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Enhancing EFL Learners' Communication Skills in Real Life Situations, in Beninese Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT: *This article aims to raise EFL teachers' awareness of the impact of authentic communication tasks in simulated real life contexts on the enhancement of EFL learners' language skills in Beninese secondary schools. This study explores the language practice activities EFL teachers have their learners carry out and their effect on their communication skills. The data of this study have been collected through questionnaires administered to samples of EFL teachers and learners from six (6) secondary schools, and via class observations in some of these schools. The findings show that a great majority of EFL teachers in Beninese secondary schools mostly focus their language practice activities on grammar notions, lexical items, language functions, written text comprehension, role-playing dialogues, with less emphasis on authentic communication tasks. Thus, most of the respondent EFL learners fail to hold conversations in English in real life situations. To solve this problem, EFL teachers should be trained about different ways to simulate real world communication instances in their classes so as to engage their learners in real communication tasks.*

Key words*: Communication skills, communication tasks, language practice, simulation, real life situations.*

1. Introduction

The ultimate goal for learning any language is to fulfill communicative purposes in real life situations. We learn a language to communicate with people in our daily life and in diverse real world contexts by speaking it or by writing in this language. Thus, Beninese EFL learners should be able to use the English language to communicate with native and non-native speakers in and outside the country in various real life instances, after some years of learning experience. Unfortunately, despite their lengthy English language learning experience, a large number of EFL learners in Benin are unable to communicate effectively using the target language both at school and outside the school. Learners' incapacity to use the English language for effective communication undoubtedly stems from the lack of their engagement by EFL teachers in language practice through real communication tasks. In the classroom, learners are taught about various life situations and events, but are not offered enough opportunities to tap into their language input to engage in effective communication as in real life. Despite the implementation of the competency-based approach which focuses on the development of EFL learners' communication skills, their proficiency in English is still embryonic, probably because EFL teachers fail to include adequate communication tasks in their language classes.

The purpose of this study is to raise EFL teachers' awareness of various communication activities that can expedite their learners' proficiency in English. Through the current article, EFL teachers will unveil various avenues they can explore to have their learners practise the English language in real communication

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situations. EFL teachers will also discover how to simulate real life situations in the classroom to offer their learners enough opportunities to use the language they have learnt to communicate efficiently.

This study is so significant in that it promotes authentic use of the English language in various daily life situations, thereby contributing considerably to students' language proficiency development and communication accuracy enhancement.

The current study anchors on these two main questions:

- How do EFL teachers encourage their learners to communicate efficiently in various real life situations?
- What are the language practice activities that can enable learners to communicate efficiently and accurately?

2. Literature Review

This section addresses the importance of engaging EFL learners in authentic language practice through simulated real life communication situations in classroom settings to develop their ability to communicate efficiently.

2.1. Language Practice in Simulated Real-life Situations

Real-life situations are happenings in the real world rather than in a story; they are situations existing or occurring in reality, drawn from or drawing on actual events or situations (*Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary*, 2010). They describe actual events, people, activities and interactions. According to Anastazy, B. (2015), learning a language is an on-going process that requires practice and application of it in real life situations. In an environment where English is not the official language, simulating real life situations in classroom context is a solution to help EFL learners practise language effectively. Fatimah, L. (2010:1) defines simulation as a technique to replace and amplify real experiences with guided ones, often "immersive" in nature, that evoke or replicate substantial aspects of the real world in a fully interactive fashion. In other words, simulation remains an artificially constructed environment, the emulation of real world scenarios in the classroom for effective language learning and practice (Liz Hood, 2010).

Alluding to the opportunities simulation offers to language learners, Sarpparaje, M. (2015:4) stated: '*'Students also practice valuable language used in negotiation, argument, expressing opinion, compromise, agreement, and disagreement. This task also provides students with an opportunity to make a formal talk, determine an advertising message, and present their concept in a creative framework*''. So, to prepare EFL learners to speak the target language competently and go on learning it independently after they have left the language classroom, we need to provide them with simulation tasks. Involving EFL students in activities which simulate real life situations or happenings is the best any teacher can offer to prepare learners for effective communication in real life.

2.2. Practising Speaking Skills through Communicative Tasks

Engaging learners in real communication activities is an efficient approach to enhance their ability to use the target language in real life. Researchers in the field of English Language Teaching have suggested many practical tasks that can expedite learners' oral communication. We will be focussing on the following ones:

- *Drama acting;*
- *Debate or discussion on social issues;*
- *Poem declaiming on social matters;* and
- *Storytelling about real-life happenings*

2.2.1. Drama Acting

Drama is a special type of talk activity that affords additional opportunities for learners' oral language development. According to Munther, Z. (2006: 9), drama bridges the gap between course-book dialogues and natural usage, and can also help to bridge a similar gap between the classroom and real life situations by providing insights into how to handle tricky situations. Showing the importance of drama in social integration and fluency development, Billows (1961:119-120) stated:

