

ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN NIGER EDUCATION: ENGLISH TEACHERS' WORK CONDITIONS AND THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.25

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Abstract

This research study aims at investigating only on Niger English teachers' work conditions and the learning environment. These two teaching and learning prominent factors among many others are our concern in the study because a teacher may be someone of a full memory of many types of knowledge such as teaching knowledge in terms of pedagogy, didactical knowledge, psychological knowledge, etc. He may also be cared of with consequent remuneration due to his efforts. A learning environment quality is didactically known to contribute enormously to the classrooms activities efficacy. As remind, English is not only taught in Niger secondary schools as foreign language, but also as a scholastic discipline, and this requires much professionalism and qualification from teachers in their teaching pedagogical tasks and a use of the language in real world tasks from learners rather than simply for exam preparation. The objective of this work is to check with certainty that teachers' works conditions and the learning environment so evoked in everyday's educational debates are parts of the sources of learners' insufficient results regarding to teaching and learning English. The investigation on the two concepts is based on quantitative approach which hundred (100) English teachers and two hundred (200) learners as research design in Niamey area. The Instruments of data collection are only questionnaires for both participants.

Key words: *work, environment, language, teaching, learning*

Résumé

Cette étude vise à investiguer seulement sur les conditions de travail des professeurs d'anglais et l'environnement d'apprentissage au Niger. Ces deux facteurs saillants de l'enseignement apprentissage parmi tant d'autres sont concernés par l'étude parce qu'un enseignant doit être quelqu'un de mémoire pleine de plusieurs types de connaissances telles que savoir enseigner en termes de pédagogie, connaissances en didactique et en psychologie, etc. Il doit être aussi entretenu de rémunération conséquente en raison de ses efforts. La qualité d'un environnement d'apprentissage est didactiquement connue de contribution énorme à l'efficacité des activités des salles de classes. Pour rappel, l'anglais n'est pas seulement enseigné dans les cycles secondaires comme langue étrangère, mais aussi comme une discipline scolaire and ce fait

nécessite beaucoup de professionnalisme et de qualification de la part des professeurs dans leurs tâches pédagogiques et d'un usage de la langue en situations réelles de la vie plutôt que simplement pour préparation à l'examen. L'objectif de cette étude est de vérifier avec certitude que les conditions de travail des professeurs d'anglais et l'environnement de l'apprentissage tellement évoqués dans les débats d'éducation au quotidien font parties des sources des résultats insuffisants des apprenants en anglais. L'investigation sur ces deux concepts est basée sur une approche quantitative avec cent (100) professeurs et deux cent (200) apprenants dans la zone de Niamey. Les instruments de collecte de données sont uniquement des questionnaires à l'endroit de tous les participants.

Mots clés : travail, environnement, langue, enseignement, apprentissage.

Introduction

This research study is undertaken for an investigation purpose on English teachers' work conditions and the learning environment due to the learners' daily unsatisfactory results through their English language learning process. It intends first, to examine the teachers' ability to teach English with professionalism and qualification, and also their financial outcome. Second, it examines the learning environment principally the classrooms state as learning arenas and the socio-cultural factor common to both participants.

Teachers' low performance and qualification to teach the language because of lack of training cannot afford them a professional ability to help learners learn the language effectively since the early stage of the process and autonomously later in order to make the English language their own as soon as they grow in learning it. According to the secondary schools teachers evaluation undertook by the Ministry in charge of education from 02 to 23, November 2022, only 35% of the total of the 16, 647 teachers all of disciplines on field is noticed qualified to get good abilities of teaching, and only 36% of The total English teachers is judged efficient Many of them entered the teaching field without any pre-service training, and this by numerous ways (contract, civic service, and voluntarism). Engaging such types of teachers in teaching English might have predictable negative consequences on learners' performances. It is to not that teaching is an art and being talented artist like a musician requires voicing melodiously and playing with appropriate means so that the audience gain interest face to him on one hand and he is motivated to do continuously better in using his audience financial offerings to renew his material for improving his talent. So, what about the

motivation of a teacher who lacks pre-service and in service training, and who is also in lack of financial economy to document himself or to pay himself the teaching training either via private centers or in attending online teaching courses or programs offered by some international institutions such as ICELT, CELTA, DELTA, webinars, etc.?

