

# Teaching and Learning of English Language by the French University Students In Porto-Novo, Benin Republic

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## Abstract

The focus of this study was to investigate the impediments to the effective teaching and learning of English language by the French University Students in Porto Novo, the Republic of Benin. The study adopted survey research type. The findings revealed that environment and background of the students constituted major hindrance for effective teaching and learning of English. Other problems include lack of qualified English teachers as well as bad method of teaching coupled with mother-tongue interference, while governmental and parental factors were regarded as purely being influenced by French colonial masters' policy of Assimilation theory.

Based on the findings and conclusion, it was recommended that the government of Francophone countries need to integrate themselves with other countries of the world that use English language since the language is globally accepted as the world language. More experienced and qualified English teachers should be employed, and more English lesson periods be put on schools' time table. Encouragement of "Anglo-francophone" students' interactions via excursions be effected to enhance the understanding of English / French intelligibility across boundaries.

Keywords: Use of English language; French university students; Teaching and learning and Anglo-Francophone.

## I. Introduction

Learning to speak the universal language (English as a second language is not an easy task, or a straight forward habit formation to a French student who is surrounded by his mother-tongue and the environment. Differences between acquiring the mother-tongue as well as the language of the French colonial masters and learning a second language i.e the English language, poor or no exposure to English, wrong attitude and lack of motivation by the environment, among others are hindrances to the effective learning and use of English in the second language context.

As much as we cannot expect students in Francophone country schools to sound exactly like their Anglophone counterparts in their spoken English, the focus is how to enable the French students to speak English language at a fairly normal conventional level so as to be easily understood when they communicate in English, as well as to be able to interpret fairly correctly a chain of sounds produced by a native speaker at a normal conversational level Abudu (2001).

However good the teachers pronunciation may be, the students would be sure to have some difficulties with certain sounds and combination of sounds in their target language due to their negative attitude to English which they see as a foreign language (Bello 2004). Thus, teachers of English in Francophone countries must have a

clear understanding of how the sounds of the foreign language and the students' mother-tongue are formed, and indeed of the whole phonetic built up of the two languages.

In line with the above, Williams (1990) asserted that there are three reasons why pronunciation should be tackled by systematic teaching in the second language context. The age at which the learner begins to speak the second language, interference from the mother-tongue in the pupil's attempt to discriminate and produce sounds in the target language, and lastly, the noise which is produced when one sound system is super-imposed on another one. Similarly, Moses (2000) was of the opinion that unfamiliar sounds, rhythms or intonations, stress and pronunciation are the aspects of speech that we should firmly keep in mind during the teaching of English as a second language. This is because utterances in English are not only considered from the point of view of pronunciation, but also from that of stress, rhyme or intonation. Moses further postulated that there is the need to find out more reason(s) for poor learning of English whether it is caused by the environment, or lack of qualified and experienced teacher, or due to poor method of teaching or non-availability of instructional materials to facilitate effective teaching and learning of English language. While trying to answer some of the questions above, McCarthy (2001) opined that every individual is powerfully conditioned by his mother-tongue, and as such, he or she uses it as a basis of interpreting phenomena of any other language(s) he or she learns later, thus, making this condition the greatest problem that confronts language teachers. McCarthy further agreed that the fundamental psychological process of relating new experience to past experience of interpreting the unknown in the light of the known implies that the mother-tongue experience and the acquired speech habits actually interfere, thus giving credence to the well known interference of one language with another. (Interference occurs or manifests itself where there is bilingualism or multilingualism), by this it means bilingualism and multilingualism are situations where more than one language is used in a speech community for communication purposes.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

The major point of the problem of English language teaching and learning lies in the very foundation of educational system which is the primary school at where the teaching and learning of English is started by way of laying the base and foundation for it. But apparently, as viewed by Abudu (2001), background and environment of students of French speaking countries contribute a lot to their inability to communicate near perfection in English language due to the Assimilation policy of the French colonial overlords even though French has a few words (spelt) like English, (and English language borrowing some words from French to its lexicon). Probably this is one of the reasons why English language is said to be universal in nature (for borrowing words to enrich its lexicon when the French stay glued to its colonial masters' language (French).