> *Drama in school gives the opportunity to the individual to try himself out, and see himself in various roles and types of conduct; to relate himself to others in doing so; to work in a team; to rely on others and defer to their wishes and opinions; to integrate himself into a community quickly and satisfactorily. It helps him to speak clearly and expressively, and to use language fluently in connection with dramatic actions.*

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In other words, acting out drama in classroom is a language practice task which enables learners to discover how good, effective or fluent they are in using the target language to play various parts; and gives them the opportunity to integrate social life by acting out social issues or matters through cooperative and interactive work. According to Holden (1982: 1), "*drama is concerned with the world of 'let's pretend'; it asks the learner to project himself imaginatively into another situation, outside the classroom, or into the skin and persona of another person*". So, drama acting in the classroom is a simulated talk activity for authentic language use by learners.

2.2.2. Discussion on Social Issues

Engaging learners in *classroom discussion* or *debate* on social issues is an effective means to improve their speaking skills and prepare them to participate in real life discussions on current social matters. Expressing and justifying their views or positions in English over a topic of interest can arouse in students a sense of accomplishment and self-esteem as they are using the language to give and prove complex opinions. Discussion activities stir up critical thinking, and are therefore excellent preparation for learners to convince and persuade people in real-life talk. Ozalp Ozer (2005:1-3) contends that discussion serves these purposes: *increasing students' comfort with the specialised language*; *developing critical thinking*; and *fostering problem-solving skills*. He suggested the following discussion activities:

- *Providing students with a basic framework for analysing a text, by allowing them to practice talking by identifying the things that matter;*
- *Encouraging students to find creative solutions to complex problems, and showing individuals how to Come to a collective decision;*
- *creating a topic that has many levels of discussion, the one which stir up controversy.*

The teacher can also engage learners in collective discussion on a current topic in line with the lessons they are taught to enhance their language accuracy, fluency and proficiency. Furthermore, the teacher can have students watch interesting films or documentaries in the classroom and ask them to give their opinion about some highlighting points of these visual materials. Real life settings and social activities can also be recorded by both learners and teacher and presented in the classroom using a computer and projector for authentic discussion purposes.

2.2.3. Poem Recitation on Social Matters

Andrew Finch (2003:2) affirms: "*the use of poetry in the language classroom can lead to meaningful and successful language learning…..Not only can language learning be facilitated, but learners at all levels can use the medium of poetry to express themselves in the target language*". Simply put, using poem makes language learning efficient, thereby enhancing learners' fluency in the target language. Showing the mechanism through which poem enhances language fluency, Billows, F.L. (1961:237) states:

> *The frequent repetition of the sentences with the swing and the rhythm demanded by a poem…..practises the mind and the muscles to work smoothly and skillfully together in the pattern and sonorities of the language; this smooth, instinctive skill is what we usually mean by fluency.*

So, an enticing, rhythmic and lively recitation of poems involves the ignition of mental faculties, physical engagement and phonemic skills in learners, which develops their fluency in speech. Yasemin Kirkgöz (2014:396) emphasises that "*the poems appropriate to the students' level of proficiency and their interest can be used for the purpose of presentation and practice of language use,…*". This implies that poems, when used for language teaching/learning and practice, should be selected based on learners' proficiency level, and their needs or interests, so as to spur their motivation to learn.

2.2.4. Storytelling about Real-Life Happenings

Storytelling has long held a crucial part in history. People have passed down stories from generation to generation. This has mainly been done orally in African societies to teach the next generation our cultural

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values. According to Katherine Massa (2015:3), ‘*’storytelling is a perfect avenue to explore when looking for ways to develop the oral language skills of language learners in a classroom*’’. In other words, storytelling in schools is a potential means of helping students to hone their oral language skills (Sundmark, 2014 and Remi, 2011). Speaker (2000) states that it is important to make clear to students how storytelling structure is built to guide them when they make their own narratives. Students who are often taught through storytelling also have a better understanding of how storytelling and narratives are structured: with a beginning, a clear action and an end (Phillips, L., 1996). Furthermore, Phillips (1996:4) affirmed: ‘*’If teachers can model the imaginative, creative, dramatic telling of tales and allow students a chance to tell their own stories, there will be a flowering of storytelling in their class*’’. So, learners cannot be expected to tell stories satisfactorily unless the teacher shows them how to approach it.

2.3. Practising Listening in Real life Situations

Listening is the ability to accurately receive, understand and interpret messages in the communication process. Mohammad Tanvir (2008:2) advocates that it would seem not very helpful to base listening exercise mainly on passages that are read aloud and followed by comprehension questions, when we know that very little of the discourse that we hear in real life is read aloud, and we do not normally respond in real world by answering comprehension questions. To develop learners’ listening skills, it is incumbent to the teacher to engage them in authentic listening activities as in real life. Georgeta Obilişteanu (2007:1) corroborates this view by stating that: ‘*’Classroom practice should usually incorporate the characteristics of real-life listening*’’, for the objective of listening comprehension practice in the classroom is to enable learners to function successfully in real-life listening situations (Penny Ur, 1996). Penny Ur (1996:2) provides the following list of real-life listening situations: interview; theatre show; instructions; telephone chat; radio news; watching TV; conversation; story-telling, etc., followed by authentic listening tasks. These situations may be simulated in the classroom for language practice.

