

English Language Instructors' Profile in Benin Primary Schools: What Are the Possibilities For Teacher - Training Programs?

Mathias HOUNNOU AZOUA*
Dossou Flavien LANMANTCHION**
Djobo KOMA***

Abstract

Being a good teacher is a matter of trainers development program building and then be capable to understand major strategies, which aspects could conduct to a good teaching. The study is undertaken in Parakou commune and covered its three districts. Both public and private primary schools' teachers were investigated; the work has demonstrated the hidden aspects of teachers' pedagogical skills development in primary: needs and perceptions about professionalization and their working conditions as teachers. In regards to observations, interviews, and also by figuring sub - components of developed skills in English classes, thirty-eight (38) teachers in private and public primary schools were involved in this survey. Different categories of teachers were identified in the procedure: some delivered content of the lessons exclusively in English, others do not and some of them do not complete at all. Then, the needs for resources and innovative techniques of teaching conducting to professionalization were considered as great challenges.

Keywords

Instructors' profile, Primary schools, Possibilities, Training programs, Benin

*Enseignant-chercheur au Département des études anglophones de la Faculté des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines (FLASH) de l'Université de Parakou, BP: 123-Parakou/ République du Benin.

E-mail :mathias.azoua@yahoo.fr / hounnouazoumathias@gmail.com

**Enseignant-chercheur à l'Institut National des Sciences, Technologies et de l'Industrie (INSTI) de Lokossa (Université Nationale des Sciences, Technologies de l'Ingénierie et des Mathématiques, UNSTIM (Benin)

E-mail : flavienlam81@yahoo.fr

***Attaché de recherche en Didactique de la Langue anglaise au Département des études anglophones de la Faculté des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines (FLASH) de l'Université de Parakou (Bénin)

E-mail : djokom05@gmail.com

Introduction

English is an international language spoken in many countries both as native and as a second or foreign language. People have found out that knowledge of English is a passport for communication with the entire world. Becoming good business man or women without mastering English is a total restriction to opportunities. Even though some notions, countries that were ruled by French, continue to teach French as their second language, English is gaining ground in those countries. The rise and spread of English is remarkable success story. Graddol (1997), estimated that today about 750 million people use English as Foreign Language and 375 million use English as a Second Language. From every background knowledge and activities in the worldwide this language is properly used.

Most African countries earlier get aware of the importance of the English language and this is the reason why the language has been introduced in all secondary schools, where it has served as a second or official language in reference to Benin Constitution but also where it is used as foreign language. For example, it is the official language of Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria and Liberia. Benin belongs to the country where English language is taught as foreign language in secondary schools, Universities, and even in other bilingual primary private schools. Therefore, it becomes necessary to fit with this new educational approach by introducing English teaching in public and private primary schools. Therefore, Benin government through the implementation of its Development Planning decided to introduce this language in Public primary schools. Some private schools followed such initiative. Nevertheless, all the teachers involved in this new program are facing training issues. Therefore, they encounter many difficulties because they do not master the different techniques and methods of teaching. Moreover, they lack important materials for language teaching in primary schools. In that respect, this program needs professionalism at every level.

When talking about professionalism, it calls for teaching competencies and the adoption of innovative teaching tools, materials and techniques. So, professionalism in teaching English as a Foreign Language is affected by the wide-ranging reforms in education such as curriculum, instruction, and assessment with the intention of achieving

better education for learners to match the challenging educational demands of life and work in the 21st century. Authors such as Yusuf, Afolabi & Oyetayo (2014) defined a profession as an occupation or vocation that requires special skills, knowledge of some department for learning and qualification to especially one with high social status. It is a job that requires special skills or knowledge through special training with a high level of education; and it utilizes functional education and mental ability rather than manual or physical labor. These contexts of rapid change are forcing many teachers to work hard in order to respond to such changes effectively and call for new styles of teaching which can be introduced to teachers through continuous professional programs: Teacher Development program.

