

## USING GROUP WORK STRATEGY TO FOSTER BEGINNER LEARNERS' SPEAKING PERFORMANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS EFL CLASSROOMS IN BENIN

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### **Abstract**

This paper is designed to examine productive and tenable ways to solve the problem of learners' failure to speak English as a foreign language. This study adopted quantitative and qualitative approach and is an attempt to explore the significance of group work on EFL beginner speaking performance in Beninese classrooms. A review of literary sources on group work has uncovered the potentials of group work to improve learners' speaking abilities. As such, a study population of 18 EFL teachers and 250 students in beginner classes randomly selected helped collect data for the questionnaire administered and the class observation in the second semester of the school year 2023-2024. The results indicate that group work is hardly used in classrooms, in general, before we even talk about using it to improve learners' communicative skills. The current research suggests that EFL teachers should be trained on the productive use of group work in creating a safe, relaxed and engaging classroom atmosphere that promotes interactions. Such solutions seem to be crucial to fight learners' failure in speaking English as a foreign language and improve their speaking competence.

**Keywords:** Group Work, Speaking Abilities, EFL Beginners, Potentials

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the realm of language teaching and learning, speaking competence has progressively become an essential requirement for learners worldwide. According to Goh (2007), "Speaking plays a key role in facilitating language acquisition and is a vital communicative skill" (p.ii). The sad reality is that a great number of learners do not possess basic interactional skills to initiate, maintain, and end a conversation in the target language. Empowering learners to speak English as a foreign language in Benin context appears then to be essential for academic progress, professional success, travelling and more. That gives room to appropriate teaching methods and strategies that the teacher should use in making their learners speak fluently and accurately. One of the simplest but important teaching strategies used by teachers as a way to organize their classrooms is group work. Harmer (2007) could therefore argue that group work maximizes learners' involvement in classes since many speaking opportunities are offered to them as well as room to express their opinions. Cooperation which is now a significant requirement in job offers (i.e., being a team worker) is enhanced through group work. As learners can perform at a personal level and share their thoughts with the others, autonomy is then promoted.

In Beninese schools whereby classes are crowded with learners and written exercises are emphasized, learners are no longer interested in speaking activities. They do not even value the role of group work in improving their speaking skills. And the latter cannot directly be blamed since it is of the responsibility of the teacher to consider the optimistic view of group work. This conception states that the most effective approach of making learners speak English is promoting conversations through group work. Such a thought will be impacted in students and make them change their mind.

To potentially solve the problem of negligence of group work, teachers should usually use group work during their classes, but also effectively plan, organize, and implement it in such a way that many opportunities are handed over to the learners to speak among themselves and with the teacher in the foreign language in use.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In today's globalized era where possessing basic English proficiency skills appears to be a key to the professional world, the bitter truth is that learners do not have command of the language skills and functions. According to Iwikotan et al. (2019, p. 107) "during their first day at school, students are very eager to learn the English language which is new to them. However, with time, the eagerness dwindles to the extent of disappearing in some cases". In other words, students lack opportunities to have genuine interactions in classrooms that are not too controlled or based on mimicking and repetitions. Hindémè et al. (2018, pp. 282-283) maintain that "students end their first cycle of secondary school studies without being able to utter a few words of conversation inside the classrooms or with English speaking people". Yet learners get excellent marks in written assignments.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance to examine not only the potentials of group work in teaching and learning English as a foreign language, but also making group work an effective teaching strategy as far as improving learners' speaking skills is concerned.

## **3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

As such, this study is an attempt to exploring the potentials of group work in improving learners' spoken English in Benin context. The ongoing study will explore both the elements that affect the use of group work in classrooms and the difficulties faced in its implementation on the one hand and the way group work can assist EFL teachers regarding the promotion of an interactive classroom on the other hand.

## **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To meet the target, the current research work will provide answers to three research questions as listed below:

- What factors influence the use of group work in EFL teaching and learning in Benin Republic ?
- What are the challenge related to the use of group work on EFL teaching and learning in Beninese secondary schools?
- What are the effective measures for better use of group work EFL beginner classrooms?

## **5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is important since it highlights the effective use of group work to promote the spoken language of English. Not only does it share a great number of advantages, but it also demonstrates how teachers and learners can manage time properly and still reach the ultimate goal of language learning, that is, to enable learners to speak the language being taught and learnt accurately before they even finish their first cycle in secondary schools.

