

INTEGRATING SIMULATION TO ORAL PRESENTATION TO ENHANCE BENINESE EFL BEGINNERS' COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS: CASE STUDY OF CEG ZOUNGUÈ

¹Dr Sourou Corneille TEBA, ²Dr Bertin DANSOU, ³Sourou Désiré Christel ZINSOUVI,
⁴Morel Marly MENSAH⁴

¹ Doctor in English Didactics, CAMES Universities Lecturer, Faculty of Arts, and Humanities, English Department, Adjarra Campus, University of Abomey-Calavi, Cotonou, Benin

² Doctor of English Studies, Assistant Professor of CAMES Universities, National University of Agriculture of Kétou

^{3,4} PhD student in English didactics at the Multidisciplinary Doctoral School, Space, Culture and Environment of the University of Abomey-Calavi
Email - adolphe.ahonnon@gmail.com

Abstract: *The main purpose of teaching-learning a new language is oral communication. In Benin context, the importance of oral communication in teaching-learning English as a foreign language is well-known, and many ways and strategies are used to reach that goal. Thus, this study aims at investigating the benefits of integrating simulation to oral presentation to foster EFL beginners' communicative skills. To achieve this goal, a mixed method has been used to collect data and questionnaires were elaborated for eight (08) teachers and fifty (50) students. An experimentation has also been carried out with students of CEG ZOUNGUE. The study reveals the impact of simulation in improving oral communication performance by reducing foreign language anxiety (FLA) during oral presentations. The findings also show that simulation increases motivation and students' participation in a language class. Therefore, this study suggests the integration of simulation in EFL classes to enhance learners' oral communication.*

Key Words: *Simulation, Oral presentation, Communicative skills, FLA.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Learning a foreign language implies the ability to communicate clearly and successfully using the target language. In Beninese EFL classes, there are some reasons causing EFL learners' inability to communicate in the target language. First of all, the curriculum do not emphasize on speaking and listening skills. Secondly, the class conditions do not favor oral activities since they are overcrowded. Then, EFL learners have limited opportunities to practice those skills. Another break is students' lack of confidence. They are still afraid and nervous in expressing their ideas or thoughts in English orally. Finally, the examination system does not emphasize on oral skill. Therefore, many students in high school still have low level in speaking.

To overcome those challenges, many ideas and strategies are explored. This research work focuses on the integrating of simulation to oral presentation in order to improve beginners' communicative skills. Taking into account its goals, the current research tries to answer the following questions:

- what are the challenges in beginners' language classes in fostering oral communication?
- how can simulation be integrated to oral presentation to improve beginners' communicative skills?
- to what extent can simulation activities impact on these learners' anxiety as an innovative way to promote the development of their oral communication performance?

This research work in hand cannot solve all the problems related to English teaching and learning process that is why it mainly focuses on the improvement of EFL learners' oral communication. This paper is organised into five (05) sections: the introductory section which displays the background for the study, is followed by the second section displaying the theoretical keystones, the report of scholars who have dealt with the current issue. The third section describes the methodology including research population and sampling, research instruments, data collection procedures and methods of data analysis. The fourth section covers the presentation and discussion of the results, and the fifth one is concerned with suggestions and the conclusion.

2. Theoretical Keystones

2.1 Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as a Challenge in a Language Class

Learning a foreign language like English in Benin context is subject to many challenges. Minaflinou (2018), confirmed this in one of her research work and said that *'Learning a second or foreign language is both cognitively and emotionally demanding'*. According to Fung & Min (2016) *'learners are anxious and lack of confidence when it comes to speak in English for the fear of making mistakes'*. In their work, they demonstrated that the lack of communication skills is often due to fear, anxiety feeling in situations when students are called for oral communication.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994, p. 284) in their definition of language anxiety, reported by Minaflinou (2018), assumed *"that language anxiety can be defined as the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening and learning"*. This means that the speaking skill is extremely anxiety-provoking for many learners and more specifically in our foreign language context. Indeed, Daly (1991, p.3, cited in Von Worde, 2003) reported that in some individuals: *"fear of giving a speech in public exceeded such phobias as fear of snakes, elevators, and heights"*. Young (1991, p.430, cited in Minaflinou, 2018) went further to mention that the anxiety suffered by many language students when asked to speak in the classroom includes *"distortion of sounds, inability to reproduce the intonation and rhythm of the language, 'freezing up' when called on to perform, and forgetting words and phrases just learned or simply refusing to speak and remaining silent"*. Obviously, the effects of anxiety are daunting on students. Additionally, in the field of foreign language learning, it is claimed that a vicious cycle is formed when high anxiety levels lead to poor performance and poor performance leads back to higher anxiety levels. This vicious cycle needs to be broken through activities where students are more comfortable, well-motivated so as to help reduce the anxiety.