1. Problem statement

In Benin, many teachers start teaching without completing their training at University or specific training in teaching education. The aim of the initiative is above all at the end of training, the teachers can be better equipped. This training allows teachers to have a good training in order to teach sustainable English language to the learners. It has to say that the teachers must be careful during the training, to consider the aspect which can be mentioned when the learners are instructed, talking about the level of their understanding is also a motive. To bring new tools in English teaching, which are at the level of primary learners in terms of professionalism, teacher must have documents, which contain pictures, the names of things on it, posters, etc. Moreover, they must keep guiding for the instructors, which let them, follow a curriculum in their teaching. One can also put an accent on model of speaking for teaching in class. The instructors must know that at level of primary school learners, they need for example a good pronunciation in order to articulate, this is what the teachers attempted to demonstrate in the correct way all day long.

This study aims at investigating the teachers' perceptions about the introduction of English at primary schooling and consequently to evaluate the language instructors' profile in terms of professionalism. Indeed, the teachers recruited for this program do not master initial training session in most of the cases. This problem is followed by the lack of instruction tools needed in younger teaching education. Such

situation cannot allow the effective achievement of the program. This research work aimed at improving the quality of English teaching at primary schools in the districts of Parakou and consequently in Benin as a whole.

2. Research framework

This study was conducted in the municipality of Parakou in the north Benin and concerned the English teachers at a lower level of study. It is in the city of Parakou. Three (03) districts are covered by the investigation. It composed with both public and private primary schools, which are chosen randomly.

2.1. Geographical location

Regional capital of Northern Benin, the city of Parakou (capital of the department of Borgou) is located at 437 kilometers from Cotonou. It is bordered to the north by the city of N'Dali, to the south, east and west by the city of Tchaourou. The city of Parakou covers an area of 441 km², 66% of which is urbanized. Situated between 9°18' and 9°22' north latitude and 2°33' and 2°37' east longitude, Parakou has an average altitude of 350 m and is subdivided into 03 Districts (Abdoulaye quoted & O. R. Kamandé, 2014, p. 24).

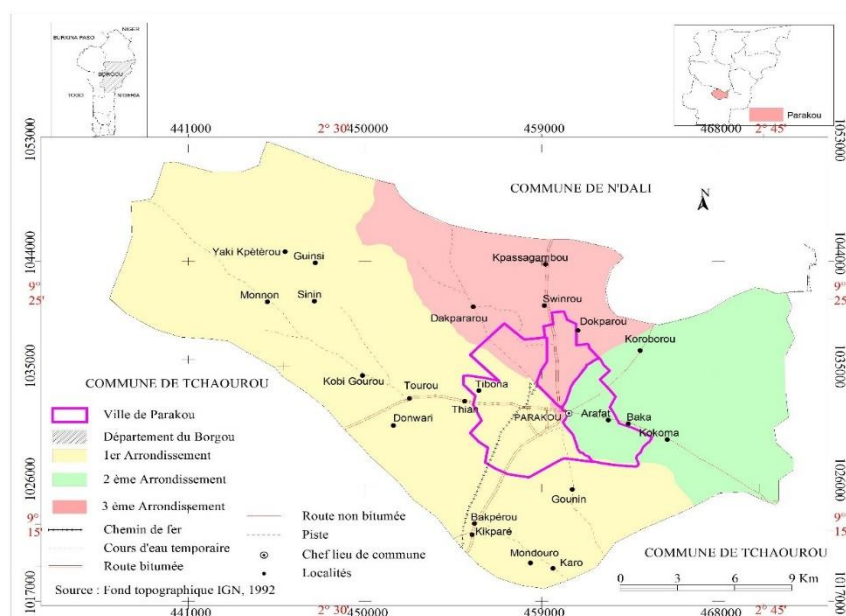


Figure 1: Parakou geographical Situation
Source: IGN, 1992

2.2. Objectives of the survey

This study aims at investigating the teachers' perceptions about the introduction of English at primary schooling and consequently to evaluate the language instructors' profile in terms of professionalism.