Regarding to learning environment, the classrooms in great part are overcrowded, out-dated, sometimes built with straw material and often tiny, non-equipped in terms of teaching materials and non-electrified, etc. Certain socio-cultural and individual attitudes like disdain, scorn, disregard, shame, and fear prevent both teachers and learners to use the language out of schools and this fact hinder a lot their English language proficiency. As earlier said in the abstract, we used quantitative method to collect data from the participants by having them fill up a questionnaire.

Some recommendations towards education decisions makers to help fix teachers' work conditions problems, those related to the learning environment and to prevent others that should hinder the effectiveness of the English teaching and learning ended the research study.

1. Problem statement of the research study

In Niger Education context, teaching and learning English as a foreign language is doubted to be ineffective. The learners' deplorable results from all formative and summative evaluations attest to their low performance. Teachers' work conditions and the learning environment are pointed at as part of the problem.

2. Research questions

1. Are teachers' work conditions and the learning environment part of the factors of learners' unsatisfactory results?

2. Are the learners' results the natural reflection of these factors' impact?

The following questions helped us to collect data from the participants as data collecting instruments. (See appendix)

Questions as instruments to collect data from teachers

A. Are you full-time professional teacher? If not what is your status?

B. On which fringe of appreciation (observation) do you number the training schools or centers for English language teachers?

C. Are you well-paid in terms of salary?

Questions as instruments to collect data from learners

A. Are your learning rooms well-equipped to learn English adequately?

B. Do you practice the language out of schools?

3. Objectives of the study

This study aims at achieving objectives that are:

1. To enlighten the teachers' work conditions and the learning environment as part of the factors of the learners' deplorable results
2. To attest to the veracity that a learner's learning performances are linked to his teachers' competences and the environment's nature in which his learning process is taking place.

4. Significance of the study

The significance of this research study is to bring a contribution to fix or to reduce at least some of the problems that teachers and learners face in teaching and learning English in Niger education context.

5. Methodology

This research study was conducted in using quantitative approach because according to (Cresswell, 1998), the quantitative approach as an enquiry into a social or human problem based on testing composed of variables, measured with numbers and analyzed with statistical procedures in order to determine whether the predictive generalization of theory holds true. The research design is composed of hundred (100) English teachers and two hundred (200) learners in Niamey secondary schools. The analysis of the findings is done upon a balance of the participants' answers.

6. Limitation

Any research study demands a clear and limited field or domain of work corresponding to its topic. So, This one is limited only on Niger English teachers' work conditions and the learning environment that are thought to be part of the factors of learners' unsatisfactory results in their English

learning process. Afterwards, we contribute to the remediation of the problems with some recommendations.

7. Theoretical framework

The term “theoretical framework” comprises two words, “theory” and “framework”. It is therefore appropriate to start by giving definitions of what a theory is and what a framework is. A theory, according to (Kerlinger, 1986: 09) is “a set of interrelated constructs or concepts, definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena”.

Theoretical framework helps also writers in researches to confront preview writers’ works against his, so that he finds what to argue for justification, what to discuss for disagreement or agreement, and what to develop as contribution to for quality improvement. A theoretical framework is so useful in researches studies and plays numerous roles that it improves the quality of educational research,

According to various authors such as (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), theoretical frameworks convince the reader of the relevance of the research question. Other explain that it connects the researchers to existing literature in providing assumptions that guide the research, helps the researcher to choose appropriate questions for the study, guides the choice of research design in guiding the researcher toward appropriate data collection methods.