In the classroom, learners may also be assigned to listen to a debate/discussion presented by their mates on a given topic. The teacher may divide the class into groups, for example, and ask one or two groups to discuss a current topic. The rest of the class should listen carefully to the speakers and jot down what each speaker says. At the end of the debate, the class will decide based on their notes, which speaker made the strongest arguments.

Furthermore, learners can be assigned to real life listening situations outside the classroom and then share with the class their listening experiences. The teacher may ask each of them to:

- Listen to an English song they mostly delight in, learn it and sing it to the class during the class time;
- Watch an interesting film in English at home and share with the class the highlighting events in it, and the lessons he/she has drawn from the film;
- Listen to the News in English on TV, on the radio or on the internet and share with the class the gist of the information passed; and then give his/her personal impressions about the information.

These types of activities make listening practice more realistic, thereby bridging the gap between the real life and the classroom.

2.4. Practising Reading and Writing in Real Life Contexts

When learners are constrained to read a text or write on a topic they are not interested in, or which makes no meaning to them, reading and writing appear as a burden to them. They can feel bored and lose taste for these activities. David Barton (2012) states: “*In the real world, we don’t just ‘read’ and ‘write’: we always read and write something for a particular purpose, in a particular way, in a particular time and place. Outside the classroom, any writing our learners do will have a specific purpose and context*’’. It means that reading and writing activities inside or outside the classroom should be carried out in real life contexts with well-defined purposes.

2.5. Reading Real-Life Materials

Referring to authentic reading, David J. Rosen (2015:6) states: ‘*’Reading itself is an important life skill. In everyday life we use reading to get information about the world around us*’’. So, EFL learners should be assigned with reading activities directed to real life information about themselves and about other life realities, situations and facts. An approach for authentic reading is the use of real life reading materials. They are authentic written materials learners come across in their daily life. These materials are also referred to as

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nonfiction materials (Stephanie Harvey, 2002). They include newspapers, magazines, memos, manuals, and directions (Zinsser, 1998), drug leaflets, recipe, menus, signposts, maps, bus and train schedules, food label, bills, catalogues, advertisement, medical prescriptions, etc. Real life reading materials can spur learners' passion and engagement to read extensively as they are reading what they know about and are surrounded with. The teacher can instruct learners to find and read those materials and do a set of comprehension activities based on these materials. For instance, after a class on ''diseases", the teacher can ask learners to find a leaflet of a drug against malaria and read the composition, the dosage, the precaution before use, the side effects; and instruct them to do some comprehension and vocabulary activities, so as to check learners' understanding of the materials and help them build new lexis about diseases and health.

2.6. Writing about Real-Life Situations

As far as writing practice in real life is concerned, Language Experience Approach (LEA) developed by Kennedy (1973) can be used. According to Adrian J. Wurr (2002), LEA draws upon the link between learners' personal experience and learning at school by using students' narratives as the basis for reading or writing instructions. Kennedy (1973:1) states that LEA is applied for authentic writing in terms of free writing: ''*The students write about topics of immediate interest- their homes, their daily lives or an important event therein – and share the work with others in the class as a reading journal dittoed by the teacher, but for the most part preserving the student's own style and wording*''. In this respect, learners can be asked to:

- Write a personal life story about an event or a situation that moved or affected them (Ciccone Erin, 2001);
- Write about their favourite athletes or football players in various competitions;
- Write romantic letters to their boy or girl-friends to praise their beauty or express their feelings to them (Waff Diane, 1995);
- Write about particular real events or occasions they witnessed: election, concert, cinema, ceremony, sports competition, etc. (Waff Diane, 1995);
- Write letters, e-mails or SMS to their classmates or friends to greet, inform, warn or advise them; and to their EFL teachers (O'Shaughnessy Kathleen, 2001; Slagle Patricia, 1997);
- Write on topics of interest to be included in the school bulletin or magazine which needs setting up by the help of EFL teachers (Ciccone Erin, 2001);
- Write drama scripts on current social issues and act them out in the classroom or during school annual celebration (Hicks, J. and Tim J., 2000.), etc.

Alluding to the importance of real life writing, Cherry (2004) reports: *"I've been teaching writing for many years. And I now realize the more able we are to relate the concepts of writing to 'real world' experience, the more successful we will be"*. Thus, for learners to experience outstanding improvement on their writing skills, teachers should often instruct them to write about real life experiences, events, situations and social issues, thereby making learning and language practice more real and authentic.

