

IMPACT OF ENGLISH CLUBS ON LEARNERS' ENGLISH PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF CEG AGBALEPEDOGAN

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Abstract

This study explores the ways in which English clubs enhance learners' English performance in the process of learning English as Foreign Language. Thus, qualitative data have been collected in two stages from a sample of 10 new members of Agbalepedogan junior high school' English club in Lomé following Krashen's learning and acquisition theory. The first stage of data collection occurred in December 2021 and the second in May 2022. After analysis and comparison of data collected, the findings have revealed an improvement of the sample's performance at the second stage of data collection which is a proof that English clubs can play an important role in the process of learning English as a foreign language in Togo.

Key words: *English clubs, meaning negotiation, English performance, impact.*

Résumé

Cette étude explore les manières dont les clubs d'anglais rehaussent la performance des élèves en anglais dans le processus d'apprentissage de l'anglais comme langue étrangère. Ainsi, des données qualitatives ont été collectées en deux étapes sur un échantillon de 10 nouveaux membres au club d'anglais de CEG Agbalepedogan à Lomé et analysé suivant la théorie de l'apprentissage et de l'acquisition développée par Krashen. La première étape des données collectées eu lieu en Décembre 2021 et la seconde en Mai 2022. Après analyse et comparaison des données collectées, les résultats ont révélé une amélioration de performance de l'échantillon à la seconde étape de la collecte des données qui est une preuve que les clubs d'anglais peuvent jouer un rôle important dans le processus d'apprentissage de l'anglais comme langue étrangère au Togo.

Mots clés : *clubs d'anglais, négociation de sens, performance en anglais, impact.*

Introduction

English language has become very important due to its global role around the world (Seidlhofer, 2004). Researches in various domains of linguistics have produced many approaches that have boosted English teaching and learning as well. In spite of these achievements, researches are still carried out in order to find effective teaching methods that can

allow a quick performance of learners in general and foreign language learners in particular, for the latter encounter many difficulties in performing well due to the fact that they are not permanently exposed to the language. According to Wang and Castro (2010), the difference between second language acquisition and foreign language learning is that the second language learners have opportunities to practice the target language outside the classroom, whereas foreign language learners have limited opportunities to learn the language.

Since the introduction of English in Togolese' educational system as foreign language in 1975, researches have been undertaken in domains such as comparative analysis of English structure and some Togolese languages. In addition, studies on interference of learners' mother tongue into English and those related to the teaching of the different sub-skills such as listening, understanding, vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing (Péré, 1994; Kponomaizoun, 1992) have been carried out in such a way that they shed light on English teaching and learning in Togo. Thus, English is taught as a foreign language and aims at training students to use it in an African context related to their everyday life. The program provides students with manuals containing themes that correspond to their' daily life. The main purpose is to help them acquire a lexicon that will facilitate their communication. In the same perspective, some junior high schools set up English clubs in order to create more opportunities for students to be in contact with English language and improve their English performance. Therefore, the present study intends to scrutinize learners' English use during an English club's activities and see if an English club may serve as an appropriate setting that needs to be part of learners' English learning processes in junior high school. After, the result of this study will be proposed to curriculum designers in order to frame new English teaching approaches that will improve English learning and acquisition processes in junior high school.

Statement of the problem

In Togo, students are introduced to English as a foreign language from the first form of junior high school. However, its learning does not offer them the opportunity to continue speaking English outside classroom. In junior high school, it is commonplace to come across some Form IV

(3^{ème}) students who are not able to hold a simple conversation in English. This situation cannot only be explained by the few opportunities that learners have to use English in and outside classroom but also the lack of effective tool in English learning system. As a result, some learners are unable to properly speak, write and read in English though they have been learning it for years. Apart from conventional English classes, some junior high schools do not have other learning settings to continue practicing the language, which impacts negatively learners' learning processes. In a context of foreign language learning, the creation of additional learning settings with diverse learning activities and language learning strategy can be a good source of motivation for learners. Learners' participation in English club may be an appropriate approach to settle English performance issues in junior high school.

Literature review

This section presents listening, reading and speaking as real learning sources of an English club and some previous research works related to the impact of the development of these skills in learners' English learning.