This research work is significant for it keeps both the government and the school authorities aware of concepts such as cooperative learning, communicative language teaching, learners-centered instruction (to name but a few) with the end goal of asking them to organize in-service training as well as conferences on small group work by experts for a renovation of English as a foreign language in Beninese schools.

## **6. LITERATURE REVIEW.**

This review of literature pinpoints the key characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching to begin. Next, it discusses the closely allied concepts to CLT. In the end, it focuses on sustaining interaction through group work.

### **6.1 Main Characteristics of CLT**

The primary concern of a communicative classroom is student development of communicative competence in English. Communicative Language teaching is a broadly based to language teaching that could be described by seven (07) interconnected characteristics enumerated by Brown and Lee (2015) in the fourth edition of their book entitled "Teaching by Principles".

### **6.2 Overall Goals**

Overall goals have to do with the theoretical framework or model of communicative competence. Eghtesadi (2017) unveils that the American sociologist and anthropologist Dell H. Hymes coined the phrase "communicative competence" and defined it as what "enables a member of a community to know when to speak and when to remain silent, which code to use when, where, and to whom, etc (Hymes as cited in Eghtesadi, 2017, p. 38). Multiple theoreticians have worked on communicative competence namely: Hymes, Canale and Swain, Bachman. Bachman (as cited in Bachman & Palmer, 1996) proposed a language ability model made up of two components such as: language competence, that is, language knowledge and strategic competence. Organizational competence and pragmatic competence are the two broad categories with each being divided into respectively both grammatical competence and textual competence as well as not only illocutionary competence but also sociolinguistic competence (Bachman as cited in Castillo et al., 2017).

### **6.3 Relationship of Form and Function**

The primary concern of language techniques is to get learners involved in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. In order to reach the objectives listed above, organizational forms play a major role despite the fact that they are not the core consideration here.

#### **6.3.1 Fluency and Accuracy**

Accuracy refers to the extent to which the learners' speech is grammatically acceptable, with clear, intelligible pronunciation and appropriate choice of vocabulary. Fluency is the extent to which the

learner can speak at an acceptable speed with few false starts and hesitations. Both concepts are complementary.

### **6.3.2 Focus on Real-World Context**

According to Moskowitz (1978, p.1) "The foreign language class has been depicted by many as having interaction that is too rote and automatic, too controlled with too much parroting, with the teacher being viewed as a drill sergeant. In this vein, Brown and Lee (2015, p.32) argue that "students in a communicative class ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed context outside the classroom". In other word, empowering EFL students to be capable of speaking the English language outside the womb of the classrooms of momentous significance.

### **6.3.3 Autonomy and Strategic Involvement**

Lifelong learning should be developed in students. Autonomy, here and now, is concerned with students being able to further their studies, that is, to keep on learning beyond the classroom. That because they are granted opportunities to focus on their learning process. This is made possible since learners are aware of their own styles (strengths, weaknesses, preferences) as well as the development of appropriate strategies for production and comprehension.

### **6.3.4 Teacher Roles**

"Teachers shall be real facilitators of learning" (Khatib et al., 2013, p.49). This way, the teacher is no "more seen as a traditional 'notion-dispenser'" who privileges frontal lessons and maintains a complete control over the group, but rather as a supporter or facilitator of the learner's approach to the foreign language' "The duty of the empathic 'coach'" is sparking students' interests to be actively involved in genuine linguistic interaction both with him and with other learners in constructing meaning.

### **6.3.5 Student Roles**

The roles of the students boil down to partaking actively to their own learning process. Learner-centered, cooperative, collaborative learning is highlighted, yet not at the expense of appropriate teacher-centered activity.

## **6.4 Closely Allied Concepts to CLT**

As a wider comprehension has already been given regarding Communicative Language Teaching, it is high time we dived into discussing the core concepts related to CLT.

Brown (2001) maintains that "closely allied to CLT are a number of concepts that have like CLT, become bandwagon terms without the endorsement of which teachers cannot be human beings and textbooks cannot sell" (p.46). Some of the concepts he enumerated are: learner-centered instruction, cooperative and collaborative learning as well as interactive learning.