3. Methodology

The methodology of this study includes the population sampling, the research methods employed (quantitative and qualitative), research instruments, and data collection and analysis. We have randomly selected sixty (60) EFL teachers (both part-time and full-time teachers) and two-hundred (200) learners (post-beginners) from six Beninese secondary schools in Ouémé and Plateau regions, and addressed each group of participants a questionnaire for data collection. We have also conducted class observations based on a detailed checklist. After data collection, we have presented the results and analysed them accordingly.

3.1. Research Instruments

Questionnaires for EFL teachers and learners, and class observations are the instruments used for this study.

3.1.1. Questionnaire for EFL Teachers

We administered a five-item questionnaire to EFL teachers. The first item is interested in the alignment of the learning topics with real life situations. The second item enquires about the creation of real life contexts in the classroom by the teacher for language practice. The third item deals with the language practice activities

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the teacher mostly carry out with learners. Question number four is asked to know how EFL teachers can simulate real life situations in their classrooms for communicative language practice by learners. The last item of the questionnaire has to do with the outcome of learners' language practice in simulated real life situations.

3.1.2. Questionnaire for EFL Learners

We addressed five questions to learners to enquire about their language learning experience in the classroom and their capacity to communicate in English in real life situations. The first question aims at knowing if the learning topics align with learners' social realities. The second question has to do with learners' interest in the language learning topics. The third question informs on the language practice activities their teacher instructs them to do. Question 4 is asked to know about learners' communication ability in real life situations. The last question is about the language practice activities suggested by learners to enhance their communication skills.

3.1.3. Class Observation

We have observed six (6) classes to witness the way teachers have their learners practise the English language. The observation mainly aims at:

- Discovering whether EFL teachers engage their learners in communicative language practice activities;
- Checking if they simulate real life situations and settings in their classroom for real communication practice; and
- Unveiling the effects of the language practice tasks on their motivation and communication skills development.

3.2. Results

We have duly presented and analysed the results from each research instrument.

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3.2.1. Teachers' Responses

3.2.1.1. Learning Topics Alignment with Real Life Situations

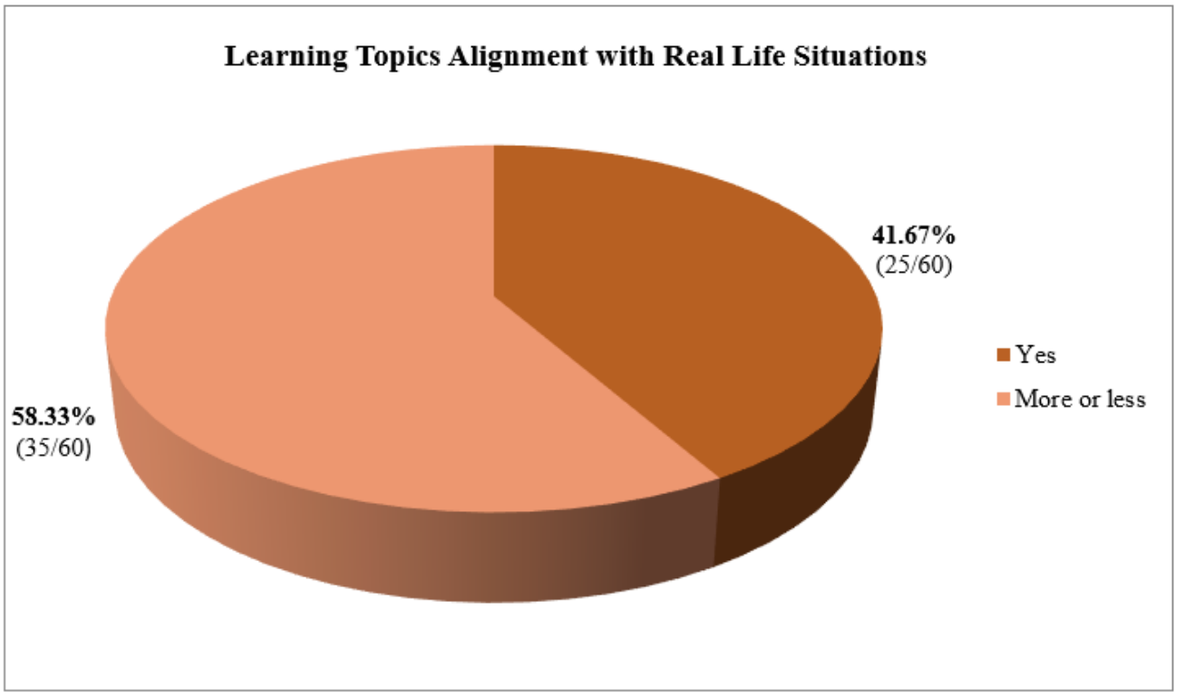


Figure 1. Relation of learning topics with real life situations.

The results on the pie chart show that 41.67 percent of the respondent teachers affirmed the learning topics in the student's textbooks pervade real life situations while 58.33 percent of them said the topics are more or less related to social realities. So, a large number of teachers (58.33 percent) think that the learning situations included in the authorised textbooks are partly related to real life events or happenings, which can have a negative impact on learners' interest in the class.

