

Examining the Way Benin EFL Part-time Teachers Conduct Their Teaching, Learning and Evaluation Processes

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Abstract

The present paper aims to examine how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) part-time teachers conduct Teaching/Learning, and Evaluation in their classes, the strategies and techniques used regarding the four EFL skills. It also provides a descriptive account of the training needs of Benin EFL part-time teachers who face the challenge of teaching EFL skills in secondary schools. A total number of 40 EFL part-time teachers participated in the pilot study. To obtain the data, qualitative research methods, namely questionnaire and interviews were both administrated to the part-time teachers, pedagogical advisors, and inspectors from Ouémé districts. Observation is also an important instrument used in this research. The results of the study revealed that part-time teachers had limited awareness in Teaching/ Learning/ Evaluation. It was suggested that there is a need for training Benin part-time teachers regarding the teaching and evaluation of language skills.

Keywords: teaching/learning/evaluation, training in teaching, part-time teachers, EFL skills

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a skill like any other skill; it can be acquired and refined with the help of methods and techniques peculiar to it. With good strategies and appropriate teaching aids, the teacher's effectiveness can be enhanced. In fact teaching is more than standing before a class and applying a few specific techniques. It is not merely presenting textbook information and then testing the student's ability to repeat it: there is no magic formula for transforming knowledge from the teacher's mind to align the student's.

Teaching effectively requires that the teacher develops competencies in communication, availability, creativity, individual consideration, social awareness, feedback, professionalism, consciousness, and problem solving. This view is supported by several findings:

“Teaching is not a mechanical process. It is an intricate, exacting, challenging job. Teaching is not a monologue but a dialogue ; a dialogue in which one partner is vocal, but the other partner may, by simple expressions on the face, by some gestures or exclamation can be part of the system” (Kochhar 2004).

The teacher should be interested in facts and skills. The teacher should be an educator, interested in developing all the capacities of the child. The teacher can by pointing out unnoticed obstacles, answering questions and furnishing supplementary information or sources for research, helping the student analyze his/ her difficulties. He may also provide encouragement to new sources of interest in the activities.

In fact much literature is available on EFL teacher training programs. Findings revealed that the education system and more specifically the training of Benin EFL part-time teachers is at risk nowadays. Since 1990, after the national Conference, Benin went through a couple of reforms. Among the reforms, we have the training of all teachers. Unfortunately, due to the increase in number of part-time teachers, the authorities have failed in their role.

The present study seeks to explore how EFL part-time teachers in Benin conduct teaching, learning, and evaluation; how they can play an active role by participating in a training program, and how this may impact positively their teaching.

Definitions of teaching/learning/Evaluation

Teaching

Teaching is a process by which students are motivated to learn. (Woodburn, 2013). According to the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*, to teach is to give someone knowledge or skills. In *Cambridge'Advanced learner's dictionary'*, to teach means to give someone knowledge, to train someone, or to instruct him or her. Thus teaching can then be viewed as a powerful tool in education. It is a kind of interaction which happens between the teacher and his learners.

Learning

Learning on the other hand can be defined in the Oxford dictionary as gaining knowledge or a skill in a subject or activity to become aware of something by hearing about it from somebody else. In Cambridge dictionary, to learn is to get knowledge or skill in a new subject or activity.

Learning according to Kochhar (2004: 25) involves changes occurring over a relatively shorter period of time which enable the learner to respond more adequately to the situation. There are various aspects of the process of learning. It is essential to pay attention to the following aspects while talking about learning:

- The needs of the learner
- The readiness to learn
- The learning situation
- The interaction

Evaluation

Richards (1993: 130) defines evaluation as the process of judging the effectiveness of any component in the teaching process. Effective evaluation should be based on a task, which may be any activity designed to help achieve a particular learning goal.

The word also refers to the decision making which follows assessment. It is a judgment regarding the quality, value, or worth of a response or performance based on established criteria and curriculum standards.