In other words, it helps to gain an in-depth insight about the practitioner teacher. That means that the investigation was conducted in primary schools of Parakou districts. Thirty-eight teachers are interviewed. They have been working up to date by teaching English. Through the interviews with participants, opportunities are given to them to interact more freely in order to have qualitative information for the purposes of reactions and point of view.

2.3. Research questions

- How do teachers perceive the introduction of English at primary schools?
- What are the opportunities to develop new strategies for language teachers' professionalism?
- What are teachers' needs to become professional in language education?

2.4. Research hypotheses

H1: English language is a matter of study at every level of schooling.

H2: The existence of large opportunities to design and implement materials and methodologies are noticeable in Benin.

H3: Professionalization of English language teachers in primary schools is a challenge for educational officials.

3. Literature review

3.1 Background on former findings

Fareo Dorcas (2015) defined a profession as an occupation or vocation that requires special skills, knowledge of some department of learning and qualification to especially one with high social status. It is a job that requires special skills or knowledge through special training with a level of education; and utilizes functional education and mental ability rather than manual or physical labor. In the same way, Iuliana Lungu (2015) argued that creating and implementing a new model of professionalization of English language skills for Romanian preschool and primary school teachers, ensuring the quality of teaching English language and directly determining the status of compulsory subject for this language studied in kindergarten and primary school. From this perspective, the goal of this research is to promote the idea of qualification and specific training of teachers in preschool and primary education to be proficient in English and formulating directions for future primary education curriculum development, in accordance with the standards of professional competencies.

However, Saud M. Alsalahi (2015) stated that in teacher education, we could not deny the importance of sponsored professionalism in the field of learning and teaching. Indeed, it can be the tool for accountability that provides measures for control. The counterpart of the sponsored professionalism is independent learning where individual oriented education stands. It is a commitment to careful and critical examination of the assumptions and practices embedded in sponsored professionalism with reference to discipline-based knowledge and wider social values, and acting to effect change if needs be. Marco Sonoek (2011) the study of professions and professionalism has long standing tradition in sociological research from the beginning of the 20th century. Sociologists have tried to identify the specific values that are connected to professions and at the same time tried to identify criteria to separate professions from occupations. As in most debates on professions and on professionalism, the characteristics of professions are connected to positive and prestigious elements; many occupations have tried to identify their professionalism, thus trying to become part of the elite. Kim L. Creasy (2015) in defining Professionalism in Teacher Education Program also identified a certain number of professional responsibilities.

3.2 English language integration policy

Since 2017, when the new authorities took the power, they decided to introduce the program of teaching English at public primary schools. The teachers' training is operated through ten (10) modules; each module is structured as follows: objective, pre-test, activities, post-test and assessment. The module1 deals with the appropriation of pedagogical documents, the module2 is methods and techniques in English Language teaching, the module3 is English language teaching in primary schools, the module4 is teaching/learning English through poems, songs and rhymes, module5 evaluation techniques in English for communication, module6 is phonetics and phonology, module7 is rehearsal techniques and teacher self-development, the module8 large classroom management, module9 is material design and the module10 is duration and time. Thus, the teacher -training program has the weaknesses because of the availability of resources is not what they expect to have when talking about the professionalism. For school

authorities and others, the self-training of teachers is an aspect to tackle so as to provide some of the resources. The time devoted for each session of training must be reviewed to better the way the teachers-trainers use to work and give more time to complete the modules. As for teachers, before to be selected as teacher at primary school the minimum admission level for prospective teacher of English is 'Duel', Bachelor or Master in English language education. They may be majored in English studies, Linguistics, Didactics or bilingual translation. Prospective teachers in primary schools with an official international English education certification are admitted to such programs. In academic year 2017-2018 trainers cohort thirty-six (36) teachers were chosen based on qualification showed above and they started with the first form in public primary schools (CI), they were shared in twenty-seven (27) communes. The next academic 2018-2019 another form II (CP) was created, they continued their training; and the basic goal of teaching here for the two forms (CI & CP) is oral communication. In 2019-2020 third form (CE1), oral communication is in progress for the benefit of the learners. For 2020-2021 the program may reach the fourth form (CE2) with the introduction of writing, and reading and then the capability of teachers must be reinforce to bring new methods which may help learners to build new knowledge and enhance their ability of reaction or understanding adaptation to CE2.