Listening as a learning source

Listening is a skill in language development process. It is an important source of learning when learners are constantly exposed to meaningful listening activities. Its improvement is remarkable through how well learners are able to use the language while answering a question or giving a point of view regarding a topic. In this study, the use of English as a medium of communication during activities such as debates, singing, and storytelling may increase members' understanding of English functions and therefore, impact their speaking. However, it is difficult to quantify listening and its implications in a language production as it happens internally. In previous studies related to listening, Brown (2000) observes that it is difficult to evaluate the importance of listening because linguistic information work internally and allow a speaker to produce a language. In addition, Harmer (2007) believes that meaningful listening activities help learners in pronunciation. As a result, the more learners are exposed to the listening of a language the better they comprehend the way it

functions and develop its speaking. Thus, it is important to identify the aspects of language that make learners' listening process difficult and work on them in order to ease the listening process (Brown, 2000). In this respect, Scrivener (2005) observes that problems that learners have when they are listening are: pronunciation of words, speakers use the language too fast, no idea about when a word begins or ends, problem with the general sense of a message and so on. In this study, the members listening difficulties and speaking issues are observed and compared with English used during the club's activities in order to evaluate the extent to which members improve in the process of English learning.

Reading as a learning source

Reading is another important learning source in language development process. It shows learners' listening and speaking capacities and impacts their writing ability. In previous researches related to reading, Harmer (2007) observes that reading impacts positively students' vocabulary and writing. For Brown (2000), it teaches learners new words, correct spelling and new language structures which result in the development of writing, listening and speaking. The reading of poems and class presentations in the club may be a strong source of learning new words and their pronunciation. Therefore, this study is going to observe reading activities in the club and see how it helps members to improve in their process of language acquisition.

Scrivener (2005), states that to make learners good readers, it is important to tell them that they do not need to understand every word when reading. In addition, they need to use techniques such as skimming which consists of: finding key topics, main ideas, overall themes, basic structure and so on and scanning which consists of finding specific individual pieces of information.

Speaking as a learning source

Apart from the two above learning sources, speaking also serves as a strong language learning source in English clubs. During interactions, speaking allows students to learn about their mistakes and improve in their output. In previous works related to speaking, Brown (2000) observes that speaking is closely linked to listening. He argues that the

interaction between both language learning sources is conversation. For Harmer (2007), the importance of teaching speaking skill in class is to involve learners in real life conversation practice, for during these practices, students exchange, share their knowledge, learn from one another and get new vocabulary and information among their friends. They also share their difficulties in speaking practice and look forward to how to understand and solve their problems. Moreover, they are able to see their success or failure, they have the opportunity to use elements of the language in an automatic way and therefore, become gradual autonomous language users. However, learners come across many difficulties during interaction. Some of these difficulties are linked to clustering, redundancy, reduced form, performance variables, colloquial language, rate of delivery, intonation, stress, kind of interaction and so on (Brown, 2000). In the present study, club debates, and topic discussions are observed in order to see members' speaking difficulties and evaluate the extent to which they improve in comparison with previous debates and topic discussions. This will allow the study to make a link between the present findings and the previous ones.

Research questions

To find out the impacts of an English club on learners' English performance, this study answers the following questions:

What are the impacts of an English club on learners' language learning and use?

How well can a new member of an English club use the language in terms of grammatical and communicative competence?

Theoretical framework and methodology

This section presents the theory and the method developed in this study. Thus, it depicts Krashen's learning and acquisition theory and shows the process used in data collection and analysis

Theoretical framework

This study is developed within Krashen's learning and acquisition theory (1981). In this theory, Krashen has highlighted acquisition and learning

as two hypotheses through which adults develop L2. In the acquisition process, the learner acquires unconsciously L2's meaningful utterances since he or she is exposed to them. But in the learning process, the learner learns consciously by studying and paying attention to the rule. Thus, for Krashen, acquisition is more important because the acquired system allows the learner to become fluent. With regard to this, He argues that language develops through natural communication. In this study, both the learning and acquisition theories are used because participants are exposed to English language in the club and its conscious learning.

Methodology

In order to study the impact of an English club on learners' English performance, this study has used a descriptive and comparative case study research methodology. The Case study research methodology is a method that allows the researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context (Zaidah, 2007). Yin (1984) defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. The case study method is used in this work in order to produce an in-depth examination of the English used by learners during the club's activities. As a result, the data collection has followed a classroom observation process. The classroom observation refers to an observation carried out by the researcher or the observer playing no recognized role (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). The researcher in such data collection situation is qualified as non-participant because he or she does not take part in classroom activities but closely watches and notes down what is going on between the participants of the class (Freeman, 1998). In this work, both participant and non-participant observation of the club interactions have been adopted to investigate participants' use of English. According to Atkinson and Hammersley (1994), all social study is a form of observation because one cannot study the social world without being part of it. Thus, the choice of participant status could be explained by the fact that I attended the club's activities. Moreover, the choice of non-participant status could be explained by the fact that I was present during the club's activities but I did not participate in any activity. The English club held its activities on Wednesdays afternoon in an 80 seats classroom.