### **6.4.1 Learner-Centered Instruction**

As the name denotes, instruction focuses on the learner. Students are therefore at the heart of their own learning process and play a role of momentous importance. Loveless (2022, para.2) defines a student-centered classroom or student-centered learning environment as "one where the focus of instruction is shifted from the teacher to student, with the end goal of developing students who are

autonomous and independent, by placing responsibility in the hands of the learners''. Problems-solving and lifelong learning skills are then fostered in students. The direct opposite of learner-centered approach will be 'teacher-centered approach'. Brown (2015) could describe the latter as the one that 'has been with us for centuries, if not millennia. The teacher controls everything; students speak only when asked to; the teacher is an authority who is not to be questioned (p.45). David Nunan got interested in the concept of learner-centered education as he came across the following question probed by Allwright (as cited in Nunan, 2013): 'why don't learners learn what teachers teach?' (p.52). He discovered that he had to see things from the learners' point of view and only then could he advocate: 'in a learner-centered classroom, decisions about what will be taught, how it will be taught, when it will be taught and how it will be assessed will be made with reference to the learner''. Thus, teachers are no longer authoritarian in the learning process, being considered as bestower of knowledge to ignorant students; however, they rather play a role of guidance and facilitator. In this light, Brown and Lee (2015) maintain:

Learner-centered instruction turned teacher-centered models 'upside down' by playing the all-knowing, authoritative role of the teacher, and giving opportunities to students to participate in a classroom without fear of being scolded or belittled by a teacher (p.45).

#### ***6.4.2 Cooperative and Collaborative Learning***

To be cooperative in the learning process is to be ready to work with another person or in a team, to be ready to work or act together for a common purpose or benefit. To 'cooperate' originated from 1595-1605 from Late Latin 'cooperatus', that is, work with; which also denotes to allow for mutual unobstructed action. Zook (2018) backs up the definition above by arguing that 'cooperative is based on group work. He adds that to showcase the positive effects of interdependence while underlining the importance of personal responsibility is a core element of cooperative learning. Hindémè (2018, p. 376) further emphasizes the aspect of personal responsibility by completing that learners should be informed of the task each and every one of them is assigned and performed while doing one's best. Learning in group is then the main concern of cooperative learning since it is not a direct teaching strategy, but a follow-up concept to help students not to go off the task set. According to Çelik et al. (2012, p.1852) 'cooperative learning in the foreign language classroom is believed to increase target language use, improve communication skills, build confidence and stimulate autonomy''. Constructing knowledge among students themselves, with the teacher as their coach and guide in the classroom points to the socio-constructivism theory. The latter supports the view that 'learning occurs through social interaction and the help of others, often in a group' (Lohman & Hurst, 2021).

#### ***6.4.3 Interactive Learning***

Interactive learning could be defined as a set of carefully designed and structured activities to facilitate learning in groups. This hands-on/ real life approach to education is grounded upon establishing students' engagement through guided social interaction. Sustaining Interaction through Group Work.

As group work has proven to be the hallmark of interactive language teaching, this section discusses then first and foremost some myths about group work and outlines furthermore the

advantages of groupwork. The steps above clarifying how to keep up interaction ongoing in the classroom are put forward by Brown and Lee (2015, p.268).

Before interaction is maintained in any English as a foreign language classroom, interaction must be created. In other words, it must be initiated. The most common way of making that happen is through teacher's questions. Brown and Lee (2015, p.264) could group teacher's question into two categories: display questions and referential questions. They further mention that display questions attempt to elicit pieces of information that the teacher knows already whereas referential questions refer to what the questioner does not know through small group work. Thus, group work could be considered as standards bearer of CLT.

### **6.6 Myths about Group Work.**

A number of misconceptions have been identified as far as group work is concerned despite all its benefits for fostering interactional and communicative skills in students. Multiple misinterpretations have been adapted from the original work of Brown and Lee (2015, p.271), namely:

- Myth#1: the teacher is no longer in control of the class,
- Myth#2: students will use their native language,
- Myth#3: students' errors will be reinforced in small groups,
- Myth#4: teachers cannot monitor all groups at once,
- Myth#5: some learners prefer to work alone, and
- Myth#: diverse students' learning styles complicate group work.

All these disadvantages found with group work as well as noise making while learners are working in small groups could be dealt with appropriately by the dynamic teacher so as to make cooperative learning be a great asset to student with the end goal of making them use the English language they are learning. In such circumstances, long term and lifelong learning are promoted in students since they have a good command of the language and reach basic proficiency level required in this era of globalization.