Tolelo & Hoit (2016) stated that there is a need to find means to overcome this fear and develop learners' confidence to use the language in a fun and motivating ways. Therefore, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methods are required for achieving this goal. By using CLT methods in EFL classes, learners have direct contact with the language and they are given more opportunities to practice. Teachers are facilitators while students are building their own knowledge. In this context, activities where students *'learn while playing and by doing'* are highly recommended. Among those activities we have role play, debates, discussions, talking circles, mock interview, oral presentation including simulation which is our main concern during this research work.

2.2 Concept of Simulation in CLT Context

CLT is broadly used today for English as foreign language teaching-learning to foster the 21st century's skills known as the four Cs (Communication, Creativity, Critical thinking and Collaboration) which are essential to prepare students for increasingly complex life and work environments in the 21st century. According to Richards (2006:16), CLT is described as *"activities where practice in using language within a real communicative context is the focus, where real information is exchanged, and where the language used is not totally predictable"*.

Richards and Rogers (2001) claimed that CLT approach is beneficial since it focuses on the development of the four skills on which language and communication depend. This approach aims at fostering EFL learner's competence in communication. Hiep (2007) argued that *'CLT is based on the idea that learning the target language occurs when classroom practices are meaningful and genuine to the learners'*. Alwazir and Shukri (2016) added that *'these practices need to be about real-life situations that entail communication'*. Then, the main goal of CLT is creating opportunities for learners to use the target language effectively for everyday communication needs without being afraid of judgement. That is why simulation, as a part of role play, comes to be powerful since it provides authentic contexts for beginners.

Simulation is a method that can help students to collaborate in developing their oral communication skills, their creativity, and their critical thinking. It means that, students are encouraged to develop and practice new language and behavior skills by themselves. According to Kayi (2003) simulation is a way of taking the students out of the classroom for a while and of showing them how English can be useful for them in certain situation. Simulation permits students to experience real life situations in which there is social interaction and an observable outcome in classroom context.

Students are encouraged to imitate, to embody characters, etc... Simulation activities, with clear instruction and adequate materials, can provide a rich communicative environment that allow students to practice the language easily in a funny way freed from fear.

According to Dulay, Burt, & Krashen (1982) *'simulation reduces anxiety levels which is essential to language development. Simulation activities increases self-confidence of hesitant students'*. This means a greater class interaction and participation, an increased interest in learning and noticeable improvement in students' communication and presentation skills.

3. Methodology :

3.1 Data Collection Procedure

A mixed method including both qualitative and quantitative researches has been used to carry out the investigation. This consists of the use of questionnaires to collect information, and a series of tests through the pilot study to cross-check the respondents' answers and to verify the research hypotheses.

The investigation consists in addressing questionnaires to EFL teachers and EFL students to collect data related to the importance of oral communication skills and the hindrances of the development of those skills. Then, an experimentation took place in CEG ZOUNGUE with beginners and a class of fifty students was randomly split into two groups: the control group (CG) which receives 'no treatment', and the experimental group (EG) which receives the treatment (the use of simulation). The experimentation was guided with the following hypotheses:

- H_0 : There is no statistical significance between the implementation of simulation and the students' performance.
- H_1 : There is a statistical significance (noted Sig. in the ANOVA Table) between the use of simulation's strategies and the students' oral communication skills.
- H_1 is proved if H_0 is rejected.

With the software SPSS 25, the collected data were processed and a statistical significance (Sig) is established for a P-value noted $\alpha < 0.05$. The level of statistical significance is expressed as a p-value between 0 and 1. A p-value less than 0.05 (typically ≤ 0.05) is statistically significant. It indicates strong evidence against the null hypothesis, as there is less than a 5% probability. The practical significance (the real-life significance) expressing the strength of the correlation between our variables, is assessed through the *Effect size* expressed in ETA squared value. The experiment is carried out using a quasi-experimental design described in the table 1.