3.2.1.2. Teachers' Simulation of Real Life Situations in the Classroom for Language Practice

Table 1. Creation of real life situation in the classroom.

Statement	Yes	%	No	%	Total
Teacher's simulation of real life situations/contexts in the classroom for language practice by learners?	60	100%	00	00%	60 (100%)

The results displayed in the table 1 reveal that all the respondent EFL teachers claimed they simulate real life situations in the classroom for language practice by their students. If this is true, then learners should be able to communicate efficiently in English in various real life contexts. We will check this in learners' responses.

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3.2.1.3. Language Practice Activities Mostly Carried Out by EFL Teachers

Table 2. Mostly used language practice activities by the teacher.

Statements	Frequency	%	Total
Assessing vocabulary and grammar	49	81.66%	**60** (100%)
True/False and questions answering activities on a written text	21	35%	
Oral questions and oral answers on the previous lessons	39	65%	
Debate/discussion and presentations on topics related to the lessons taught	21	35%	
Acting out drama related to the topics dealt with	10	16.66%	
Paragraph writing, listening and text summarising	04	06.66%	

The results in Table 2 show that EFL teachers mostly engage their learners in the following language practice activities:

- Assessing vocabulary and grammar (81.66 percent of EFL teachers);
- True/false and question-answering activities on a written text (35 percent of them);
- Oral questions and answers on the previous lessons (65 percent of them);
- Debate/discussion and presentations on topics related to the lessons taught (35 percent of them);
- Acting out drama related to the topics dealt with (16.66 percent of them);
- Paragraph writing, listening and text summarising (06.66 percent of them).

Based on the results, we can infer that very few EFL teachers involve their learners in real communicative language practice activities. Most of them usually assess vocabulary, grammar and question-answering skills. This is one of the factors that stifle the development of learners' communication skills.

3.2.1.4. Ways to Simulate Real life Situations in the Classroom for Language Practice

The respondent teachers suggested the following ways to simulate real life situations in the classroom for authentic language practice:

- Poem recitation by learners;
- Songs singing: having learners sing the songs they like;
- Drama enactment based on the topics dealt with in the classroom;
- Having learners discuss topics that suit their interest by creating an atmosphere of free expression;
- Discussing real life current topics;
- Emphasising role playing activities;
- Equipping schools with audio-visual materials to simulate real life situation so as to enable students to learn and practice language in a way conducive to its mastery ;
- Presentations on topics related to the lessons taught;

The respondent teachers are aware of the simulation strategies for authentic language practice in the classroom. However, the results in Table 2 show that very few of them apply these strategies in their classes. Therefore, many EFL teachers in Beninese secondary schools fail to engage their learners in real communication tasks to prepare them for language use in real life.

3.2.1.5. The Impact of EFL Learners' Language Practice in Simulated Real Life Situations?

Based on the responses of EFL teachers, the effects of language practice in simulated real life situations on learners' language performance are as follows:

- Ignition of students' drive to learn;
- Enhancement of their language fluency and proficiency;
- Accurate use of the target language by learners in various real life situations and settings;
- Development of learners' retention capacity;
- Learners' autonomy and ability to communicate efficiently in any real life situation;
- Students' capacity to hold effective conversation with native English speakers.

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These responses show that having learners practise the target language in real-life-like situations created in the classroom is highly efficient to enhance their communication skills in real world communication contexts. Therefore, EFL teachers in Beninese secondary schools should endeavor to create such situations in their classes to expedite their learners' language skills.