Training

The term *“training refers to activities directly focused on a teacher’s present responsibilities and is typically aimed at short term and immediate goals”*. Richards (1994) More often it is perceived as preparation for induction into a first teaching position or as preparation to take on a new teaching assignment or responsibility.

Training involves understanding basic concepts and principles as a prerequisite for applying them to teaching. It is also involves trying out new strategies in the classroom, usually with supervision, and monitoring, or getting feedback from others on one’s practice.

The same author supported that the content of training is usually determined by experts and is often available in standard training formats or through prescriptions in methodology books. The following are examples of goals from a training perspective:

- Learning how to use effective strategies to open a lesson.
- Adapting the textbook to match the class.
- Learning how to use group activities in a lesson.
- Using effective questioning techniques
- Using classroom aids and resources (e.g., video).
- Techniques for giving learners feedback on performance.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to provide a descriptive account of the training needs of EFL part-time teachers in Benin secondary schools. The specific objective is to draw the attention of all stakeholders on the needs of EFL part-time teachers training.

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated for this research study:

1. Do EFL-part-time teachers have the required qualifications?
2. How do EFL part-time teachers conduct the teaching/learning/evaluation process?
3. What are the impacts of their teaching on students’ achievements?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature will take into account two fields: researchers who have previously dealt with training programs, and the principles of teaching/learning/evaluation in Benin context.

Teacher's training can be viewed as a cornerstone of teacher professionalism. In Benin, educational authorities invest and are still putting great attention on teachers' training programs. Schools administrators and the whole educational system complain on the teachers training issue. More specifically, they would like educational institutions think seriously about the great number of EFL part time teachers, this in order to improve their quality, and to meet the needs of students.

The teacher quality is an issue in most Countries especially those with limited access to education. "Many teachers in these countries are untrained or underqualified, or teaching subjects in which they are neither qualified nor trained for. Perraton, Creed & Robinson, (2002)

Teachers report that their knowledge and skills in teaching increased dramatically as a result of their involvement in training. (Boles, 1992).

Moreover, Wood (cited by Hargreaves, & Fullan, 1992) argued that :

"training is necessary to raise the quality of educational standards because teachers need to go ahead continually by equipping themselves with the knowledge and skills to enhance their teaching skills and students' learning opportunities".

Most of the time part time teacher-training programs are composed of two main dimensions. The first dimension consist of linguistic and academic knowledge. The second consists of pedagogic skills, that is the strategies and the technics useful in a class situation. In Benin, it is compulsory to put emphasis on those dimensions.

To quote Murdoch (1994), he suggested that "teacher-training program should think more in terms of activities that will help develop both the pedagogical skills of the trainee and his or her language competencies".

Anderson (2004, p. 22) portrays effective teachers as goal achieving people who want to achieve goals set by themselves, educational authorities, or school administrators. Stronge (2007), while summarizing his research findings characterizes effective teachers as well-trained professionals who manage the classroom well and know how to plan, teach, and monitor student progress.

Shuman (2004) indicates that when it comes to ask a question on what do teachers need to know in order to teach well? The depth and quality of teachers content knowledge is a critical aspect of their ability to teach.

Studies in the past have also proved that teachers training programs can impact positively learners' achievement. (Hayes, 2000; Jacobs & Farrell, 2001). The important

issue with training, then, is how to enable the transfer of the learned skill to the classroom setting. In order to ensure proper transfer, any training must be reinforced with other follow-up procedures, such as mentoring or peer coaching, to be assured that learning transfers to the teacher's classroom.

There are principles for teaching, learning, and evaluating English in Benin. Those principles are sum up in three points: the learner-centered approach ; the use of strategies such as individual, pair, and group work ; finally, the learners should be encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. In Benin, the curricula are designed according to the competency-based approach. The approach aims at training students to develop different integrated skills in themselves and making them the center of the learning process.

Nunan (1999: p. 148) contends that rather than fitting students to courses, courses should be designed to fit students. Learners have to do the learning for themselves. Three main competencies are to be developed and compulsory for the teacher to know :

- The disciplinary competencies
- The transdisciplinary competencies
- The transversal competencies.