Table 1: Quasi experimental design process

Steps	EG	CG
Step 1	Pre-test	Pre-test
Step 2	Treatment (Integrating simulation)	No-treatment
Step 3	Post-test	Post-test
Step 4	Comparisons and analysis	

3.2 Population and Sampling

Table 2: Selected Teachers and Students

Secondary school	Status	Teachers' number	Students' number
CEG Zoungue	Public	08	50

4. Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of the Results :

4.1 Presentation and Analysis of the Data Collected

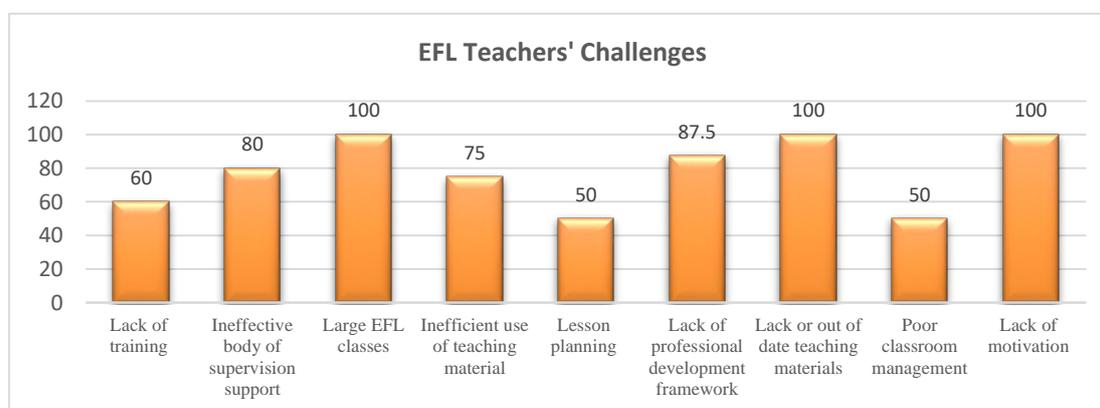


Figure 1: Teachers' challenges

The results of figure 1 show that all the teachers (100%) have almost the same problems in trying to enhance students' oral proficiency in their classes. These include lack of materials or the unproductive use of the existing one,

or the out-of-date of those teaching materials if there is any, students' lack of interest, the absence of support from an effective body of supervision, the lack of training and professional development framework. This chart also points out the size of our classes (too large), and the challenges in lesson planning leading to poor classroom management, as obstacles to the teachers' and students' best performances.

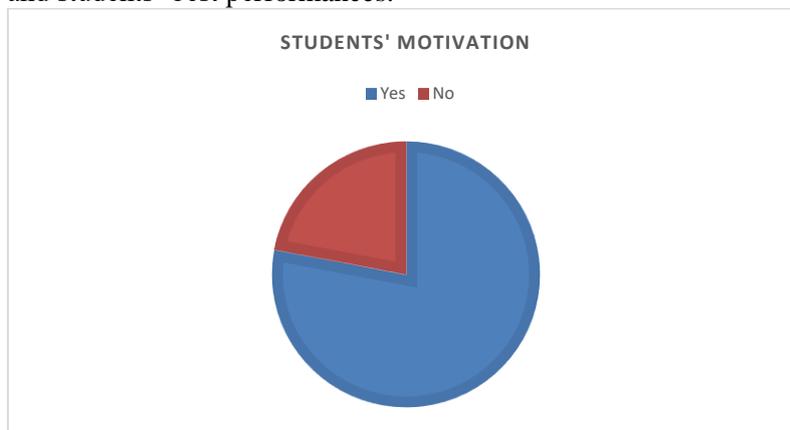


Figure 2: Students' Motivation

Figure 2 displays the satisfaction of seventy-eight (78%) percent of the students about the ways their teachers motivated them. This is a good thing. Nevertheless, something should be done for the remaining twenty-two (22%) percent.

