

Teaching English Noun Formation through Verbal Suffixes in Secondary School

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Abstract

This research work analyses noun formation teaching via a root and a verbal suffix in junior secondary school. We carried out our investigation on the way EFL teachers teach noun formation lesson at Antonio Agostino Neto and Angola Libre junior secondary schools located in Brazzaville. The target population consisted of E.F.L teachers and learners from the classe of Quatrième. We used quantitative and qualitative methods. We also used three (03) instruments for data collection: (1) questionnaires; (2) classroom observation with a checklist and (3) the semi-structured interview with a dictaphone. We also used Excel to analyse statistical data. It resulted from this study that many EFL teachers teach noun formation generally, but not selectively. Consequently, many learners are unable to form and grasp complex nouns having roots and affixes. In this respect, we suggest a teaching strategy through a lesson plan which should help teachers teach and assess noun formation from roots and verbal suffixes effectively.

Keywords: EFL teacher, junior secondary school, noun formation, verbal suffixes, teaching

Résumé

Ce travail analyse l'enseignement sur les noms formés à partir des racines et des suffixes verbaux au collège. Les collèges Antonio Agostino Neto et Angola Libre ont constitué le champ d'investigation de notre travail de recherche. La population cible était constituée des enseignants d'anglais et des apprenants de la classe de quatrième. Nous avons utilisé les méthodes quantitatives, qualitative. Pour ce qui est des instruments de collecte de données, trois instruments utilisés : (1) le questionnaire; (2) l'observation des classes avec une grille d'observation ; et (3) l'entretien semi-ouvert avec un dictaphone. Le logiciel Excel nous a permis d'analyser les données statistiques. Après analyse et interprétation des données, il ressort que le problème majeur entravant l'enseignement des noms formés à partir des racines et des suffixes verbaux est que l'enseignement est donné de manière globale et non sélective. Par conséquent, les apprenants éprouvent des difficultés à former des mots complexes dérivant des racines et des suffixes verbaux. Ainsi, ce travail suggère, à travers une fiche pédagogique, une stratégie pour l'enseignement des noms formés à partir des racines et des suffixes verbaux.

Mots clés : collège, enseignant d'anglais comme langue étrangère, enseignement, suffixes verbaux, formation des mots.

INTRODUCTION

In the Congolese educational system, the secondary school curriculum includes lessons about noun formation. This notion is taught at all levels. The purpose is to enhance learners' capacity of creating nouns by combining roots and affixes. Learners improve their writing and speaking abilities. Therefore, the lesson about noun formation is very momentous to them. Previously, in October 2020, we conducted a survey on the way EFL teachers teach the lesson about noun formation at la Fraternité junior secondary school. As a result, some EFL teachers (60%) lack effective strategies to help learners assimilate word formation easily. Consequently, many learners are unable to form complex words based on roots and affixes. Then, this paper focuses on efficient strategies for a successful noun formation teaching through affixation. As such, our research question is stated as follows: Which teaching strategies can a teacher use to teach a noun formation lesson productively? The paper consists of the review of literature, the research methodology, the major findings, discussions and suggestions.

1. Review of the related literature

This section provides an overview of word formation. We come across some researchers who deal with word formation issue. Hamdallah (1992) points out that « morphological processes such as affixation, compounding, conversion, blending are not mentioned in foreign learner's textbooks». According to Hamdallah, this disinterestedness of noun formation teaching shows the difficulty for learners to understand the mechanism and functions of different components of a word. *Oxford Secondary English Course* is an argument in support of his assertion where claims that students are only trained to learn the meaning of words, but not the way they are shaped. Hamdallah finds it inadequate to learn such a complex word as *discovery* based on its meaning only. According to him, this word should be learnt with regard to the different components that compose it. Teachers, for instance, should let learners know that the word *discovery* is made up of the prefix “**dis-**” the root “**cover**” and the suffix “**-y**” to yield the noun *discovery*. In this connection, Hamdallah argues that:

Students usually learn words (e.g. “unjust”, employer”, blackboard”) all as single units without being aware that most words they learn are derived or composed words which they can break down into components to help them understand their form and therefore, their meaning. (1992, p.63)

This assertion shows that mastering different parts of a word is a clue for a learner to know about its meaning. Hamdallah therefore sides with Cutler (1983) who thinks that «learners should learn carefully word formation processes in order to understand and decode the structure of words they encounter».