In consideration to these multiple functions of theoretical when conducting research study, its finality is to assist the researcher to make predictions of the outcomes and to interpret and analyze the results of a given research based on the existing literature.

The framework of this research study puts interest on the Niger English teachers’ work conditions and the learning environment in secondary schools. These teaching and learning have negative impacts on the learners’ results and even on the entire effectiveness of the English language teaching and learning. This problematic has already been the worldwide preoccupation of numerous researchers in education. In recent years, there has been increasing interest in ways to measure effective teaching practices around the world (e.g., Hamre et al., 2013). Therefore when teachers’ professional qualification is not perfect, when

their practices in terms of pedagogical tasks are doubted of inefficacy and when their employment status and their insufficient financial outcome are not motivational, the learners' results are logically impacted. Moreover, the learning environment nature and the socio-cultural context have their own impacts that contribute to the learners' poor outcomes known "outputs" in other terms. For these reasons, English teachers' work conditions and the learning environment are the key points to explore in the present study. Generally, Problems in education hinder teaching and learning goal's achievability and mainly those that are related to teachers' qualification to teach English because teaching a foreign language demands first of all talent in teaching spelling and pronunciation through genuine competence of phonetic-phonology from a teacher as master pronunciation is one of the core stones foundation of appropriating English for communication via knowledge in vocabulary and grammar.

7. 1. Teachers' low professional qualification.

Teachers' low professional qualification is one of the major factors of the learners' poor performance because their results reflect who their teachers are. (Abbas, 1998: 25) points out that "failure in English is attributed to flawed pedagogy. The lack of adequately trained master trainers, little emphasis on teaching practice and non-existence of a proper support/monitoring system for teachers".

A teacher with any training hardly teaches the language objectively because he lacks appropriate pedagogical and didactical knowledge from practices, of practice and in practice. He lacks techniques to use in different methods and approaches in such extent that he doesn't even know how to perform his duty. So, teachers' low professionalism impacts massively learners' performance and can even turn the English teaching and learning non effective.

7. 2. Problems linked to teaching environment.

One of the current and easily noticeable problems toward the English learning environment is the problem of over crowded classes. Over crowded classes are indeed difficult to teach, to control and to evaluate due to the large number of learners even if teachers can have them in group to work when teaching certain items. Over crowded classes evaluations results are generally subjective because even bad and lazy

learners can get acceptable grades with cheating on good ones without being able to reproduce the same work or task autonomously as it does not come from their own intellectual effort. Researchers like (Gibbs and Jenkins, 1992, p. 22) reveal the problem of over crowded classes in these terms:” the increase number of the students as in the large classes, many difficulties in teaching and learning occur”.

7. 3. Problem of appropriate classrooms in learning environment

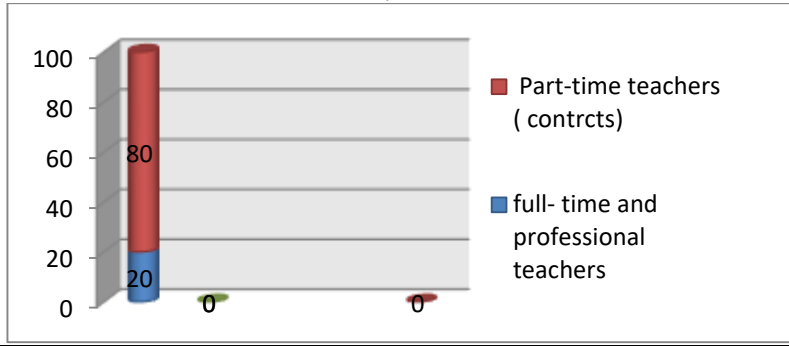
A shortage of appropriate classrooms is another problem that impacts considerably the learners’ results. A large number of classrooms are non adequate for helping learners to learn with objectivity. They are not comfortable in being stocked in classrooms with bad conditions of learning. No electricity to think about air conditioners, no materials, brief, not only one motivational aspect. Nothing as didactic supports a part the blackboard and the chalk.