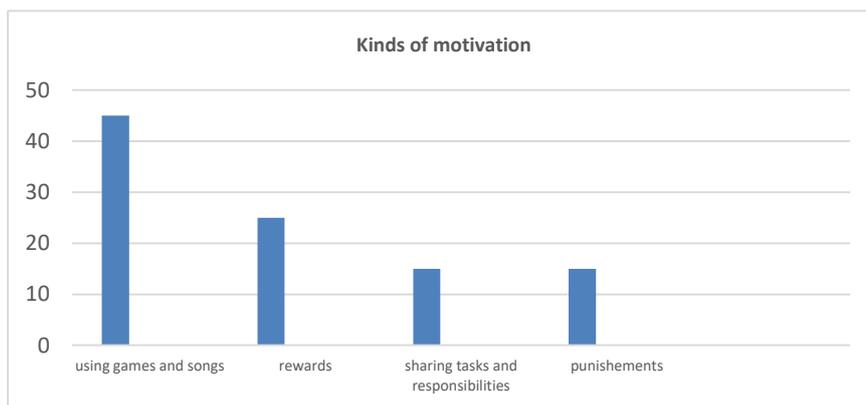


Figure 3: Types of Motivation According to the Students

Figure 3 shows the different strategies used by teachers to motivate their students. According to forty-five (45%) present of the learners, teachers use games and songs. Twenty-five (25%) percent of them talk about rewards; whereas fifteen (15%) percent of the respondents point out punishments and tasks/responsibilities sharing.

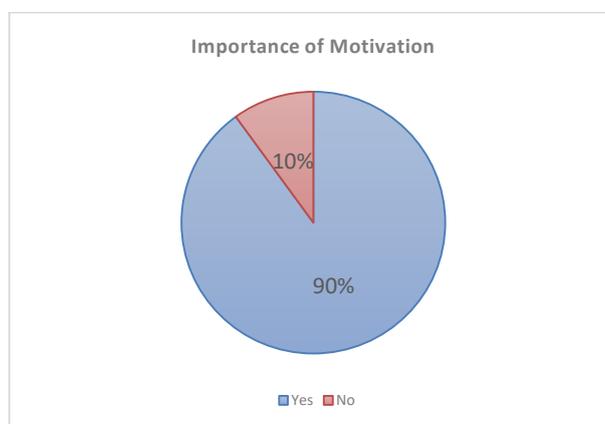


Figure 4: Importance of motivation in a language class

This pie chart of the fourth figure, shows that almost all the teachers are aware of the importance of students' motivation ninety (90%) percent of them answered 'yes' to the question. What matters is certainly the ways to succeed in motivating them appropriately and continuously.

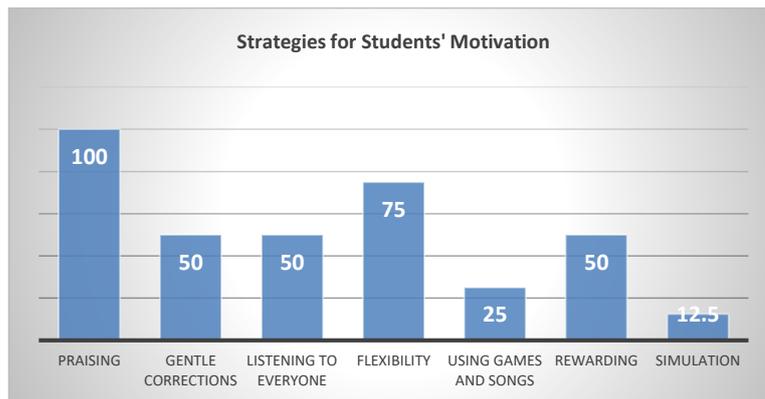


Figure 5: Motivation Strategies

Figure 5 lists motivation strategies used by teachers. Hundred (100%) percent talked about praising their students; fifty (50%) percent practiced gentle corrections, equal attention to everyone and rewarding. Some other use their flexibility as declared by seventy (75%) percent of them. But only twenty (20%) percent of them make use of games and songs, and 12.5 % use simulation as motivational tools.

4.2 Discussion of the Results

4.2.1 Effects of Simulation on Beginners' Oral Communication in Beninese's EFL Classes

The findings of the study revealed that simulation and oral presentation have positive effects on EFL Learners' oral communication. Those speaking activities help learners to enhance their Communicative Skills. This finding is supported by Girard, Pinard and Trapp (2011) who found that oral presentations lead to a greater class interaction and participation, an increased interest in learning and noticeable in improvement in their students' communication and presentations skills. Furthermore, simulation and oral presentation activities encourage the students to learn a new language in a creative and effective way. These activities allow them to react and communicate spontaneously and really build up their confidence level. In addition, the findings reveal that those speaking activities can be beneficial for the students in their future career. This is supported by Živković (2014) who stated that "*presentations have also been shown to improve students' abilities that can be beneficial for their future employment*". Bruce (2011) stated that "*this is especially true in EAP or ESP context, where there is much higher chance that students will be asked to use English in their future jobs*".