3.3 The dynamics at work in private schools

Private schools in Parakou city teach English for many years. Most of teachers who are assigned in teaching English program to primary schools were trained in English and others were not. Some were recruited by an NGO's which signed a contract with the schools and thereafter deployed the teachers in the different schools of the district. Among the private schools teachers others came from Nigeria, it means that they already understand English, but some of the teachers were the director or owner of the school and they did not have any training in English education. They think that due to ability in the language, they could practice the profession of teachers of english in primary schools. Apart from those who were recruited by the organization and then they have the possibility to receive a kind of teaching integration program

applied to primary schools, all those who taught did not get any training of teaching.

4. Research methodology

4.1 Target population

The issue raised here is the necessity of professionalization in the job of English Language Instructors applied to Primary levels. What strategies for Benin as French speaking country? For such question, the target population was made up of English teachers in the city of Parakou in three districts, the school teachers investigated were about thirty-eight (38) and they were interviewed. Some were observed in the class situations when delivering lessons.

4.2 Data collection procedure

From a designed semi- structured method, the research instruments used here comprise two parts. The first part is based on the interviewed with English teachers and the second part is based on class observation where teachers were acting with their learners.

4.2.1 Interviews

At this stage items composing the questionnaire elaborated are contributive to know the grades of teachers and learners in terms of their development. Such collection of information is intended to assess them separately. All the items elaborated were naturally rated on five (05) points acceptance scale 'not real at all (01) to 'totally real' (05). The procedure of administration is face to face and also by phone with some language teachers who are not really available to meeting once I arrive to their respective school.

Many teachers demonstrate good interest to access a training in order to know how to manage their classes by succeeding in lesson delivery. Most of them were trained at University in English department and complete it. Some of them were still performing their study but others were not trained in English, they are just fascinated to English language and they started to teach it to their learners at Primary schools. Many

teachers approached were anxious about the program of English and express their desire to be trained. Moreover, good materials need to be devoted to the new policy in terms of learning because some schools did not have materials like maps, visual aids in general and objects that can help to teach younger learners in primary schools. In this vein, each teacher had his own schedule and decided to teach anyway.

4.2.2 Class observation

The teachers were observed in the situation of delivering lessons to their learners; learners were organized in a group of six (06) and then following in some schools not all, repeating what the teacher was teaching them. They do not have a specific plan and some documents. For all the teachers let the students formed some groups, which is mixed between girls and boys.

5. Data presentation and analysis

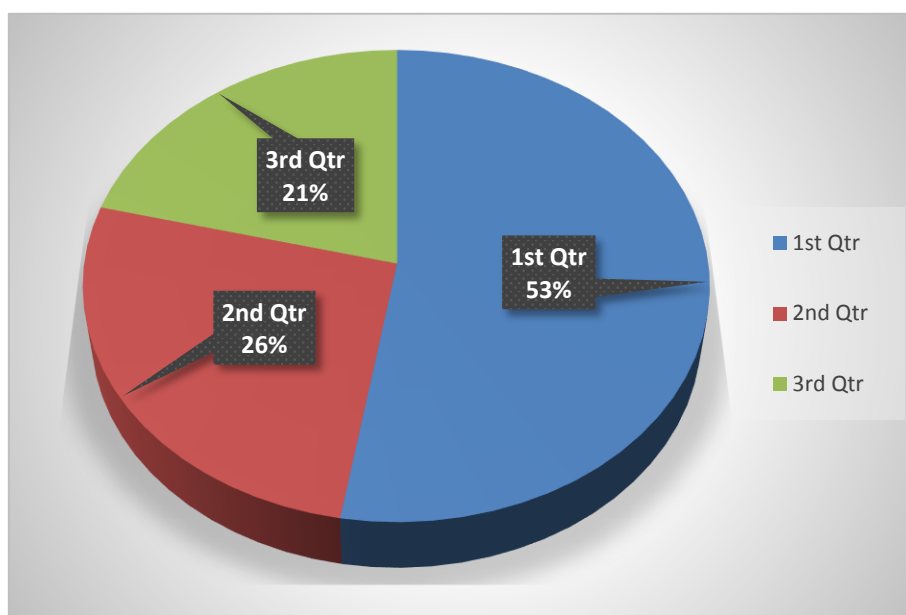
Table: Teachers' perception trainers-training program