Callella (2004: 3) designs five (05) activities which are as follows. The first activity, **Word list**, consists in providing learners with a set of ten words containing prefixes or suffixes. Based on the affix of word, the learner is to be asked to provide both the word class and its definition/meaning. The second refers to **Vocabulary sort** which concerns matching up a word with its appropriate definition. The third is termed **Read-Around Review**, consisting in reviewing the words in the list and their definitions in which the teacher plays an interactive game with learners. In fact, the teacher's role here is to be a facilitator. The teacher first issues learners with cards that contain the definitions of affixed words. Next, s/he reads loudly the cards of affixed words to help the learners find the right word from the cards they have. The fourth activity concentrates on **games** that Callella shares in three sets. The first game is what she calls "*Around the world*". This game gets learners match up affixed words in the pocket chart with the corresponding definitions that the teacher reads. The second one, "*Vocabo*" consists in getting learners to repeat after the teacher's reading of the affixed word and then having them write these words down as the teacher spells them out. Indeed, the teacher here recalls affixed words studied in previous lessons intending at reviewing them. The third and the last one is *Vocabulary race*, which aims at checking a quick understanding of learners on prefixes and suffixes. As such, the teacher displays affixed words and their definitions in pocket chart and selects two learners to compete. These two learners are given half of the definitions of the words. They are supposed to complete the missing part of definition and race to match up the words and their definitions. The rest of the students are allowed to correct errors and offer help. The fifth activity, which is **Assessment**, alludes to an evaluation based on two exercises namely a vocabulary quiz and a review test. In the first exercise, the teacher asks learners to choose the correct affixed word referring to its definition. As for the second one, the teacher gets learners to review the affixed words learned in previous lessons through a given test that s/he submits to them. Concisely, Callella has set mechanisms for affix teaching. According to her, it is worth planning a lesson in such a way that it can be taught in a considerable time.

Kleinman (2006) restrains a series of daily exercises on prefixes and suffixes. According to her, these daily class activities are "*a wonderful way to turn extra classroom minutes into valuable learning time*". Besides, they should be practiced every day and at any moment of lesson (at the very beginning of the class, in the middle of the class or at the end of the class) as they aim at getting learners in the learning mood, especially about prefixes and suffixes. In this respect, Kleinman evokes different types of exercises namely:

- 1)- Multiple choice questions: a type of exercise by which learners are supposed to choose among the different suggested answers the correct one (based on prefixes and suffixes)

2)- Matching up exercise: an exercise wherein learners are asked to match either the affixed words with their corresponding definition, or prefixes and suffixes their meanings.

3)- Blank filling: learners fill the blanks with prefixes, suffixes or roots.

Some other exercises consist in making verbs with the suffix *-ize* for example. Another variation of the same exercise is that, from a given verb, learners make nouns with the suffixes *-ion*, *-tion*, *-ation*, *-ition*. According to Kleinman, the series of the exercises suggested above is very effective to practice and get learners grasp and use affixed words easily.

Hamawand (2008) broaches noun with a particular regard to morpheme occurrence referred to as base driven selection of affixes. As such, Hamawand (2008) argues that affixes do not co-occur hazardedly; there are reasons, which underlie their co-occurrence. In fact, in a case of double suffixes, there is a particular ready-made order of suffixes inasmuch as one determines the occurrence of other. The word “*usefulness*” for instance, is consisted of three parts including “*use*”, “*ful*” and “*ness*”. “*Use*” being independent by its own, is the root of the word. However, “*ful*” and “*ness*” are bound affixes and constitute the suffixes that are attached to “*use*” to form “*usefulness*”. As far as the occurrence order is concerned, we remark that the adjectival suffix “*ful*” occurs first to yield the adjective “*useful*” before allowing the occurrence of the nominal suffix “*ness*” to result in the noun “*usefulness*”. Indeed, such occurrence is justified according to Hamawand by the straight meaning relationship that suffixes share with the roots they attach to. This choice is what Rochelle (2009: 198) calls “*a base-driven selection*”. In fact, What Hamawand advances is right because the non-respect of the syntagmatic relationship with the word “*usefulness*” will trigger off an odd or strange word “*usenessful*”. The following section deals with research methodology.

2. Research methodology

The present research work uses quantitative, qualitative approaches. We carried out our investigation in two junior secondary schools: Antonio Agostino Neto and Angola Libre, both are located in Brazzaville, during the academic year 2022-2023. The target population consisted of E.F.L teachers and learners from the class of *Quatrième* who study English in a French-speaking environment.

2.1 Participants

The participants consisted of fourteen (14) EFL teachers and two hundred and eighty (280) learners whom we selected seven (7) teachers and one hundred and forty (140) learners per school.

2.2 Instruments used for data collection

We used three (3) instruments for data collection: (1) observation checklist; (2) semi-structured interviews with a dictaphone; (3) questionnaires.

2.3 Classroom observation

Classroom observation enables us to collect objective data by watching passively actors (teachers and learners) in the different sequences of a lesson. So, we selected at random four EFL teachers and four classes of “quatrième” for classroom observation, two EFL teachers and two classes per school. Besides, we designed a checklist with items to check during the lesson on noun formation, namely the teaching techniques and strategies the teacher uses for instruction and the impact on learners’ lexical competence. The observation lasted one term from January to March 2023. We observed one session per class a week; then four sessions per week for the four classes. We totally observed forty-eight (48) sessions during a term.