Lending credence to the universality of English language, English dictionary contended that in total, about 510 million people are Anglophone i.e speaking English globally, and that English is the language of the world policy, economy, science, technology, internet and informatics. Corroborating McCarthy (2001), Abudu (2001) agreed that the foundations of the English language in French speaking countries are often inadequate and that the primary school children are not exposed to, or even when they do, they are exposed to the poor, non-standard English. Insufficient, inadequate, inappropriate teaching materials coupled with the environmental factors of the French speaking countries do militate against the effective teaching and learning of English language by the French university students in Porto Novo, Republic of Benin. This reason is possibly why Afolayan (2000) stressed the need for more employment of English specialists who would be able to select appropriate materials, teach and to some extent, break the shackle influence of environment on learners of English as a second language in French speaking countries.

Similarly, Bello (2004) asserted that since poor performance in English by students could generally be traced to bad method of teaching or negative attitudes on the part of the students, it is believed that students learn better when two or more sensory modalities are appealed to. It is therefore recommended that instructional materials like radio, television, cassette recorders and physical oral drills in English language should be constantly used in the French schools to enhance their English language proficiency. In support of this assertion, Yomoah (2006) contended that for any language learning to be effective, students need to practice out side the school whatever they have been taught in the classroom, while the school authority should monitor the use of English when they are in the school with provision of more language lessons made on the school timetable than any other subjects. Similarly, encouragement of workshop, seminars and in-service training for teachers of language would enhance their productivity.

Many French speaking students now enroll in schools that offer English language as a course in Porto Novo, Benin Republic. The risk is that students of French background would tend to be influenced by their environment, thus transferring to the English language the habits of the acquired language (French) into English is very evident, therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out whether the problem of learning English is teachers or students or background oriented or environmental influence.

1. What are the problems facing the teachers of English language in Porto Novo?
2. What are the suggestions on how to improve on teaching and learning of English language in Porto Novo?

## II. Method

This study adopted a survey research design. The population consisted of all the English language lecturers of all the thirteen (13) universities (both public and private) in Porto Novo, Republic of Benin. Three of the universities have eleven English lecturers each, four universities have nine English language lecturers each while the rest six have six English language lecturers each totaling 105 lecturers handling English language as a course.

The instrument used consisted of a seventeen researcher designed teachers' questionnaire generated from the lecturers of English based on what they are experiencing on their subject delivery to students with French background. The questionnaire has two sections. Section A has nine (9) items questionnaire while section B has eight (8) items questionnaire. The items in section A elicited responses on questions facing effective teaching and learning of English by students of French universities, while sector B of eight items elicited responses on suggestions on how to improve on teaching and learning of English by students of French background. Direct administration of the instrument was adopted. However, 100 copies of the questionnaire were adequately received from the respondents that were used for this study.

Two experts adjudged the content validity of the instrument. To ensure reliability of the instrument, the questionnaire items were subjected to test re-test technique of three weeks interval after the first administration. The scores obtained were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics which resulted in 0.82 which the researcher adjudged reliable.

## III. Results

The data got from the study were analyzed using simple frequency counts and simple percentage distribution as shown in the tables below:

Table 1. Distribution of Problems Facing the Lecturers of English Language

<b>The problems</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Background of students	70	70
2. Environment of students	76	76
3. Mother-tongue interference	51	51
4. Parental influence	5	5
5. Governmental problems	6	6
6. Lack of qualified English teachers	67	67
7. Bad method of teaching`	53	53
8. Lack of instrumental materials	5	5
9. Problems inherent in learners	48	48

Results in Table 1 above show that the greatest problem facing effective teaching and learning of English language by French University Students in Porto Novo universities is environmental influence of the students ranking 76%, this is followed by the background of the students that ranks 70%. Lack of qualified English teachers is next ranking 67%. Bad method of teaching English has 53%, close to it is mother-tongue interference as 51%. Other problems inherent in the learners has 48%, Governmental problem ranks 6% while parental influence and lack of instructional materials have 5% each as the last problems identified by the English lecturers.