Questions	Yes	No	Percentage%		Total
Could you tell me about your specific EFL/ESL training programs?	23	15	60.53%	39.47%	100%
Were you trained as Primary school teachers of English?	18	20	47.37%	52.63%	100%
What do you know about materials appropriateness in such level?	00	38	00	100%	100%
How do you perceive teachers of English development programs applied to primary schools?	38	00	100%	00	100%
Has your profile fitted the norms and standards of professionalization in EFL/ESL?	38	00	100%	00	100%

Source: Investigation data (2021)

For the purpose to have a specific training 60.53% of teachers read English and recognized the necessity. It means that they know something about general English but 39.47% do not reach the same level like the others. About the experience in teaching English in primary school, 52.63% claimed that they do not have any experiences they just start teaching the language and willing to acquire experience there; 47.37% stated that they taught it for 3, 4 or 5 years. To the question on the adaptability of the materials to implement the program of teaching, all of them argued that they did not have it. It means that

100% of surveyed population know that implementing one program is a matter of availability of resources. For the question of improving the quality of teaching, 100% the investigated population show their



interest in getting innovative.

Schedules and strategies to better the practices of the job of teaching also inspire the learners. For the issue of goals and professionalization of the profession, it was demonstrated a great aim of all ways and procedures, which can lead to reach the stage. 100% people investigated agree on the question.

To handle the problem of English teachers' professionalization in Benin, English language instructors at every level must be self-confident because professional development in teaching English as foreign language has gone through different ages. Considering the specific or the different modules for private schools' teachers, they do not have any kind of training session in the holiday or during an academic year.

Some of teachers were recruited by one Non-Government Organization (NGO) and were trained only for few days. Therefore, they knew something about English Teaching in primary and they had

their schedule, document that they used to accomplish the mission. But the others who were recruited by the headmaster, the owner of school, or where the headmaster took himself as the English teacher they did not know more about English teaching. They just used their small knowledge and background, which they got since secondary school.

Legend:

- 1st academic quarter. Teachers who completed their training and get their Bachelor degree.
- 2nd academic quarter. Teachers who did not complete their training.
- 3rd academic quarter teachers who did not get any training in English.

Figure 1: Diagram of Teachers and the level of training in English

Source: Investigation data (2021)

6. Implications of the study

The findings showed that many of the teachers were trained in English only but some of them were untrained in teaching skills. Therefore, it can be clear for them to reconsider professional development to be adopted. However, their understanding appears to be limited in participating to conferences, webinar programs or studying for higher degree. Graham (2015) stated that primary school teachers of English would have at some stages undertaken sort of intensive training in the past to help them with the task of teaching English to their classes. That is why Cambridge Assessment English proposed schedules for teachers training program which are: teaching qualifications and courses, professional development, support for teachers.

6.1. Teaching qualifications and courses

‘The comprehensive range of teaching qualifications and courses are designed for aspiring, developing and experienced teachers working in a variety of teaching contexts. With an emphasis on building essential teaching knowledge, skills and confidence, teachers are helped on

working with primary, secondary and adult students, with part-time, fulltime, face-to-face or online training.'