2.4. Semi-structured interviews

We carried out the semi-structured interviews among the four teachers whose classes were observed. The objective was to know how the teacher plan his lesson on noun formation and learners’ writing performance. We recorded the interviews with a dictaphone and interpreted them.

2.5 Questionnaires

We designed two questionnaires, one for teachers and another for learners. We investigated on the way instructors teach noun formation using verbal suffixes and its impact on learners’ lexical competence. We will present the results of this study in the next section entitled major findings and discussion.

2.6 Data collection and analysis

The quantitative method helped us to collect numerical data from questionnaires; however, the qualitative method the non-numerical data from interviews. We used Excel software to analyze statistical data and the formula for percent proportion in order to appreciate the participants’ responses:

$$\begin{array}{lcl} N \Rightarrow 100\% & \Rightarrow \% = & \frac{100 \times n}{N} \\ n \Rightarrow ? & & \end{array}$$

N: The entire number of participants

n: The partial number of participants

3. Major Findings and Discussion

In the following lines, we provide the results of our investigation and discussion.

3.1. Major findings

This sub-section aims at presenting the results of questionnaires designed for teachers and learners as well as those of classroom observation.

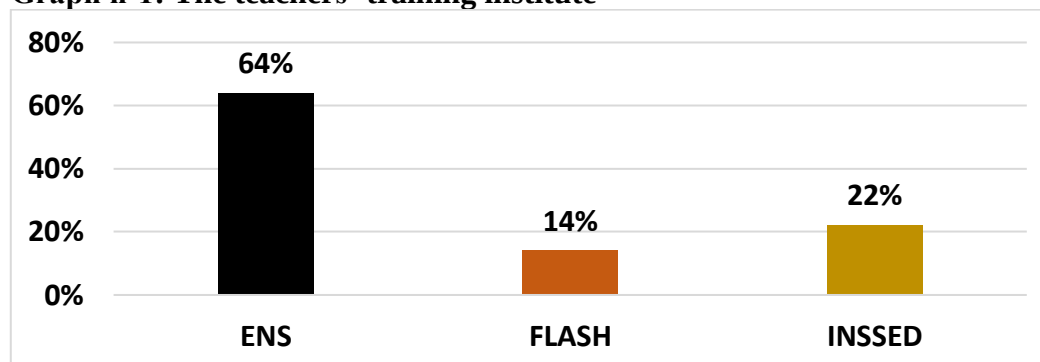
3.1.1. Results related to the questionnaire for teachers

The questionnaire for teachers focuses on three items: the training institute, the teaching experience years and the teaching strategies used to teach noun formation through verbal affixes.

Question n°1: Where have you been trained?

The aim of this question was to know about the institute where the teacher was trained.

Graph n°1: The teachers' training institute

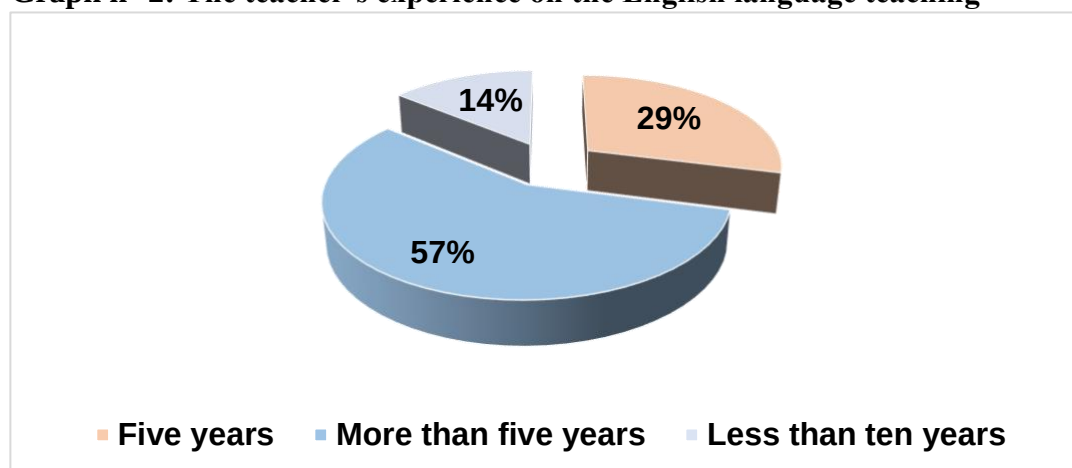


The results of the above graph reveal that the majority of teachers (64%) were trained at Ecole Normale Supérieure (E.N.S) and a few (22%) at Institut Supérieur des Sciences de l'Education (INSSSED), the current E.N.S in charge of teachers' training. Undoubtedly, they all have the English teaching language degrees. As such, they are supposed to have knowledge of word formation because this item is taught in syntax and semantics courses at university. Besides, it is included in the English Teaching syllabus of secondary school. Therefore, prospective teachers should be familiar with during their initial training. Only, few teachers (14%) were trained at the faculty of Arts (Flash).