The disciplinary competencies can be viewed as subject-related assets to be developed in EFL learners so as to enable them to indulge in effective interaction with speakers and writers of the English language. In EFL teaching and learning in Benin, there are three disciplinary competencies:

- Indulging in appropriate oral communication (Disciplinary Competency N°1 or DC1) ;
- Reacting to a written or oral message (Disciplinary Competency N°2 or DC2) ;
- Writing texts for a variety of purposes and functions (Disciplinary Competency N°3 or DC3).

The transversal competencies are considered, for the main, as learning tools for all subject matters. They include:

- making use of the available information;
- problem solving;
- using critical thinking; and
- working cooperatively.

The transdisciplinary competencies are taught and learned in every subject field. They relate to social behaviour, that is why they are considered as competencies for life.

METHOD

This study is a descriptive survey. As it is mentioned in the preceding section, it is intended to explore training for Benin EFL Part-time teachers. The instruments used in this research are questionnaire, interview, and classroom observation. A total number of forty (40) part time-teachers were involved in this study. Eight pedagogical Advisors and six inspectors were interviewed. A total number of twenty one classes were observed by the researcher.

Data Collection

Data collection took six months from January to June 2015. Twenty one (21) Teachers scheduled for inspection were selected from their respective schools and were asked conveniently to fill out the questionnaire. Negotiation was made to distribute questionnaires to nineteen (19) other EFL part-time teachers in the schools visited. Negotiation was also made to undertake a follow-up research (observation) in a different context to the other part-time teachers (19) just to check if there is a need for training them too. Opportunities allowed the researcher to be part of the members of the committee for inspection in the schools involved in this research. Data was collected in Benin specifically in the department of Ouémé-Plateau regions.

Table1. Schools involved number of classes observed, and other EFL part-time teachers

Schools involved in the study	Number of classes observed (context of inspection)	Other Teachers selected randomly
1 CEG Dangbo	3	0
2 CEG Avrankou	2	2
3 CEG Wanho	2	0
4 CEG Adjohoun	2	0
5 CEG Bio-Guerra	3	5
6 CEG Davié	3	4
7 CEG Cocotiers	3	2
8 Lycée Toffa 1er	3	6
Total	21	19

Criteria for classroom Observation

The researcher followed criteria and indicators of class observation. They are comprised of rules, principles of teaching, learning and evaluation in the context of the CBA programs. The hour of observation was about fifty five (55) minutes.

RESULTS FROM PART-TIME EFL QUESTIONNAIRE

For question 1, on EFL part-time teaching experience, twenty four (24) teachers, that is 61% confessed that their teaching experience range from 0 to 5 years. Thirteen (13) teachers, that is 32% replied that their teaching experience was comprised between 5 to 10 years. Finally three teachers (03), that is 7% were veteran teachers.

For question 2, the answer was synchronized. Thus, 100% EFL part-time teachers believed that they mastered the EFL skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing).

For question 3, when it comes to know about their preference on the teaching skills, twenty seven (27), that is 67% of EFL part-time teachers confessed they did like teaching reading. Six teachers (6), that is 15% preferred teaching speaking. Four (04) teachers, that is 10% had strong passion for listening. Finally three (03) teachers, that is 7% would devote their time to teach writing.

Regarding question 4, on the reasons for their choice, EFL part-time teachers' selection for reading could be explained by the fact that it was less difficult to follow as far as its strategies are concerned. The pre-reading stage, with the pre-questions, the while reading, and the post reading are easy steps and does not require too many time.

EFL part-time teachers preferred teaching listening because learners' level in vocabulary did not allow them to teach that skill. When they read the text, it was impossible for learners to catch the words.

Regarding their preference in teaching speaking, EFL part-time teachers felt comfortable in teaching it simply because communication is the most important among all the fourth skills. Lastly, EFL part-time teachers put emphasis in teaching writing, because first of all it is the most difficult of all skills to acquire. Second, the credit allocated to that part of skill for the national exam is so important. Thus, it is compulsory to train learners on how to write.