3.2.2. Learners' Responses

3.2.2.1. Learning Topics Alignment with Students' Social Realities

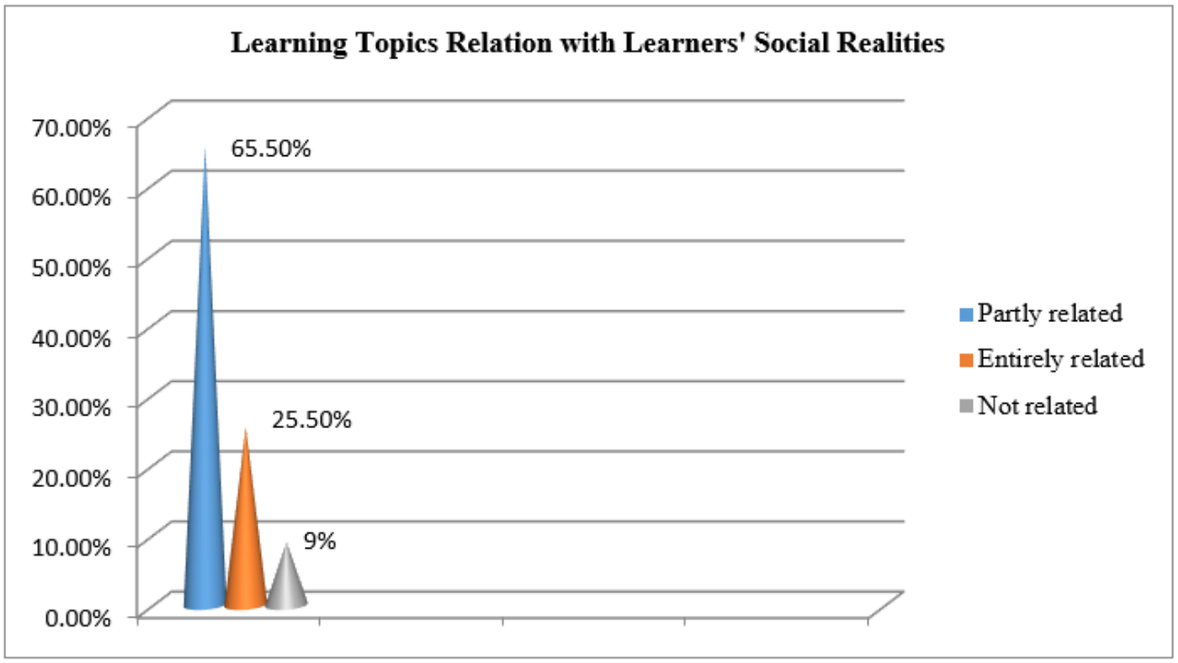


Figure 2. Alignment of the lesson topics with students' social realities.

Based on the results on figure 2, 65.5 percent of the respondent learners stated that the learning topics studied in the classroom are partly related to the social realities in their areas; 25.5 percent of them affirmed the topics are utterly related to their social realities; while only 09 percent thought those topics are not related at all to their social realities. So, the learning situations developed in the official textbooks take into account parts of the social realities, beliefs or events in the learners' regions or communities as reported by most of the students. This situation may weaken their motivation to learn and practise the English language as some important aspects of their culture and realities are not emphasised. As the teacher is not expected to stick to the textbook, he/she can include other aspects of learners' social realities in his/her classes so as to increase their motivation to learn.

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3.2.2.2. Learners' Interest in the Learning Topics Developed in Their Textbook(S)

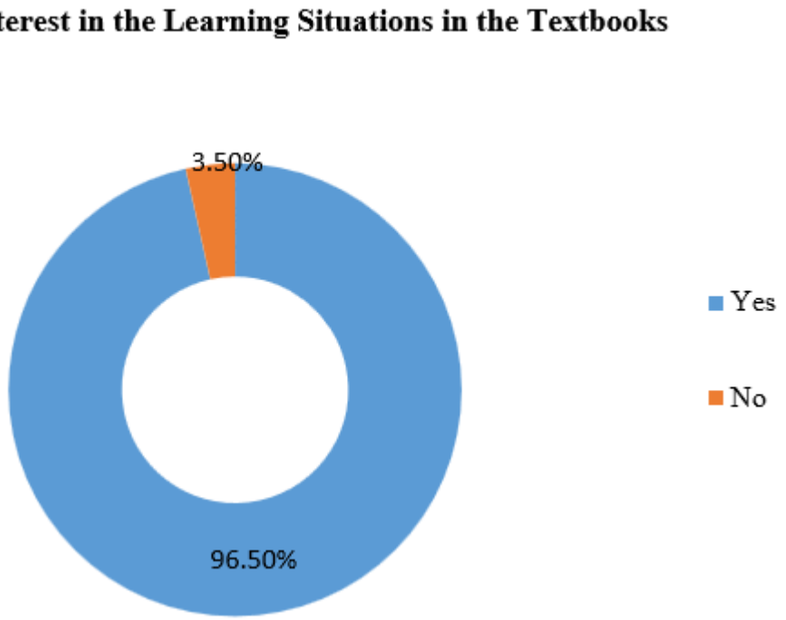


Figure 3. Students' interest in the learning topics.

The results displayed on the ring show that 96.5 percent of the respondent learners are interested in the topics included in their textbook(s) while only 3.5 percent of them are not. The great majority of learners are satisfied with the learning situations dealt with in the English textbooks. So, they are expected to be motivated to acquire and master the knowledge pertaining to these topics. But their motivation may falter if the teacher fails to create authentic communication situations for language practice in the class.

3.2.2.3. Language Practice Activities Mostly Assigned to Learners

Table 3. Language practice activities learners mostly do.

Statements	**Frequency**	**%**	**Total**
Vocabulary and grammar activities	149	74.5	
Role playing dialogues from the textbook	124	62	
Text followed by questions to answer	131	65.5	
Debate/discussion topics related to the lesson studied	87	43.5	**200** (100%)
Drama related to the learning situation	14	07	
Presenting topics related to the learning situations	07	3.5	
Watching films related to the topics developed and discussing some important points	00	00	
No language practice activity	13	6.5	

Table 3 displays the following results:

- 74.5 percent of learners said their teachers mostly give them vocabulary and grammar activities for language practice after the learning tasks;
- 62 percent of students reported that their teachers have them role-play dialogues from the textbook;
- 65.5 percent of them are given texts with questions to answer;
- 43.5 percent of them said they are involved in debate or discussion on topics related to the lesson studied;
- 07 percent of the learners act out drama related to the learning situation studied;

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- 03.5 percent of them are assigned to present topics related to the learning situations dealt with;
- None of them watch films on the lessons studied;
- 06.5 percent of them are given no task for language practice.