The activities occurred in a good environment which was favorable for data collection. Thus, data have been collected in two stages from 10 new participants from form IV aged between 14 and 17 years old. Two sequences of data have been collected in order to highlight all the changes that may occur in participants language use after practicing English language. And the choice of form IV learners is justified by the fact that they have been learning English for at least three years. The first stage occurred on Wednesday 15th December 2021 and the second stage on Wednesday 25th May 2022. The academic year lasts nine months and the choice of May is justified by the fact that the English club stops its activities within this month. In the first and second stage, data collected were based on participants' use of English which involves their grammatical competence, their capacities to engage in meaning negotiation, and their use of new lexicons. Thus, both data were described and compared in order to highlight the impact of the club's activities on participants' English performance.

Analysis of the data collected in the first stage

This part presents data collected from the sample when I first attended the club. Data have been collected on the use of the third person singular, the plural form, verbs and tenses and false friends. Thus, these data have been analyzed to find out the real capacities of participants in their English use.

*He don't know,

*She have a book,

*It have three aspect,

My friend comes from 3ème B

A look at participants' grammatical competence in these data shows that 90% of participants were unable to use a good structure in their English speaking. Therefore, their capacities to engage in meaning negotiation were very low and their expressions were very poor in new lexicons. Thus, the use of the third person singular in simple present tense (negative or affirmative form) shows that the majority of participants had difficulties to make the difference between the third person singular and other personal pronouns. This situation may be explained by the fact that they were not used to practicing English language. According to Krashen

(1981), language develops through natural communication. As a result, some participants' lack of English practice might prevent them from using correctly the English structure while speaking.

In addition, the misuse of the third person singular might be also due to the interference of French grammar system in their English use. Indeed, French is the language of instruction at school and learners are familiar with it than English since English is not so much used in instruction. In French grammar system, the third person singular and the second person are produced alike with the deletion of the bound inflectional morpheme (-s) at the verb' final position in third person singular (eg *Tu manges, il mange*). Thus, participants introduced unconsciously this system in their English speaking because they were not used to practicing English language. The same situation was also observed in the participants' production of the plural in English.

*Student (s) don't have means,

*Some child have that problem

The observation of the data has shown that 100% of participants forgot to utter the plural marker (-s) in their sentence productions. The plural marker (-s) was omitted because of the interference of the French grammar system. In French, the plural of a noun carries the bound inflectional morpheme (-s) and it is not uttered in sentence productions like in English (eg *les parents, les enfants*). Thus, the lack of reading and interaction of participants in English made them interfere the French system. According to Long (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, the interaction focuses on the 'negotiation for meaning'. As a result, the frequency of occurrence of the target forms brings about input modifications and increase comprehensibility and content predictability. These processes induce 'noticing' of new forms, new form-meaning connections, gaps in interlanguage, and mismatch between input and output. He also argues that interaction facilitates comprehension and acquisition of semantically contingent speech and negotiation for meaning. Therefore, classroom interactional tasks such as group works, class debates, dialogues, and role play are very important because they stimulate negotiation for meaning. In addition, they also facilitate learners' focus on the target language's forms as well as its functions. Thus, the implementation of interactional approach in an English club is

a key that develop as quickly as possible learners' communicative competence. Apart from the plural form, participants displayed also difficulties in the use of verbs and tenses.

*Last time, they don't go home,

*Yesterday, she don't see her

*They buyed chalks,

*Last time, he singed a song,

*Yesterday, I dranked cold water

The data above have also shown that 100% of participants misused the simple past tense and some irregular verbs. This shows that they might pay little attention to their grammar courses or they had a total ignorance of the use of the simple past tense in English. The use of the negative expression "do not" to express past events might be explained by lack of reading and practice of forms and tenses in English. Indeed, some students have good grammatical competence in English. However, they still do not have capacities to use the language for meaningful communication because of the lack of interaction in English (Richard, 2006).

Apart from the wrong use of the simple past tense, participants misused some irregular verbs by adding the bound inflectional morpheme (-ed) to them. This bound inflectional morpheme is rather used to form the past and past participle of regular verbs. Participants' wrong use of this inflectional morpheme has shown that they had difficulties to express themselves in English. Apart from irregular verbs' shortcomings, the data have also shown some pronunciation issues observed in words such as (buyed /baɪd/, chalks /tʃɔ:lks/, and time /taɪm/). Participants used French vowel sounds instead of English in the production of these words, which shows that they had a very little knowledge of the correct pronunciation of words in English. A similar situation is also observed in the use of false friends by the participants.