Question n°2: How long have you been teaching English?

We asked this question to find out about the teachers' teaching experience.

Graph n° 2: The teacher's experience on the English language teaching

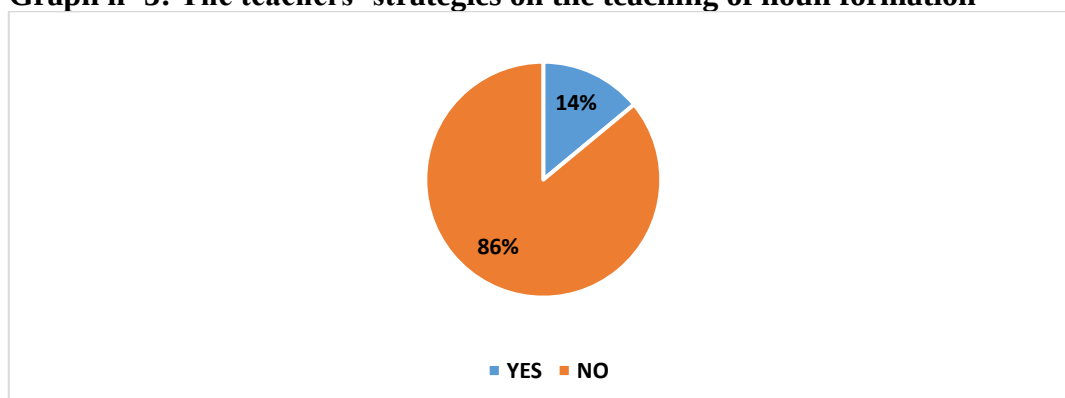


It results from the above graph that many teachers (57%) have a teaching experience of more than five years. Some (29%) have a teaching experience of five years. Only few of them (14%) have not yet five years of teaching career. Otherwise, all these have at least taught noun formation through verbal affixes as required the English teaching curriculum of junior secondary school.

Question n° 3: Do you usually select a type of affix while teaching noun formation?

This question aims at knowing whether teachers proceed by selecting affixes when teaching noun formation. In other word, we want to check if they focus on one specific category of affixes such as verbal affixes, adjectival affixes to teach noun formation.

Graph n° 3: The teachers' strategies on the teaching of noun formation

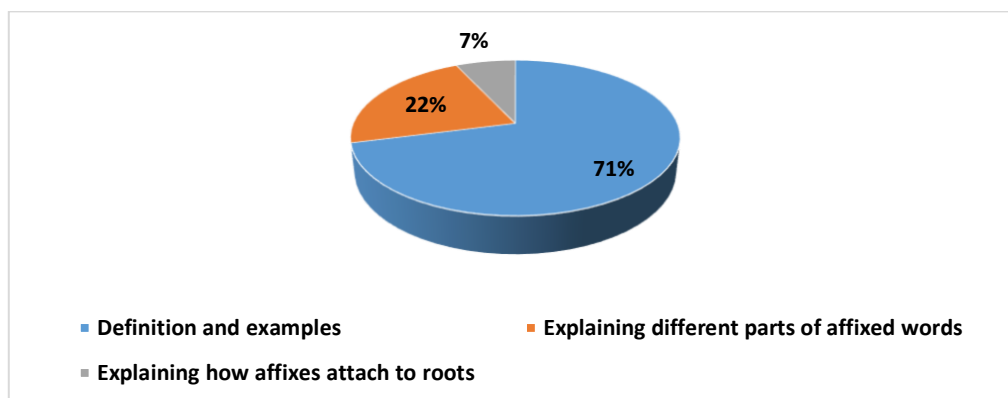


The results of the graph reveals that a great majority of teachers (86%) do not select affixes while teaching noun formation. They usually mix affixes while teaching this lesson. In other words, they do not categorize them into nominal, verbal or adverbial; but they teach them altogether. Knowing that teaching is selecting, teachers should not do so. Consequently, learners find noun formation difficult and ungraspable.

Question n°4: How do you teach affixation?

We designed this question to know the way teachers teach affixation, which is part of items to teach at the class of “quatrième”, as required in the English teaching syllabus.

Graph n°4: Teachers' teaching method on affixes.