### **6.7 Advantages of Group Work.**

Group work as defined by Merriam Webster (n.d.) is "a technique within the field of social work wherein various groups (as educational and recreational) are guided by an agency leader to more effective adjustment and community participation". From the definition above, group work is to be implemented by a leader, that is, in this context the teacher. This will result in a more personal adjustment. In plain English, the teacher makes sure that the disadvantages of working in small groups are minimised at most through the choice of appropriate peers, monitoring the task given with clear and precise directives right from the beginning. This way, the participation of each member of the group is increased. If well organised and structured, none of the criticisms previously discussed could be recorded. More precise definitions are given by specialists of the field of education that will be surely useful. Brown and Lee (2015, p.272) refer to group work as "a generic term for a variety of techniques in which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self-initiated language". The most salient difference that exists in between individual work and pair work is readily the number of people dealing with a given task.

In the former, only one person faces an assigned task, however in the latter, two people work on the same exercise. More than two people for the same task make up a group. Brown and Lee maintain moreover that according to the collective of teachers, groups of three or four are usually optimal. Along these lines, six people at most should be included in a small group. To such extent, the major purpose for doing group work which is giving students more opportunities to speak is successfully reached.

For Richards et al. (as cited in Usman, 2015, p.99) group work stands for ‘‘a learning activity which involves a small group of learners working together’’. In addition, they support that the group may work on a single task or on different parts of a larger work. In a nutshell, it can be seen that group work is concerned with gathering students in groups and assigning a task to resolve with the ultimate purpose of more language practice.

Some of the advantages of group work are mentioned below Brown and Lee (2015, p.273) as follows:

- Group work generates more interactive language,
- Group work offers an embracing affective climate,
- Group work promotes learner responsibility and autonomy, and
- Group work is a step Group toward individualizing instruction.

**7. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

In order to provide adequate answer to the research questions, the ongoing research uses both quantitative and qualitative methods and a questionnaire administered to 18 EFL teachers in CEG Pahou, in the region of Atlantique. It is a 15-item questionnaire divided into three parts. There is a set of five close-ended exploring factors influencing the use of group work in EFL teaching and learning in Benin Republic to begin. Then another part that consisted of five other questions investigating EFL teachers and learners’ perception of the impacts of group work on EFL teaching and learning in Beninese secondary schools and eventually the last part that is made up of five questions as well examining effective measures for the better use of group work in EFL beginner classrooms.

A questionnaire also has been elaborated and distributed to EFL beginners’ learners with the end goal of intensifying teachers’ answers provided. Thus, 250 learners, randomly selected, received a questionnaire in November 2023 and 241 were filled and returned. Creswell (1988)’ spiral approach was used in the data analysis.

**8. FINDINGS**

**8.1 Answers to Questionnaire Administered to EFL Teachers.**

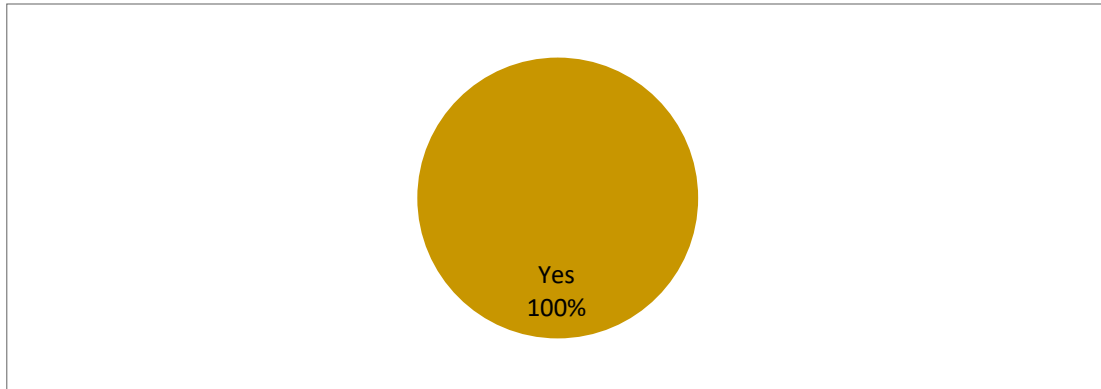
From 18 teachers who received a questionnaire in early November in CEG Pahou, 11 filled and return them. Therefore, the analysis of data takes into account 11 EFL teachers

**Table 1: Working Experience**

What is your working experience?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Five or more	11	100
Less than five years	0	0
Total	11	100

Source: Field Investigation, November 2023

The results in table 1 illustrate that 100% of the respondent teachers have five or more than five years of working experience. That means that all of them know about group work since they are not new in the teaching field.