The results clearly show that the majority of EFL teachers in Benin secondary schools mostly engage their learners in the practice of language essentials and notional aspects void of authentic communication. These types of activities can by no means foster their communication skills.

3.2.2.4. EFL Learners' Ability to Communicate Efficiently in Real Life Situations

Table 4. Learners' capacity to communicate efficiently in real life contexts.

Statement	Yes	%	No	%	Total
Students' ability to communicate efficiently in English in real-life situations.	26	13%	174	87%	**200** (100%)

The results in this table show that 87 percent of the respondent learners are unable to communicate efficiently in English in real life situation while only 13 percent of them can. The great majority of EFL learners in Beninese secondary schools, especially in 'Ouémé' and 'Plateau' regions, fail to express themselves fluently and effectively in English despite the lengthy learning experience. Among the reasons they put forward are their lack of words and expressions related to each situation; and the failure of the teacher to offer them enough opportunities to engage in interactions related to real life situations. If learners are unable to communicate efficiently in real life contexts, then the teachers' claim to have their learners practice the target language in simulated real life situations, as reported in Table 1, is faulty.

3.2.2.5. Learners' Suggestions of Communicative Language Practice Activities

For the development of their communicative efficiency and accuracy in real life situations, the respondent learners suggested their teachers instruct them to carry out the following activities:

- Holding debates/discussions on current topics related to the learning situations;
- Acting out drama related to real life situations or events;
- Watching films related to the topics learnt and discussing them;
- Assigning us to project works on current topics and presenting our results to the class;
- Organising internal and external trips (in an English-speaking country) for language practice in real life situations;
- Setting up and mentoring English clubs for further language practice;
- Creating school bulletins to promote writing about real life occurrence.

These activities will undoubtedly hone their communication skills.

3.2.3. Class Observation Report

As stated earlier, I observed six (6) classes using a well-defined checklist. Based on my observation, I came up with the following remarks:

- In most of the classes I observed, there was lack of authenticity and real life reality in the language practice activities learners were involved in.
- Four out of the six classes were grammar and vocabulary-oriented, which is just a notional aspect of the language.
- One of the classes was based on discussion of a topic which did not instill in learners the interest to express their opinions.
- In general, there was absence of motivation in learners as the atmosphere in most of the classes was so dull and dormant.

However, in one of the observed classes, the language learning activities sound practical and display some aspects of real life communication. The lesson was on *Asking and Giving Direction*. The teacher (a female) taught learners successfully how to ask and give directions. Almost all the learners were motivated and enthusiastic while learning this lesson. After the lesson presentation, she had the learners practise by asking, giving and following directions in turn both within and outside the classroom. But learners already knew the

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places they asked directions about, which is not so in real life. In real world, people ask direction about places or settings they do not know. The activity would be more authentic if the teacher asked a student (who knows a given non-distant place in real life) to give direction to his or her mate who does not know the place.

3.3. Discussion of the Findings

Based on the findings of the questionnaires and class observations, we deem it crucial to discuss the following highlighting points:

- The outcome of ineffective language practice on learners' language development;
- The enhancement of authentic communicative activities in EFL classes;
- The Training of EFL teachers on simulation strategies for language learning and practice.

3.3.1. The Outcome of Ineffective Language Practice on Learners' Communication Skills

The findings of this study show that 81.66 percent of EFL teachers mostly had their learners practise the English language through grammar and vocabulary activities and 65 percent of them engaged their students in oral questions-answering based on the lessons taught (*cf.* Table 2). Considering these language essentials and notions assessment as effective language practice is an overstatement and a misnomer. These isolated and disembodied activities can foster in no way learners' language communication skills. Alluding to the outcome of language practice based on notional aspects or language essentials like grammar, vocabulary, etc., Andrew (2012:1) stated: "…..*We are practicing in a way that does not call on the faculties that we use when we are actually using the language in real life. This could be a reason why so many students feel tongue-tied in real life situations even when they have put in ample hours of practice"*. It implies that theoretical and notional language practice cannot ignite the cognitive potentials of learners to communicate effectively in real life. It will rather put a damper on their communicative ability. That is why most of the students are unable to express themselves fluently and accurately in English in various life situations (87 percent of them, based on the results in Table 4) in spite of their lengthy learning experience. Therefore, language practice void of communicative activities hampers learners' ability to accrue skills that are crucial for the mastery of the target language in terms of the actual use of the language to communicate in diverse life situations. This situation needs correcting in Beninese secondary schools for a meaningful and impactful teaching/learning and practice of the English language to ensure effective development of learners' communicative efficiency. To this end, communicative language practice activities should be emphasised in EFL classes.