6.2. Professional development

'Help teachers develop their professional skills by providing a range of paid-for professional development courses, free resources and materials. Everything is based on frameworks to help teachers identify themselves where they are in their journey, where you need them to be, and how you can help them get there.'

6.3. Support for teachers

'Especially materials developed to help teachers prepare students for our exams. Provide also an extensive range of support materials and resources for all teachers of English. However, Steven Graham (2015) showed the strategy of this training is in line with The Ministry of Education's ELT strategies proposed by the British Council containing five objectives:'

- * To develop teachers' English language skills and equip them with English language teaching tools;
- *To encourage school administration to promote English language teaching and learning methods;
- *To strengthen English language teaching and learning resources and network so that the network can accomplish its mission;
- *To develop teaching methodology and evaluation for English language classes with modern instruction media.

6.4 Innovative primary school English programs

Education as the basis of development need through teaching and learning system. So, the acceptance to innovative methods will help learners to acquire appropriately their different competences and abilities needed. Therefore, teachers may be familiar and adapt these new innovative methods to better their ways of teaching in order to get a good result and the quality of good human resources that are educated. For the instance audio, video, physical, and posters are suitable materials that may be the tools of our teachers today if they want to be

in the professionalized system nowadays. Milosevic (2017) showed that speaking of the effectiveness of video materials in teaching “audiovisual resources do not only increase the motivation of teachers and learners, but they also add clarity to the topic taught and make learning more interesting”, he just claims that video materials bring added value, making classes more appealing and making teaching material easier to understand. Furthermore, he argued that when watching the material and listening to it simultaneously, students can almost immediately test their understanding of certain video content, their audio and visual capacities being stimulated at the same. They can rely on many paralinguistic features too, like mimicking, gestures, postures, or attitudes that can assist them in the meaning of the study material, which can facilitate learning. The Cambridge Assessment English said that social media could contribute by learning English. Teachers may use Facebook, free learning tips, activities and videos to get connection all over the world share ideas and experience. These tools, techniques and strategies are the recent innovative tools that the decision makers will consider to better apprehend the question of professionalization.

Furthermore, teachers had many needs so the government especially the Ministry of Education must consider teachers’ needs before designing and implementing the professional development programs. This is not sometimes possible to address teachers’ needs on collective or generic basis; however, (Alsalahi 2015) argue that some negotiation should be conducted with the participants in order to address both the teachers and institutional needs.

6.5. Requesting teaching English in Teacher -training schools

As a new program and the policy of the government to teach English in primary schools, there is a necessity to review and insert in the training program of teachers to scope with English also. To permit the program to be successful, authorities and all ministries involve in those experience integrate it in the training of those future teachers so as they can be able to teach English also to learners.

Conclusion

The professionalism improvement of teachers of English in primary schools to non-English speaking country like Benin is a major program of development to be tackled with higher management by decision – makers in education sector. This category of educationalists are not organized socially, neither technically. Because their promotion is a major question in Benin Republic. They are confronted to orientations at every level of knowledge chain and their officialization probably needs to the first before their technicality for an excellency of the trilogy (Teaching-Learning and evaluating) in EFL/ESL towards learners in Benin public and private primary schools. They have to play a crucial role in the life of younger learners searching for knowledge. Several findings have discussed about teachers as global in terms of training and motivation but the issue of primary school English teachers' development and their profile fixing in education system template is rare in foreign languages education literature. However, it becomes a development planning for Governments to design a national professional training program with stakeholder' validation which requires implementable action plan since the integration of English in primary schools is a true reality in Benin and many other French speaking countries in Africa nowadays.

Some limitations of this research work are not neglectful. Since, the investigation was executed in only a single commune of Parakou in the northern side, it could be interesting to go beyond this city by exploring data from other communities of the country or at least all the experimentation zones from the academic year 2017- 2018 to 2021 - 2022.

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