For question 5 about EFL part-time teachers' involvement in any training session, all of them (21) teachers scheduled to be inspected agreed to their participation on a training program. Among the other nineteen teachers selected randomly, 50% of them agreed they attended a training session and 50% confirmed they had never attended it.

All the participants confirmed that the training session (teaching council) occurred every Tuesday afternoon. It is often directed by the pedagogical Advisor (PA) or the teacher mentor (AE). Also, they session is organized by the Department most of the time for two days and once a year. Veteran EFL part-time teachers confirmed that they follow training program twice a year apart from the weekly exchange. This happens during the periodical visit organized by PA. The period may run from the (first semester : October to February), and beginning of the (second semester : March to May).

For the sixth question, aiming at knowing if they have been visited or inspected, all EFL part-time teachers agreed that they have been visited and inspected at least once in their career. All of the EFL part-time teachers agreed that the PA and the inspectors did not have a bad impression on them. Nine (9) teachers that is 22% were fair ; Fifteen (15) EFL part-time teachers, that is 37% were fairly good, Eight (08) of them, that is 20% were good, and finally Eight (08), that is 20% were very good.

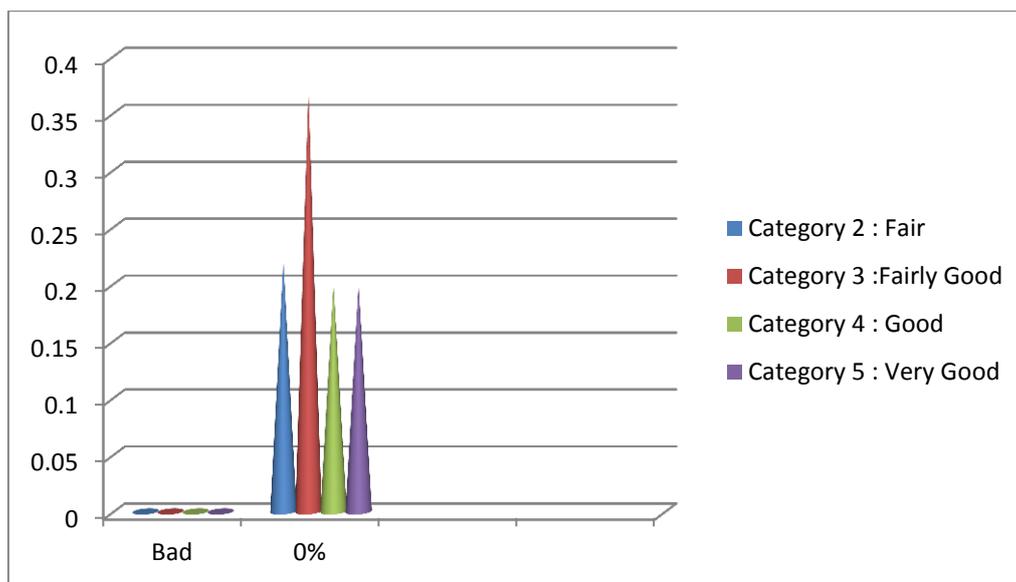


Figure 1. Impression of PA and Inspectors after a class visit

On the last question, a total number of twenty three (23) part-time teachers, that is 57 % have pedagogic difficulties. Ten (10) part- time teachers have academic problems that is 25%, and finally seven (7) that is 17% part- time teachers were concerned about academic and pedagogic weakness.