The experimentation standing as a pilot study, took place in CEG ZOUNGUE in Oueme region and the results are outstanding. Simulation increases learners' confident level, reduce their shyness, improve their vocabulary and leads to their communicative skills' enhancement. A look at our experimentation report confirms the previous researches.

FLA Pre-tests

Report			
Overall Score			
Group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Experimental	36.85	25	8.412
Control	33.70	25	5.983
Total	35.28	50	7.380

ANOVA Table						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Overall Score * Group	Between Groups	99.225	1	99.225	1.862	.180
	Within Groups	2024.750	48	53.283		
	Total	2123.975	49			

Before the implementation of the new strategies based on simulation, P-value = .180 > 0.05. Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference between groups before the experimentation. This means that all the students were almost at the same level at the beginning of the experimentation.

FLA Post-tests

Report			
Overall Score			
Group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Experimental	18.65	25	4.082
Control	33.40	25	6.581
Total	26.02	50	9.220

ANOVA Table							
			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Overall Score * Group	Between Groups	(Combined)	2175.625	1	2175.625	72.562	.000
	Within Groups		1139.350	48	29.983		
	Total		3314.975	49			
P value = 2.4126×10^{-10} <0.05 indicating statistical significance difference between groups after the experimentation.							
Measures of Association							
		Eta	Eta Squared				
Overall Score * Group		.810	.656				

Eta Squared of .656 indicates a strong correlation between the reduction of the FLA and simulation integration, and more than 65.6% students' improvement is related to the experimentation which is the use of simulation.

At the beginning of the year, the pre-test revealed that almost all the students have the same level at English. Through the post-test the following results were obtained.

Table 3: Comparison Between Experimental Group and Control Group

Students' marks	EG	CG
[0 ; 10[02 (08%)	17 (68%)
M ≥ 10	21 (84%)	08 (32%)
[16 ; 20]	02 (08%)	00
Level reached in the planning	95%	40%
Conclusion	Good progression and good performance	Poor achievement and poor performances

The analysis based on the students' marks and the progression rate of teachers, is showing that the integration of simulation impacts positively the productivity of the students which is directly connected to the achievement of their teachers. So, teachers can maximize the teaching time for better results when students are highly motivated. Based on the difference between the two groups (the progression rate, the teachers and students' performances), we can conclude that the more students are confident, the higher are their performances. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test scores of the simulation group compared to the traditional group (the CG). The findings indicated that the students in simulations group had performed better in the post-test compared to the pre-test after the exposure to the treatment (simulation as teaching-learning approach) in the beginners' classes for oral communication skills development. An implication of the study is that simulation approach can serve as a strategy to improve on students' oral proficiency.

4.2.2 Simulation as a Teaching Strategy in Competency-Based Approach (CBA) Context

The current curriculum in Benin Republic is CBA. Wherever an innovative teaching-learning is suggested, many teachers' question on its rationale and its matching with the present curriculum, naming CBA in our context. Simulations as other experiential approach originated from Task-Based Learning (TBLT), Cooperative Learning (CL), Communicative Learning Teaching (CLT), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). As a result,

5. CONCLUSION:

This research work explored the hindrances of beginners' oral proficiency and the advantages of the integration of simulation to oral presentation as a teaching technique to improve students' communicative skills. Integrating simulation to oral presentation has positive effects on improving students' communicative skills since it allows them to learn in a fun environment in which they can explore different situations of real life. The analysis of the findings revealed that the integration of simulation to oral presentation is a learner-centered approach which allows learners to develop their critical thinking and creativity.

As many researchers suggested in the past to use a different form of strategies and methods to examine the issue, this paper has tried to scrutinize the elements which make ESL/EFL learners dread learning by advising some types of techniques which help overcome the problem. Specifically, this paper is recommending the implementation of simulation activities in our beginners' classes in order to increase motivation and reduce FLA for better students' performances.

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