* Actually he is sleeping,

*I will go to a library to buy that book,

*His party is not done,

*He cultivate his parcel

The use of false friends in participants' English has shown that they did not master the contexts in which these words needed to be used. As a result, 100% of the participants were in the case. This problem might be due to the fact that learners use the French meaning of these words while writing or speaking English. As a result, they interfered French context in English bringing about their wrong use. Apart from that the data have shown pronunciation issues observed in words such as (library /laɪbrəri/, party /pa:ti/, done /dʌn/, and cultivate /kʌltɪveɪt/). As observed in previous data, participants have used French sound system to produce these words instead of English. This observation confirms previous research findings which say that foreign language learners display difficulties in word pronunciations (Scrivener, 2005).

Analysis of the data collected in the second stage

As stated above, the second stage of data collection occurred in May 2022. Data have been collected from the same participants' language production taking into account the use of the third person singular, the plural form, verbs and tenses, false friends, participants' capacities in meaning negotiation and their use of new lexicons.

She have a book, please has a book,

*It touch me

The men know the problem

We students of this school need to learn,

Last time, they didn't talk,

*Yesterday, she taked the book

Actually he was sick,

We don't have a library in this school.

As opposed to the first data, the second stage data have shown an improvement of participants language use. Thus, 80% of participants were able to use correctly the third person singular or to come back to it when the bound inflectional morpheme “-s” was omitted. I observed that the interaction in English has improved their input and output as highlighted by previous studies. Researches on interaction state that conversational interaction facilitates language acquisition because it corrects the learner input (what learner hears and reads) and his output (what learner produces) (Long, 1996). According to Ellis (1994),

interactive input is more important than non-interactive input. Also, 70% of participants have improved in their use of the plural form and the simple past tense. This was due to the increase in the frequency of English use and reading. The frequent use of English might help them improve in the pronunciation of plural form and the use of the simple past tenses. In the club, they initiated conversations and sometimes they were even granted the opportunity to lead debates, to read poems or to sing. Thus, their English speaking has improved and, therefore, reflected quite good structure and some new lexicons such as (however, henceforth, indeed, whereas, etc). These data have also shown that all the participants were able to use nouns in agreement with verbs. However, 30% had problems with irregular verbs. That is, they used to add the suffixes “-ed/-d” to some irregular verbs which they did not know. Furthermore, 70% of the participants have improved in their use of some false friends. Henceforth, they know perfectly the contexts in which they must be used. In addition, the pronunciation issues observed in the first data have considerably reduced and participant were able to produce quite good English even if some mistakes came in during interactions.

Results

The Data collected in this study allowed me to highlight the following results. Participants’ English use at the beginning shows a low mastery of English structure. In addition, they have few lexicons and ignore the contextual use of some words. Their communicative competence was very low and they very often interfere French structure system during interactions. However, after they had been involved in the club’s activities for about five months, their English performance had considerably improved. The exposure of participants to English during debates and other interactional activities has definitely improved their listening capacities. As a result, they have acquired the correct pronunciation of most words and they reflect a quite good capacity to understand others and to make clear cut distinction between contexts. The improvement of their listening capacity has allowed the development of their English speaking, for participants are able to distinguish the correct inputs from the wrong ones, which impacts positively their sentence productions during interactions. Moreover, they are able to recognize their own weaknesses and strengths and they tried

hard to improve. With regard to this, the members tutor one another in a peaceful environment that assures language acquisition. The peaceful learning environment that prevailed during the club's activities confirms the finding of previous research works which observe that no language learning is possible without peace (Bitadi, 2021). The results also show that participants have improved in reading and writing since they have to write their own poems and read them before the members. As a result, they have acquired new lexicons and improved their writing skills. Reading has contributed a lot to participants' language learning. It is a session in the course of which new words and expressions are learnt from one another. In addition, correct pronunciations and structures are memorized and therefore, induce improvement in participants English speaking, reading and writing. Thus, their English performance has improved and allowed them to engage in meaning negotiation and to use new lexicons during interactions. These results corroborate previous research findings about the importance of interaction in language learning process (Long, 1996; Wang and Castro, 2010) and the role of the four skills in language development (Brown, 2000; Harmer, 2007).

Conclusion

This study has investigated the impact of English clubs on learners' English performance as Foreign Language. Thus, two sequences of data have been collected and compared. In construct to the first stage data where participants showed poor performance of English, the analysis of the second stage data have shown improvement of their language use in terms of meaning negotiation, syntax, and the use of new lexicons. The creation of English clubs in junior high school in the context of English as a Foreign Language learning allows learners to develop and improve their English speaking, reading and writing. Thus, English clubs need to be considered as appropriate learning settings which motivate learners to learn and acquire the language. For, in the club, learners were highly interested in practicing English language, and therefore, developed their performance. Since many schools do not have enough financial means to set up language laboratories, this study suggests the creation of English clubs in junior high school is compulsory in English learning processes. The creation of the clubs will allow a quick acquisition of English language and its good performance.

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