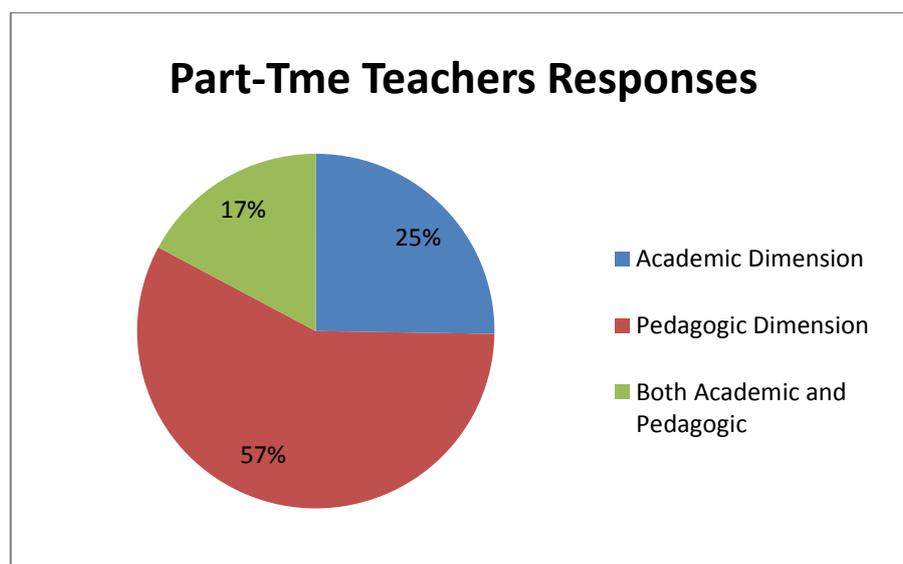


Figure 2. Part-Time teachers Responses on their difficulties in teaching

RESULTS FROM CLASS OBSERVATION

From the observation, the researcher noticed that : -The teaching/learning/evaluation process was not well conducted. Only five (5) part-time teachers over twenty one (21) scheduled to be inspected did a great job. The remaining (16) teachers simply need reinforcement. For the follow-up activity, seven (7) succeeded in teaching really. Twelve (12) teachers need intensive training. Overall, 28 part-time need to be rescued.

There was a messing up as far as EFL skills are concerned. The strategies and technics to teach listening were beside the norms. There was a confusion regarding the organization of the students in the groups. At a point of time, the researcher just asked herself if the observed teachers were really aware of what they were teaching.

EFL part-time teachers were the only one to write from the beginning to the end. The majority did not praise learners at the right moments, and sometimes, the praising was too much. In addition, they wrote with mistakes on the board. Mismanagement of the time and the board was observed and learners were asked to complete quickly the assignment in a very short period.

Another important element that the researcher noticed was in the fact that lessons were not well – prepared. In seven classes observed the teachers were not confident and manifested a negative attitude, fear, and indelicacy. Furthermore, improvisation was observed above all in the upper- sixth grade classes (Terminals classes). A total number of five (5) part-time-teachers wasted their time in correcting the previous evaluation and turning the papers back.

The goal of a formative evaluation is not to punish learners. However, this was a demonstration for some EFL part-time teachers to show the observer that they are demanding, and to turn in the papers right away in the researcher's presence that they were doing well. The evaluation did not reflect the content and the level of learners. A task was just set up to make learners feel they were subjected to an assignment.

A teacher of second form (5^{ème}) kept insisting on irregular verbs, blaming all the students in an aggressive tone, for they did not care about learning the list of the verbs he provided. Complicated verbs are taught and even their pronunciation was wrong. In the same class, a student reminded the teacher that the activity tackled was corrected the previous week.

In the upper-sixth grade classes, learners did not participate and did not achieve well. For example, over 56 students in a (D) class series, only eleven students (11) succeeded in obtaining the mean, that is 10 out of 20 (10/20). In 5^{ème}, half of the learners were fair. The majority of students were not able to write a good essay after seven years of English programs. That situation generates a great issue, the issue of students' achievement.

The findings of the researcher in observing students' participation in class, and in taking a look on learners' marks have correlation with the last research question on the impacts of EFL part-time teachers on learners' achievement.

In addition, from the class observation, the researcher concludes that the second research question (How do EFL part-time teachers conduct the teaching/learning/evaluation process?) strongly correlates with EFL part-time teachers' attitude. They conduct teaching, learning, and evaluation according to their own style. There is not a norm and from one part-time to the other observed, there was just a new creativity in terms of strategies. The researcher discovered new technics she

had never thought about before. Steps were skipped deliberately and the conclusion was quickly established. Actions need to be taken if not, this may impact negatively the type of citizen Benin's curriculum designers strongly desire.