**Figure 1: Using Group Work in Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

Source: Field Investigation, November 2022

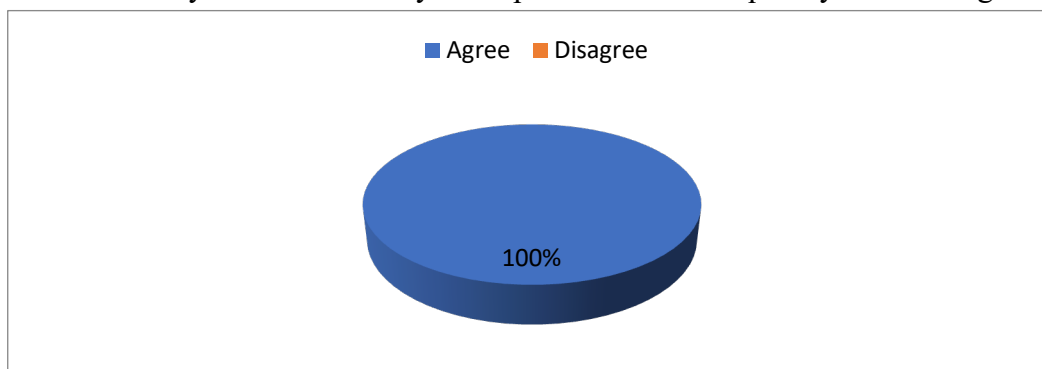
The results in figure 1 illustrate that 100% of respondent teachers use group work while teaching the language. That means that every teacher knows group work as a teaching strategy.

**Table 2: Frequency of Using Group Work**

If yes, how often do you use group work in EFL classrooms?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Usually	10	90.91
Occasionally	0	0
Rarely	1	9.09
Total	11	100

Source/ Field Investigation, November 2023

The results in table 2 show that 90.91% of the respondent teachers use group work usually while 0% uses it occasionally and 9.09% rarely. Group work is then frequently used during classes.



**Figure 2: Group Work as Source of Encouragement to Learners to Speak English**

Source: Field Investigation, November 2023

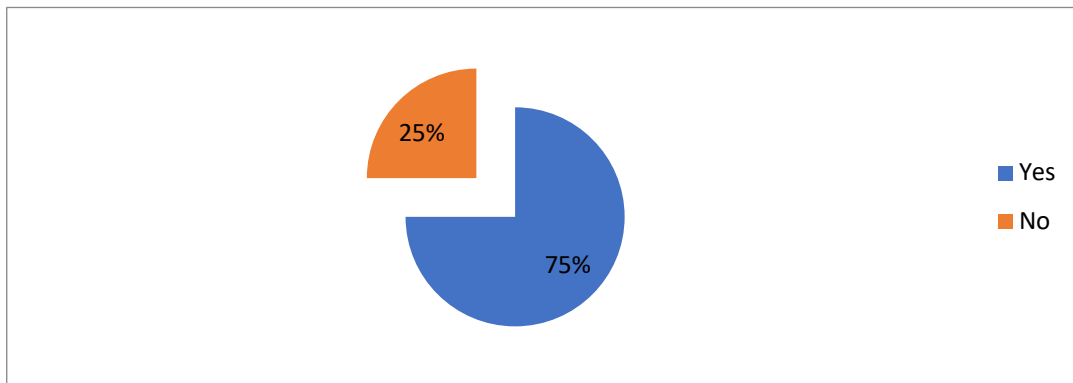
The results from figure 2 point out taha 100% of the respondent teachers agree that the use group work encourages the learners to speak English. This denotes that many teachers value group work as a way for promoting spoken English both inside and outside the classroom.

**Table 3: Group work promotes interactive learning**

Does the use of group promote interactive learning in the classroom?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	10	90.91
Disagree	0	0
Neither agree nor disagree	1	9.09
Total	11	100

Source: Field Investigation, November 2023

The results in table 3 show that 90.91% of the respondent teachers assumed that the use of group work promotes interactive learning while 0% disagrees it and 9.09% neither agree nor disagree. Group work is frequently used during classes. Some teachers still ignore the interactive role of group work.