Table 2. Suggestions on how to Improve on Teaching and Learning of English Language by French University Students in Porto Novo.

<b>Suggestions</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Provision of instrumental materials	63	63
2. Employment of more experienced and qualified English teachers	80	80
3. Having more English lessons on the school timetable	80	80
4. Students to be encouraged to always speak English and read English novels	79	79
5. Improvement on teaching methodology	56	56
6. Allowing “Anglo-Francophone” students’ interactions	79	79
7. Encouraging in-service training, seminars and workshops for teachers of English	79	79
8. Students excursion to Anglophone countries to be encouraged	79	79

Results in Table 2 above reveal that 80% of the lecturers favoured having more English lesson periods on the school timetable as well as employing more experienced and qualified English lecturers respectively. Closely to this are 79% responses of the lecturers in favour of “Anglo-Francophone” students’ interactions, in-service training, seminars and workshops for teachers of English, students’ encouragement to always speak

English and reading of novels written in English language respectively. Provision of instructional materials has 63% while improved teaching methodology has 56%.

## VI. Discussion

Results of the data from this study showed that 76% and 70% respectively of the respondents identified environmental influence and background of the students as major factors militating against the teaching and learning of English by the French university students in Porto Novo. This is in agreement with Abudu's (2001) assertion that both environment and background of the students of French speaking countries contribute a lot to their students' inability to communicate near perfection in English language due to the assimilation policy adopted by their colonial overlords. Lack of qualified English teachers (67%) is next identified problem of teaching and learning of English language. This is in consonance with the findings of Moses (2000) who suggested a need to find out reason(s) for poor learning of English which could be caused by lack of qualified and experienced teachers.

Bad method of teaching (53%) is also identified as one of the problems that mar teaching and learning of English, as it is rightly suggested by Moses (2000) that poor method of teaching could affect effective teaching and learning of English language.

Averagely, mother-tongue interference (51%) is another problem identified by the lecturers as militating against teaching and learning of English. This connotes the opinion of McCarthy (2001) that every individual is powerfully conditioned by his or her mother-tongue, and as such, he or she uses it as a basis of interpreting phenomena of any other language(s) he or she learners later, thus, making this condition the greatest problem that confronts language teachers, and in this context, lecturers and teachers of French University in Port-Novvo.

The results of the data further revealed that problems inherent (attitude) of the students (48%) is yet another factor that affects teaching and learning of English as identified by the respondents. This finding tends to agree with Bello, (2004) that however good the teachers pronunciation may be, the students are sure to have some difficulties with certain sounds and combination of sounds in their target language due to their negative attitude to English which they see as a foreign language. Governmental problems (6%) indicates that the inadequacies on the part of government could be left out of the problems on the basis that the governments of the Francophone countries are within the purview of the "Colonial Assimilation" policy. Next to this are the parental influence and lack of instructional materials that ranked (5%) each. These, however, left out the parental influence who only acts according to the government directives, while lack of instructional materials agrees with the findings of Moses (2000) that non-availability of instructional materials could mar effective teaching and learning of English.