RESULTS FROM THE INTERVIEW

The answers from the interview are summarized and combined according to similarities and differences. The same sheet of interview was used for both PA and inspectors. It took fifteen minutes for each participant. The PA were interviewed in the school visited because the majority of them were tutors for the EFL part-time visited. Appointment was set up to meet with the inspectors.

1-On the first question to know about why the PA and inspectors blame EFL part-time teachers, here is the summary of their answer:

Generally, we blame them for the strategies and techniques used to reach their goal. The majority of the teachers have problem of communication. Some of the part-time teachers do not know how to formulate questions. "How come that part-time teachers couldn't answer themselves questions they've prepared for learners?". In the context of CBA program, there is a way to conduct the assessment and many of them do not master how to formulate the three questions, which should normally be addressed to one and the same student. Sometimes they misused the auxiliaries. Moreover, phonetics is another great issue. Words are regularly mispronounced and EFL part-time teachers make learners repeat several time those words. Briefly speaking, teaching is no more what it is supposed to be. Teaching in these conditions is not an art, but a process where teachers act mechanically and learn the steps by heart. Since teaching itself is an issue, ultimately, it impacts the evaluation. The content of what is taught is completely different from the test proposed and submitted to learners. This poses a problem of the process of evaluation and raises great issues such as the training of part-time teachers in the domain.

2-Regarding the second question if part-time teachers really understand recommendations from PA and inspectors observation, they replied: EFL part-time teachers are most of the time surprised. They do not accept recommendations easily. They always try to justify the reasons why they have used one strategy or another one. They think that the observer is too demanding. By sweating over a lesson plan, and making too much noise, they think they are doing great job. Other teachers interpret the fact of providing advice as a punishment from the administrator (the Assistant Principal) specifically when the class visit is an unexpected visit.

3-The third question intended to know the areas of concern that needed to be reinforced after the exchange. On that question, PA and inspectors strongly insisted that EFL part-time teachers need thoroughly to be trained on the use of language. Secondly, they need to learn more about strategies and techniques of teaching. The third aspect is on classroom management. They do not understand the principles of rules and procedures, and punishment scales.

4- For the fourth question on how PA and inspectors can explain that some part-time succeed in teaching effectively, they turned that those teachers have acquire the pre-requisites on teaching. They have good command in manipulating the expressions. The situation is also due to the ambition of the teacher to do well. They constantly learn from other teachers and up-date their lesson plan. The mentioned teachers have also gone through continuous training; they feel more confident and have strong personality.

5-The last interview question intended to know PA and inspector's general impression and their expectation after class visit. PA and inspectors have bad impression about the situation. They confessed that the government should immediately reconsider the training needs of EFL part-time teachers. First, their level should be reinforced academically. In addition, they must be knowledgeable on the current curriculum and the CBA programs before stepping into the job. Peer observation may be another teaching strategy so that the teachers learn from those who possess experience on the subject matter. They also added that if decisions are not set up rapidly, knowing that the nation is already at risk, the system will fail and it will impact negatively education in Benin.

PA and inspectors all formulated a recommendation towards the decision makers. Repeatedly, they focused attention on students' achievement. They provided percentages regarding the national exam of the previous five years. For them the results reflect the types of teachers on the ground. The main responsible for such a situation is in the quality of teachers. PA and inspectors' reaction about students' achievement supports the research question number three, established to know the impacts of EFL part-time teaching on the achievement of learners.

Teacher's quality depends on school authorities. EFL part-time teachers have a role to play in order to meet that objective. They must bear in mind that the reward is nothing compared to the knowledge and the package of techniques and strategies they going to acquire during training sessions. Generally, they are not motivated to attend training sessions due to the inexistence of incentives. They prefer moving to their private schools to sign in and to validate the hours due.