In sum, teachers teach the language using only teachers’ guide and some few types of books. Not only textbooks as didactical materials are helpful to teach the language, but CD players, radio type recorders and audio listening bands are also of a great utility to conduct pedagogical tasks to make learners familiar to native speakers’ accent in order to respond of any type of conversation out from school, means using the language in real world tasks. Materials play a central role in teaching and learning. This is proved by (Gaston and Graves, 2014: 11) when they assert; “Materials are fundamental to language learning and teaching (...), but materials cannot be viewed independently of their users”. In showing the importance of availability of teaching materials in order to avoid or to reduce difficulties in learners’ understanding and even for achieving goals by teachers, Toptas (2012) attested that the concept of educational or didactical materials is accepted to serve academic goals of the curriculum as developing ideas in depth, encouraging sense making, engaging students, and motivating learning.

8. Outcomes of the data collecting and interpretation

8. 1. From teachers

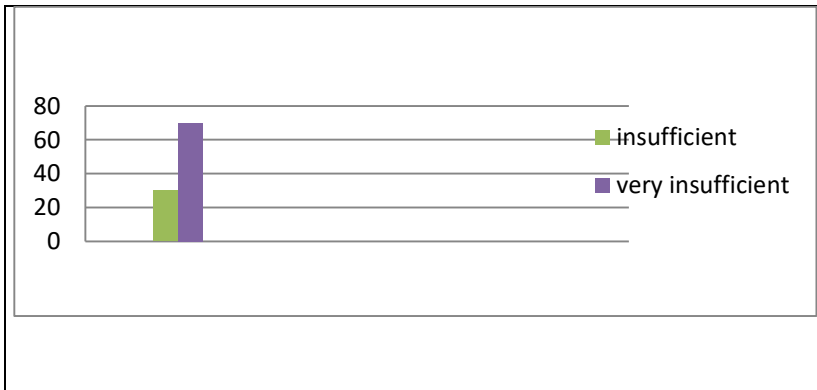
Figure 1. Question A: Are you full-time professional teacher? If not what is your status?



Result & interpretation

The survey in English teachers' status shows that a large number of them are contractual teachers, they are not qualified to teach the language objectively and they can leave the teaching field at any time. This fact reduces the number of teachers that is already low.

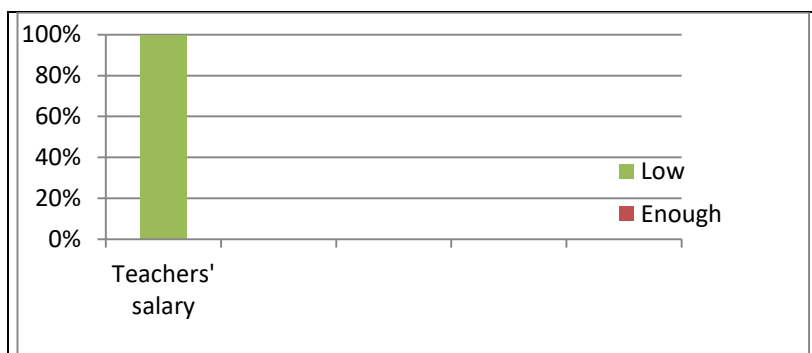
Figure 2. Question B: On which fringe of appreciation (observation) do you number the training schools or centers for English language teachers?



Result & interpretation

According to this graphic, schools for training English teachers in Niger are very insufficient. Among hundred (100) teachers questioned, none of them responded sufficient or sufficient enough. Also, few of them answered insufficient while the majority answered very insufficient. There is no doubt then, that in Niger, teaching and learning English suffers from a great lack of training centers for teachers, and this fact of lacking trained teachers on the field affects considerably the learners' performance.

Figure 3. Question C. Are you well-paid in terms of salary?



Teachers in Niger are not really well-paid like the graphic shows it. 100% of the teachers questioned answered that they are under-paid. It means all teachers are in the same situation regarding their low salaries and this fact can hinder their motivation towards the accomplishment of their duties.