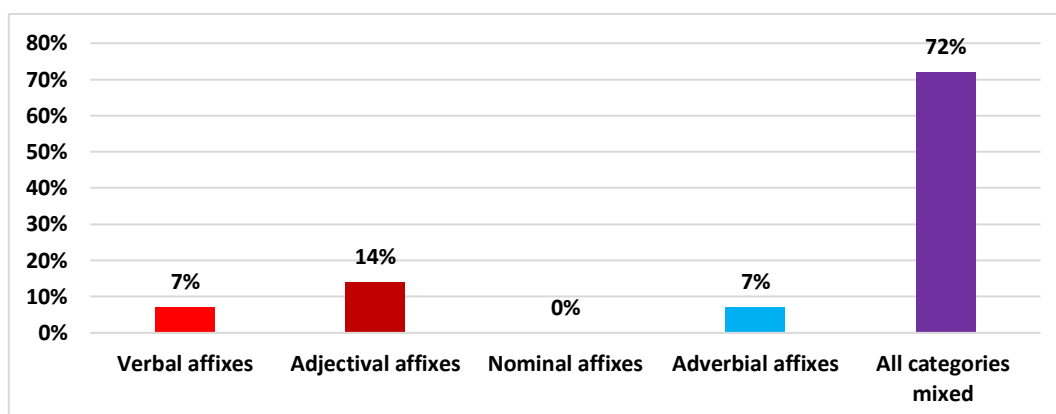


This graph unveils that many teachers (71%) teach affixation by defining first affixes; i.e. prefixes and suffixes, then provide example of affixed words; whereas some of them (22%) proceed in explaining the different parts of affixed words, i.e. separate the affix from the root word. Only few (07%) prefer explaining the process of affixation (prefixation or suffixation). Otherwise, they explain how affixes attach to roots.

Question n°5: Which category of affix do you usually teach to form words?

Through this question, we wanted to find out the category of affixes, which teachers usually teach to form words.

Table n°5: the teacher's selection of the category of the affixes



The results of the above graph indicate that the majority of teachers (72%) do not select the type of affixes to teach. Instead, they usually mix them up while teaching. It emerges that only few teachers (14%) select adjectival affixes when teaching. However, teachers should teach affixes selectively in order to facilitate their easy grasp by learners and show how an affix can be attached to a given root. Teachers should categorize affixes in terms of nominal, verbal, adverbial and adjectival affixes, i.e., which affix can be attached to either of the above category.

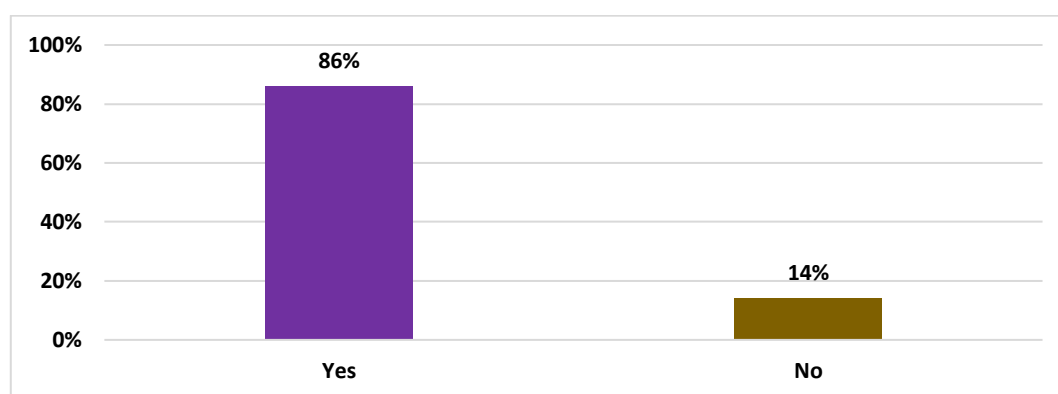
3.1.2. Results related to the questionnaire for learners:

We designed learners' questionnaire to check two (2) variables: their enthusiasm about the learning of noun formation through affixes and the major difficulties that they may have.

Question n°1: Have you ever studied the lesson about noun formation?

By asking this question, we would like to see whether learners have already encountered such a lesson in their training.

Graph n°6: Learners' opinions about the teaching of noun formation in the class

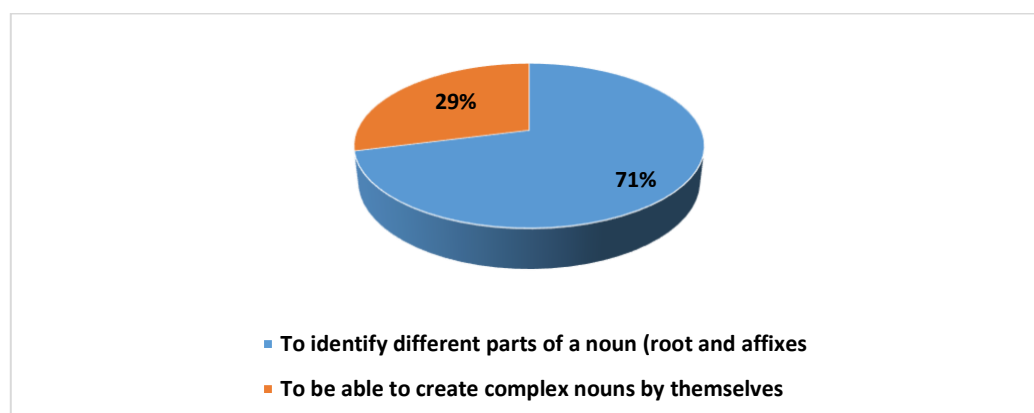


According to the above graph, the majority of learners (86%) have already studied the lesson about noun formation, whereas few of them (14%) have not. Normally, learners should have knowledge about noun formation.

