits are scarce. In the schools I visited when collecting data, most EFL teachers would like the visits of inspectors and advisors to be more frequent. They reported that in the past years, inspectors used to visit their schools twice a school year. Others even said that inspectors only come at the end of the school year to check the levels reached in curricula.

I then invite the government to increase the number of inspectors and educational advisers and substitute those appointed to political positions. This will allow an efficient control and monitoring of teachers in carrying out their teaching for a qualitative education. In addition, it is better to regulate the hours of teaching per week for teachers so as to reduce fatigue, stress and accidents which are risks for those who exceed thirty-six hours load a week.

Suggestions

To EFL Teachers

As mentioned before, teachers have an important role to play in bettering the situation if they really aim at assuming their responsibility correctly. They should permanently strive to acquaint themselves to new trends in the English teaching area on the whole, and in the writing teaching in particular. For this purpose, I suggest that teachers equip their personal libraries with TEFL books and subscribe to TEFL magazine like English teaching forum, collaborate with one another's experience contributes to teacher's self-development. They should also be

humble enough to question their own teaching strategies whenever it does not work and adapt it to reality.

To motivate learners, I suggest that teachers reward the students who achieve well in writing activities, encourage and invite weak students to do better. Also, teachers should avoid making fun of weak learners in order to avoid frustrations. Besides, it is necessary for teachers to always attend the weekly shop meetings and to the periodical seminars during which educational issues are debated in the interest of both teachers and students. Similarly, they should participate in various trainings organized for them to improve their teaching.

Furthermore, as a teacher is considered as a reference for students, it is then very important that he or she inspires confidence from his or her students by grasping properly his or her subject. Finally, I would invite young teachers to be humble and rely on their experienced deans to get practical advice so as to improve their teaching techniques.

To Learners

Learners should bear in mind that English is as important as the other subjects they learn at school and its mastering can help them in every field particularly in the career they intend to have in the future. It is then necessary for them to attend English classes regularly and make an effort to understand their teachers' lessons. They should always seek out opportunities to practise English language. By so doing, they will develop a good command of English which will enable them to tackle writing with confidence. Moreover, I suggest to learners to usually keep a diary in English and to find out interesting topics on which to write so as to improve their writing skills. In a nutshell, students should often try to create opportunities to express themselves in English

Conclusion

Writing is a complex activity that entails a series of difficulties. Learning to write accurately is not easy for advanced EFL learners. Although this category of learners has dealt with writing skills for a long period (five years at last), they are still unable to produce coherent texts. Nowadays, the English language has become so important in every sector of activity that failure to learn it means loss of considerable opportunities. Learning English means developing the following skills in English: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

As far as writing in English is concerned in Beninese secondary schools, it is noticed that both EFL teachers and advanced learners especially find it extremely challenging. Learners' failure to write appropriately depends closely to the way EFL teachers handle writing tasks. Investigations show that the majority of EFL teachers neglect the teaching of writing and do not succeed in teaching it efficiently. Lack of qualified EFL teachers, insufficient training in the area of writing and lack of various motivational factors account partly for this situation.

Learners, for their part, are still not aware of the importance and the opportunities writing well in English will provide for them. Many advanced students still believe that writing means copying existing texts. Learners resent writing for several reasons. Firstly, they do not know what profits they could draw immediately from learning to write in English. Secondly, English is a foreign language and accounts from elders have revealed that whatever one may do, one could not succeed. Thirdly, the Benin social environment does not favour at all the

practice of writing. Fourthly, teacher's ways of handling writing tasks, impact seriously on writing learning.

There are some measures, when carried out effectively could help to improve the situation. Firstly, avoiding oversized classes, building libraries with good English text-books, recruiting more qualified EFL teachers, advisors and inspectors, will positively impact on the teaching and learning of writing. Secondly, encouraging weak students to do better and avoiding making fun of them, could have positive effects on writing practices. Thirdly, to really improve their teaching skills, teachers should have an ongoing commitment, as far as teacher's self-development is concerned. Fourthly, learners for their part should increase both their reading and writing frequency. Writing practices such as diary or journal keeping, seeking and writing to pen pals, writing games, newsletter writing, etc could contribute to the improvement of their writing skills substantially.

To make learners come back to writing with confidence, a change in attitude is necessary. Indeed, a change in the teachers' teaching techniques will help English learners to improve their writing skills. In the same trend, I suggest to the government, better teachers working conditions by increasing teachers' salaries and incentives. The government should make sure that in-service training is organized regularly for teachers in the area of writing teaching. Teachers should work at improving their teaching behaviour. They need to question their teaching strategies in order to seek new alternatives and find remedies for the poor performance of their students.

Teachers should be aware of the new teaching methods and approaches in order to meet the expectations of their students and to respond efficiently to their needs in the area of English writing. They should also be supportive and flexible with regard to the students writing productions so that learners will not be put off. Teachers should put more emphasis on regular practice of English writing in their classrooms. This emphasis will generate grounds for English writing mastering to take place. I suggest to teachers to keep on exploring how they can improve their writing teaching in order to become effective writing teachers. I hope this paper would open the door to other people to tackle the issue of writing assessment.

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