8. 2. From learners

Table 1. Question A. *Are your classes well-equipped? If not why?*

	Are your classes well-equipped?		Total
	Yes	No	
200 Learners	0	200	200
Reasons (why?)		-No electricity (some said) -No enough desks (some said) -No enough books -No technological devices for teaching -Numerous classes built with straw	

Learners, in this table, declared commonly and with common reasons that their classes are empty of conformability for learning objectively. When classes are not electrified, nor equipped of learning materials, both teachers' and learners' tasks are far from being successful.

Table 2. Question B. *Do you speak English out from school?*

	Do you speak English out from school?		Total
	Yes	Non	
150 Learners	00	200	200
Reasons (why?)		-No conversation partners -Shame to speak with mistakes and errors -others find us vainer and look at us like if we are committing sins. (a bad catchment area conflict).	

Due to certain socio-cultural factors, learners face difficulties to orally put their acquisitions into practice. The social environment does not permit them to speak English in order to gain proficiency that can make them good orators, because a language is firstly seen as a means of communication.

9. Recommendations as contribution to fix problems or to reducing at least the problems

We do not deny the efforts so far made by decision makers to jugulate the problems in teaching in general and in teaching/learning English in particular, but much remains to do. That is why after our research study, we attempt to bring a contribution to fix some of the problems or to diminish them. Teachers' work conditions and the learning environment need improvement according to the study results and interpretation. That is why we formulate the following recommendations:

- Create numerous training centers for teachers,
- Engage well-trained and professional teachers to teach English,
- Stop engaging teachers as contractual, they must be trained before,
- Asserting to teachers high salary as work conditions improvement means,
- Build definitive materials classrooms in sufficient number with electricity,
- Equip schools with all materials needed in general and in particular for teaching and learning English for communicative use rather than for exams preparation.

Conclusion

The relevance of this research study is of a great significance because all durable problems in general education can finally turn into obstacles that should definitively block the teaching and learning process. Though, it is better to investigate on noticeable problems in order to solve them than keeping silence with closed eyes and ears. That is why the research study we conclude was undertaken to investigate on Niger English teachers' work and the learning environment as problems that impact the learners' learning results. Therefore, as English teachers, we can try to find out ways from these problems because we are concerned. It is one of teachers' duties to investigate on their working sector problems or

difficulties as teaching and research are straightly linked the one to the other.

The interpretation of the questionnaires' results helped us to assert and to recognize that in Niger, English teachers' work condition and the learning environment are really poor in all aspects and they do need improvement, readjustment or recondition to make learners' English results acceptable. We hope that the recommendations done towards authorities in charge of education in general and in particular those in the specific charge of teaching/learning English in Niger will be taken into account for a better education. /.

Appendix

Appendix 1. Teachers' questionnaire

<p>Name:</p> <p>First name:</p> <p>School:</p> <p>Dear colleagues,</p> <p>I want your help as participants to achieve the objectives of a research study I am conducting in Niamey area and on English teachers' work conditions and the learning environment.</p> <p>Thanks for understanding me.</p> <p>NB: Please, answer the questions honestly.</p>
<p>A. Are you full-time professional teacher? If not what is your status?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> other</p> <p>B. On which fringe of appreciation (observation) do you number the training schools or centers for English language teachers?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> insufficient <input type="checkbox"/> vey insuficient</p> <p>C. Are you well-paid in terms of salary?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no</p>

Appendix 2. Learners' questionnaire

Name:
First name:
School:

Dear students,
I need your help as participants to achieve the objectives of a research study I am conducting in Niamey area and on English teachers' work conditions and the learning environment.
Thanks for understanding me.

NB: Please, answer the questions honestly.

A. Are your learning rooms well-equipped to learn English adequately?

yes no

Tell the reasons:

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B. Do you practice the language out of schools?

yes no

Tell the reasons:

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