Question 2: According to you, to what extent is a noun formation lesson important?

We designed this question to find out learners' interest on noun formation lessons.

Graph n°7: Learners' viewpoints on the relevance of noun formation teaching

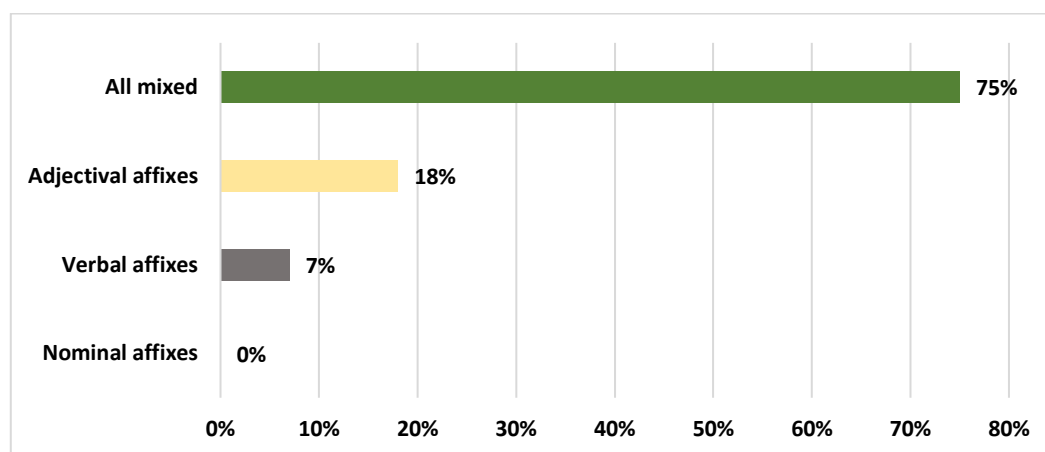


It turns out from the above graph that a great majority of learners (71%) opine that a lesson about noun formation enables them to identify and grasp the different components of a complex noun. However, some of them (29%) consider a lesson about noun formation as a means to shape complex nouns by themselves.

Question 3: Which kinds of affixes does your teacher focus on?

The aim of this question is to check the types of affixes the teacher emphasizes before the noun formation lesson.

Graph n°8: The types of affixes, which the teacher emphasizes.

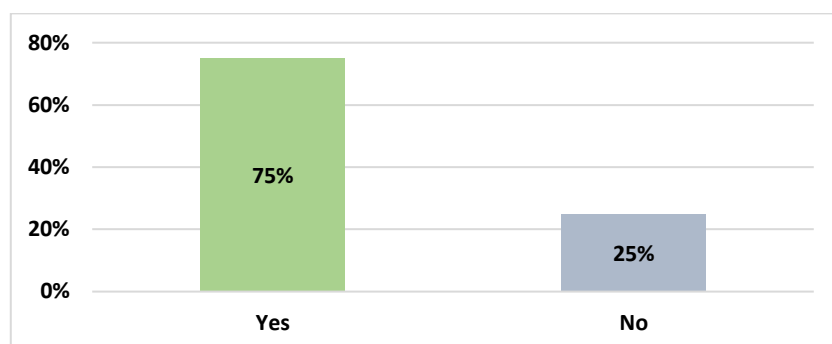


From the results of the above graph, most of learners (75%) confirmed that their teacher mixes all affixes. He does not select them per category. This way of teaching prevents learners from grasping the types of affixes useful for the noun formation lesson. This makes it difficult for learners to differentiate the types of affixes as well as to know how an affix can be attached to a given root to give a noun, or which word is obtained when adding such or such an affix to a given root. As we can see, only few of them (18%) emphasize the categorical affixes linked to adjectives. Besides, none of them privileges the teaching of nominal affixes, which are essential for noun formation.

Question n°4: Do you have any difficulties to form complex nouns from a given verbal suffix and a root?

This question aims at verifying whether learners have some difficulties to form complex nouns by adding suffixes to a given verb root.

Graph n°9: Learners' difficulties to create complex nouns from a given verb root



The results from the above graph show that the majority of learners (75%) have problems forming complex nouns by adding verbal suffixes to the root. Whereas, only few of them (25%) have no problem forming complex nouns. In fact, teachers should teach affixes in a very simple way. They should specify that lesson by first selecting one type of affix and then one condition (either the structure or the position, the function). Actually, teaching too many things at the same time can hinder the learner's understanding.