On the issue of the suggestions on how to improve the teaching and learning of English by the French university students in Porto Novo, the results in Table 2 revealed that employment of more experienced and qualified English language teachers (80%) and having more English language lesson periods on the school timetable (80%) respectively took first position. These were in line with the findings of Moses (2000) that provision of qualified and experienced teachers would facilitate teaching and learning of English as well as the

assertion of Yomoah (2006) that for any language teaching and learning to be effective, students need to practice more outside the school whatever they have been taught in the classroom, while the school authority monitors use of English when the students are in the school as well as the provision of more English language lesson periods than any other subjects on the school timetable since English is the medium of instruction in schools. Next to the above is the encouragement of students to always speak English and read novels in English (79%). This is in agreement with the contention of Yomoah (2006), who suggested that for any language teaching and learning to be effective, students need to practice more outside the school whatever they have been taught in the classroom.

Other high suggestions by the respondents are allowing “Anglo-francophone” students’ interactions (79%) and excursions of Francophone students’ to Anglophone countries be encouraged (79%), meant to broaden the teaching and learning of English horizon of the French university students in Porto Novo. Similarly, other high suggestion of respondents is on the encouragement of in-service training, seminars and workshops for teachers of English (79%). This finding seems to support Yomoah (2006) who suggested the encouragement of workshops, seminars and in-service training for teachers of language to enhance their productivity. Provision of instructional materials (63%) is next, and this seems to support the assertion of Bello (2004) that students learn better when two or more sensory modalities are appealed to, and therefore recommended that instructional materials like radio, television, cassette recorders and physical drills in English language should constantly be used in the French schools to enhance their English proficiency. The last suggestion by the respondents is on improvement on teaching methodology (56%). This finding partially seems to connote Afolayan ’ s (2000) assertion that there is the need for more employment of English specialists who would be able to select appropriate materials to teach, and to some extent, break the shackle of environmental influence on learners of English as a second language in French speaking countries.

## V. Conclusion

The findings from this study have led to the conclusion that majority of the respondents contended that environment and the background of the students respectively constitute major problems for effective teaching and learning of English language by French University students in Porto Novo, Republic of Benin. Other factors include non-availability of qualified English teachers. Bad method of teaching and mother-tongue interference were also identified as problems facing teaching and learning of English. Problems inherent in the learners such as negative attitude to the learning of English was also identified by the respondents. The government problem was negligibly (low) identified on the basis that the governments in the Francophone countries are within the purview of the “Colonial Assimilation” policy, more so that about three-quarter (3/4) of the universities in Porto Novo are privately owned, hence, viewing use of English in those universities as having no significant effect on the Government of Benin Republic. Equally negligible (low) identified problems confronting teaching and learning of English are lack of instructional materials and parental influence respectively. The low ranking on instructional materials and parental influence could be the fact that instructional materials will only thrive where importance is attached to the concept to be learned while parents (in Francophone countries) are considered as

having no control over the Governments' policies, who themselves (Governments) are colonial administration policy duty bounded.

## **VI. Recommendations**

The government should realize that a state cannot be an island to itself and as such, it must integrate itself with the leading and teaming countries of the world in the use of English since English language is universally considered and accepted as the world language. In the light of this, the Benin Republic Government must employ more experienced and qualified English language teachers to teach her teaming population (just as virtually all Anglophone countries have employed sizeable number of French teachers to teach French language to their people, which has yielded positive results as many students from Anglophone countries now speak French without much problems). Nigerian government has provided a place called French village at where the only medium of teaching, learning and communication is French language. By way of breaking their Assimilation servitude, provision of more English lesson periods on the school timetable would accelerate the teaching and learning of English in Porto Novo, (without tampering with their identify as a French nation). Making English language a compulsory course at particular levels in primary, secondary and even the university would afford virtually all the pupils and students the opportunity to have the rudimentary knowledge of English, thus making them global citizens. "Anglo-francophone" students' interactions via excursions would enhance understanding of English /French intelligibility across boundaries. There should be organization of in-service training, workshops, seminars and conferences at where teachers will benefit from exchange of ideas on current developments in English language thereby up-dating and improving their knowledge and method(s) of teaching English as well as selecting appropriate instructional materials to aid teaching/learning processes (considering the fact that though the students are in the university, the subject must be taught with all sense of purpose).

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