3.3.2. Enhancing Authentic Communicative Activities in EFL Classes

Authentic activities are tasks with real world relevance, that is to say, activities that prepare learners for the use of the target language in real life. Thus, to ensure the development of learners' communication ability in real life situations, teachers should put emphasis on communicative language practice based on similar situations. Unfortunately, the study reveals that the majority of EFL teachers overlook communicative language practice tasks. Very few of them, engage their learners in communicative activities, such as drama acting, discussion on current issues, etc. though almost all of them are aware that they are the best language practice activities likely to foster learners' fluency and proficiency in real life (*cf.* Table 2). As Littlewood (1981) contends, only communicative activities related to life realities are worthwhile to enhance incrementally learners' language skills. Involving learners in such activities will enable them to get a proven command of the English language by dint of using the language repeatedly in real life communicative instances.

Drama enacting, project works, writing articles in school bulletins, exchanging letters between pen-pals, discussing current topics, sharing one's experiences, storytelling, etc. are part of authentic communicative activities, as suggested by both the respondent teachers and learners. The setting up of English clubs and the issuing of school bulletin or magazine in Beninese secondary schools as proposed by the respondent teachers and learners are other avenues to enable learners to use the English language for authentic communication. Note that learners' social realities should be included in language practice activities to arouse their motivation to participate actively.

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3.3.3. Training EFL Teachers on Simulation Strategies for Language Learning and Practice

As mentioned earlier, simulation consists in transferring real-life situations into the classroom for authentic language learning and practice, thereby making learning more exciting (Brinton, 2001). Based on the results of the study, many teachers are ignorant of simulation strategies and fail to involve their learners in authentic language practice activities (*cf. Table 2*). Even the majority of those who suggested some right simulation methods do not use them for language practice, probably because they do not know how to go about it. Therefore, EFL teachers need to be trained on simulation strategies and their implementation for language learning and practice in their classes. This will help them discover the tremendous opportunities simulation offers for a successful language teaching/learning and practice. Pointing to the benefits of simulation, Watson (1986) stated: "*The use of simulation techniques where students are allowed to project themselves into new classroom roles helps to improve classroom dialogues, active participation, and transfer of learning*". Sarpparaje (2015:4) adds: "*Students also practise valuable language used in negotiation, argument, expressing opinion, compromise, agreement and disagreement*". Considering these benefits, pre-service and in-service training on simulation techniques is recommended for EFL teachers to master them and implement them in their classes. Any language teacher who overlooks the use of simulation strategies for language learning and practice will simply fail to foster his or her learners' language proficiency. Note that simulation of real-life situations through textbooks' pictures is insufficient. Students need more communicative simulated instances in which they use the target language to play new roles as in real world or watch and hear people communicating in various situations via audiovisual materials. Such strategies will develop in no time their language skills and communicative efficiency. To make this easier for teachers, the government should provide schools with relevant audio-visuals materials for authentic simulation of real world situations and train teachers on the use of these technological aids for fluency and proficiency-enhancing language practice. Each secondary school should be equipped with at least a modern language lab well equipped with technological devices like TV, computers, video and audio recorders and players, internet connection, etc. with a view to offering learners opportunity to learn and practise the English language effectively.

4. Conclusion

Language practice via communicative activities in simulated real life situation is the cornerstone of the enhancement of learners' communication skills. The current study has revealed that the majority of EFL teachers in Beninese secondary schools put less emphasis on authentic communication tasks in their classes, which dampers the development of their learners' language proficiency. Their failure to simulate real life situations in their classes to offer their learners opportunities to practise the target language effectively is a sequel to their lack of training in simulation strategies. To solve that problem, it takes adequate training and personal development. Moreover, Beninese education authorities should equip each secondary school with teaching materials, devices and aids that will make it easier for teachers to create real-life-like communication contexts in their classrooms for effective language practice by their learners.

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Appendices

Questionnaire for Teachers

1- Are the learning topics developed in the student's textbook(s) related to real life situations, events, happenings, issues or matters?
2- Do you create real-life-like situations/contexts in the classroom to have your learners practise the English language?
3- Which language practice activities do you mostly have your learners do?
4- How can EFL teachers create real-life-like situations in the classroom to make learners practise the English language so as to enable them to communicate efficiently and accurately in real world situations?
5- What are the outcomes of EFL learners' language practice in simulated real life situations?

Questionnaire for Learners

1- Are the learning topics related to the social realities in your area/region/community?
2- Are you interested in the learning topics or situations developed in your textbook(s)?
3- What activities does your English teacher often have you do for language practice in the classroom?
4- Can you use the English language to communicate efficiently and accurately in real life situations?
5- What learning tasks do you suggest your English teacher to do to enable you to communicate efficiently and accurately in real life situations?

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