Pedagogical advisors and inspectors answers demonstrate that EFL part-time teachers were not aware of their teaching practice. There was a sort of illusion. For that category of teachers, they were doing a great job. The findings of the interview also corroborate with the research question number one (1), aiming at knowing if EFL part-time teachers possess the require qualification. Not only, do they need the academic knowledge, but more importantly, they need additional help in pedagogical and human domains.

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Elements of my own observation different from the commission with the nineteen EFL part-time teachers strongly correlate with the teachers' behaviors observed on the ground(the twenty one (21)scheduled EFL part-time teachers. In the classes observed, EFL part-time teachers were the only one to write on the board from the beginning of

the lesson to the end; also they were the one to provide right answers especially during the assessment. This is a proof they did not assimilate that phase of assessment, "retour projection". The assessment phase requires that the teacher directs the three basic questions to only one student just to check if the learners have really acquired the notion taught. The questions are formulated in these terms :

1. What have you learned today?
2. How have you learned it?
3. What are you going to do with what you've learned?

Thus, it is up to the teacher to guide and to help the learner so that he succeeds in answering the questions. It is not a mechanical strategy.

The second issue was in the fact that all the EFL part-time teachers systematically rushed learners. "Quickly quickly", and "hurry up!" were the slogan used. This is against one of the fundamental principles of the CBA programs. The goal should be to focus learners' attention on the comprehension of the different activities, not in covering partially the activities designed for the day, and the program.

Another issue derives from the observer's presence in the classroom. This might have an impact on the verbal behavior of EFL part-time teachers. In most cases, the teacher's verbal behavior in the presence of an observer may not be the same as the behavior exhibited in the observer's absence. That assumption strongly correlates with other researchers' views on classroom observation. Heyns and Lippitt, (1954), Flanders, (1968) : "It is believed that observers do cause some changes in the verbal interaction between teachers and students".

Based on the data collected, and the observation, the researcher suggests that decision-makers re-examine the issue of the quality of EFL part-time teachers. Teacher training programs should be a priority. The quality of a teacher is a strong variable that may impact students' achievement. There is a need to plan and think about the training of that category of teachers. The training might run from the break, that is the holidays and if need be during the academic year. Pedagogical Advisors and Inspectors have a role to play to make this happen. The curriculum designers may help part-time teachers understand more the CBA programs and show them useful strategies and techniques to teach those programs. It is important to empower the administrator of schools to work collaboratively with EFL part-time teachers. The school authorities may re-examine the issue of classroom size.

Once EFL part-time teachers acquire good strategies on how to teach, then they can develop continuously their profession. Wallace (1991:6) presents three models of professional education: the craft model, where the teachers just imitates the expert's techniques and follow his day-to-day instructions and advice. During the craft model stage, the teacher develops his competence.

The second model has to do with the applied science where the teacher learns and applies the scientific knowledge and techniques developed by academics and

researchers in order to solve day-to-day problems. At this stage, the teacher gains new concepts. The last model proposed by Wallace is concerned with the reflective model. It helps the teacher to gain knowledge from his own experience.

CONCLUSION

Pedagogical Advisors and Inspectors must play their role. Threatening learners is not part of teaching strategies. It is a great notion that EFL part-time teachers should take over. Training EFL part-time teachers requires that PA and Inspectors use tactful strategies in order to integrate them into the job. Class visits should not be perceived in terms of punishment and providing severe and negative feedback. Class visits are not also established to brutalize beginner teachers. The only way to please the teachers is to teach them strategies, to encourage them on the basis of the skills they have already acquired and to reexamine the aspects that need improvement. Providing gentle correction and feedback may make them feel more confident about their daily teaching. Williams (1989:85), reinforced the same idea in the following terms “classroom observations should be developmental rather than judgmental in the sense that they offer opportunities for teachers to improve their awareness, abilities to interact and evaluate their own teaching behaviors”. The situation today in Benin is the urgent need to equip EFL part-time teachers with the minimum and basic strategies. Later, the school specialists and curriculum planners may proceed on how to train the category of teachers continuously.

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