3.1.3 Results related to classroom observation

We focused on the following items during the classroom observation: the categorical affixes the teacher selects and the strategies and steps, which he uses to teach complex nouns. As for learners, we mainly leaned on their motivation on the noun formation issue and their performance during applied drills or formative assessment. As aforementioned, we selected at random four EFL teachers and four classes for classroom observation (two EFL teachers and two classes per school).

1. Teachers' observation

Table n°1: EFL Teacher Evaluation/Observation Checklist

Items	A		B		C		D	
1-Categorical affixes the teacher selects :	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
All categories mixed	x		x		x		x	
Adjectival affixes		x		x	x			x
Nominal affixes		x		x		x		x
Verbal affixes	x			x		x		x
2. Strategies and steps the teacher uses:								
Naming only each part of the noun (prefix-root-suffix)	x		x		x		x	
-Presenting the structure of the noun -Naming each part of the noun (prefix-root-suffix - Explaining each component of the noun (whether the affix/root is linked to word class, grammar or meaning)		x		x		x		x

Total	4
%	100

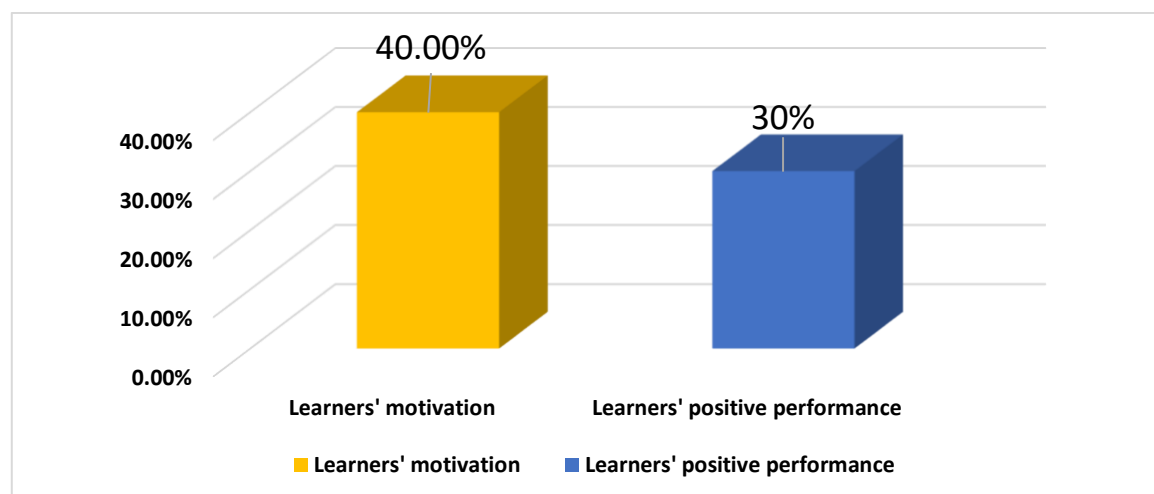
Legend: A,B,C and D: EFL teachers observed during class sessions.

The results of the above table revealed that:

- 1- All teachers do not select one category of affix while teaching a complex noun; formation. In other words, they mix all of them;
- 2- Three-quarters (3/4) of teachers do not focus on the adjectival affixes;
- 3- None of them emphasizes nominal affixes;
- 4- Only a quarter (1/4) of teachers teach verbal suffixes; this is what they should normally insist on.
- 5- All the observed teachers only present the different parts of a complex noun without providing the reasons for each while teaching.

Learners' observation

Graphic n°10: Learners' behaviours and performance



It emerges from the above graphic that learners' motivation is very insignificant (40%), whence their little performance (30%) during class tests.

4. Discussion

Our discussion is based on what hinders the teaching of noun formation in secondary school. To start with, it turns out that the teaching of noun formation is still a problem for teachers. Our investigations unveil that the majority of EFL teachers teach noun formation. Unfortunately, their teaching strategies are less effective as it is noticeable in the results of both teachers' questionnaire and observation. In fact, most of teachers (72%) do not select the type of affixes during

the class. On the contrary, they mix them up (cf. table n° 1 of teachers' observation checklist).

Besides, they do not teach affixes according to their categories related to word classes. Normally, they should do that to help learners create words by themselves and enrich their vocabulary (cf. graph 3). Consequently, learners have difficulties to create words by themselves (cf. learners' observation graph n°10)

Moreover, teachers of English lack creativity i.e., they do not endeavor to set up new teaching strategies to solve the problem linked to the teaching and learning of noun formation.

All these difficulties that teachers encounter might be accounted for the fact that inspectors do not permanently organize workshop on vocabulary teaching to show the different steps on word teaching formation lesson. Normally, strategies should be set up and included in the teaching card for vocabulary teaching mainly on the noun formation.

All these concerns impact on learners' understanding of word formation revealed in the graphic n°9 showing (75%) of them who have difficulties grasping noun formation may result from the fact that throughout their school career, they have not been well equipped with appropriate methods on the way to form words by themselves thanks to suffixes. Indeed, what comes out from their former lessons on word formation that we observed is that those are too general i.e., during one session, teachers may teach the entire lesson of word formation. This fact has also been confirmed from our observation of the teacher's teaching cards, which instead of selecting one affix to teach, they mix more than one affix for one lesson, what makes it difficult for learners to grasp the issue about word formation.

In nutshell, the teaching of word formation and more particularly that of noun formation via verbal suffixes deserves a serious attention. The next section is devoted to the practical suggestions about the teaching of noun formation through verbal suffixes.

5. Practical suggestions

This section aims at suggesting some remedial solutions concerning the teaching of noun formation through verbal suffixes in the class of Quatrième in secondary school. In fact, these practical suggestions emphasize the teaching strategies mainly based on three Ps model i.e., Presentation, Practice and Production as summarized below.

5.1. Presentation

This stage is devoted to the presentation of the selected item. Let us consider the formation of nouns thanks to the verbal suffix –er. The teacher can go through the following steps:

Step 1, the teacher provides some examples of nouns bearing the verbal suffix –er;
Step2, the teacher makes learners observe the way words are formed thanks to structure Root + suffix (-er);

Step3, the teacher tells learners about the function of the verbal suffix **-er**, which generally creates agent nouns when added to verbs.

5.2. Practice

The main purpose of this stage is to reinforce the learner's understanding of the key issue related to the verbal suffix **-er** (e.g *goer*, *killer*, *fighter*). The teacher first illustrates on the board and then makes learners practice them. This step is fully performed by learners and the teacher appears just as a guide.

5.3. Production

This is about learner's oral and written production based on the selected item. Indeed, learners are requested to provide their own examples according to their understanding of the lesson by referring to the teacher's patterned examples. At this level, the teacher simply observes how learners produce orally or by writing their own examples thanks to their understanding of the item learnt. This step aims at increasing the learners' speaking and writing skills.

5.4. A sample of teaching card related to noun formation through verbal suffixes

Level: Quatrième 2

Subject: English

October 6th 2023

Matter: Word formation
minutes

Title of the lesson: Forming noun from verb using the suffix **-er**
Complete

G.O 2: Expressing orally
rules, 20

Date: Monday,

Duration: 55

Teaching aids:

English Grammar

	II.2. Practice: The teacher makes learners observe examples with the suffix -er on the board and make them practice them after him. II.3. Production: The teacher asks learners to provide their own examples of nouns from the suffix -er. Next the teacher makes learners copy down the lesson in their copybooks. III. Evaluation 1. Applied exercise The teacher asks learners to find the agents of actions explained in the provided sentences. 2. Homework The teacher tells learners to fill the blanks of the text provided with the indicated words ending with the verbal suffix -er.	2- researcher 3-employer 4- teller Answers 1- follower, 2- sinner, 3- singer 4-doer 5-taster 6-runner Learners copy down the lesson in their copybooks. Answers 1- a learner 2- a swimmer 3- a baker 4- a teacher 5- a speaker 6- a player Answers 1- player 2- goalkeeper 3- players 4- fighter	Task 4: Look, listen and practice. Task4: Based on the structure above, provide six (6) nouns of your own from the verbal suffix -er Task 5: Copy down the lesson in your copybooks. Task 6: Find the agents of the actions explained in the following sentences: 1- The person who learns. 2- The one who swims. 3- He who bakes. 4- Somebody who teaches. 5- Someone who speaks. 6- Someone who plays. Task: Fill the blanks of the text below with the following words: fighter, player,	10 minutes 10 minutes 10 minutes	
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			goalkeeper, players Yesterday I saw the..1..who scored the goal. The..2..failed to stop the ball. The referee asked the ..3..to stop fighting because the..4..place is the ring.		
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Conclusion

This paper examines the effectiveness of the strategies EFL teachers use to teach noun formation from roots and verbal suffixes in junior secondary school. It results from this study that the lesson on noun formation is really inserted in the English teaching program of junior secondary school. Also, teachers teach it in junior secondary school. However, the teachers' strategies and techniques do not help learners be able to form nouns by combining on their own roots and verbal suffixes. Indeed, they teach it more broadly than selectively. In fact, the teaching of word formation in general, and that of noun formation through the verbal suffixes in particular, is hindered by the lack of appropriate teaching strategies from teachers. Their task should be to provide learners with materials that could allow them to master word formation in order to form their own new words. The lack of appropriate training on the teaching of word formation in their background is also a hindrance for teachers to teach effectively formation lesson because even more qualified teachers fail. In fact, many teachers of English teach the item of word formation anyhow since there is no teaching model initiated by the official English teaching curriculum of junior secondary school. Therefore, inspectors should organize workshops and seminars devoted to the teaching of word formation. A sample of a lesson plan shows that noun creation can be taught, learnt and assessed like many other English language issues such as grammar, reading comprehension, and language functions.

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