**Figure 3: Fostering Fluency and Accuracy through Group Work**

Source: Field Investigation, November 2023

Through figure 3, it can be noted that 75% of the respondent teachers think that fluency and accuracy can be fostered through group work whereas 25% do not agree. The enhancing role of group work on fluency and accuracy is thus looked down on by some teachers.

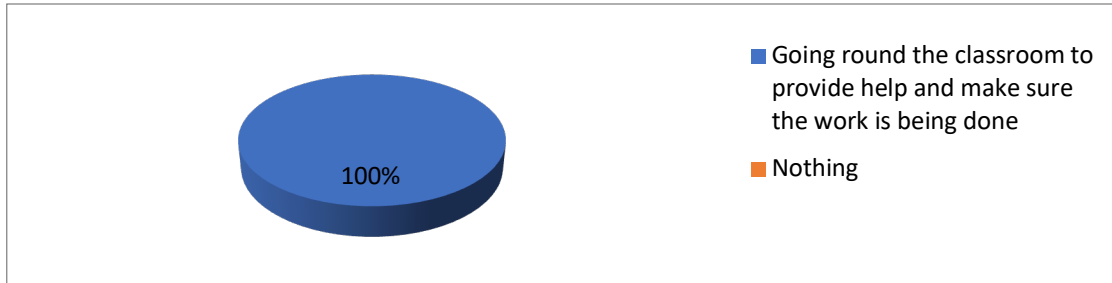
**Table 4: Justification of Fostering Fluency and Accuracy through Group Work**

Justify your answer	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Freedom to speak	5	45.45
Learners' background and Teacher's help	2	18.18
Lack of vocabulary	3	27.28
Nothing	1	9.09
Total	11	100

Source: Field Investigation, November 2023

The results from table 4 indicate 45.45% of the respondent teachers who agreed that freedom to speak through group work foster fluency and accuracy, when 18.18% said that group work allows teachers to know the background of the learners so as to help them enhance fluency and accuracy.

27.28% of the respondent teachers declared that fluency and accuracy are not fostered through group work since learners lack vocabulary and eventually 9.09% said nothing. A great number of teachers acknowledge therefore the potentials of group work in improving learners' fluency and accuracy.



**Figure 4: Teachers' Duty during Group Work**

*Source: Field Investigation, November 2023*

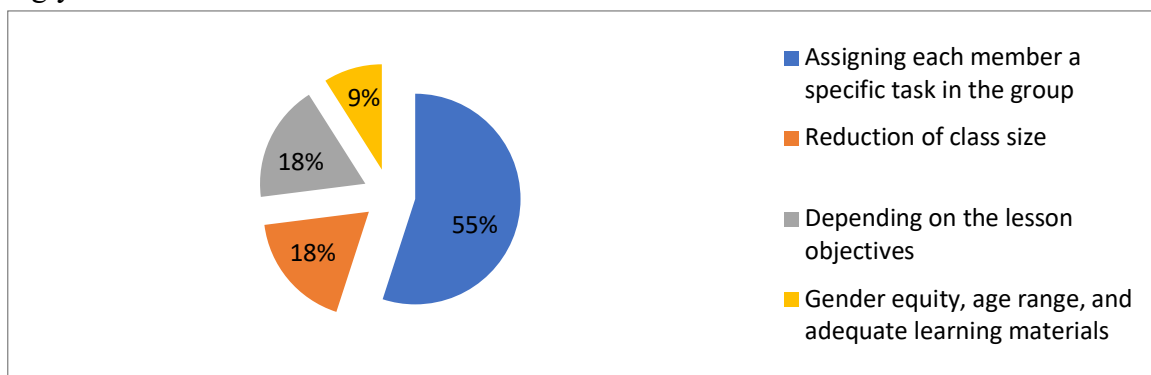
The results in figure 4 show forth 100% of the respondent teachers who said going round the classroom to provide help to learners confronted with some difficulties as well as making sure the work is done is their duty during group work. All teachers know about what to do when students are working in groups.

**Table 5: Group Work Makes Learners Lazier**

Does group work make EFL learners lazier?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	2	18.18
No	9	81.82
Total	11	100

*Source: Field Investigation, November 2023*

Table 5 points out that 18.18% of the respondent teachers think group work make students lazier while 81.82% rather think it does not. A few teachers fear then that by using group work they open willingly doors to laziness in their classroom.



**Figure 5: Ways of Using Effectively Group Work to Generate Interactive Learning**

*Source: Field Investigation, November 2023*

Figure 5 demonstrates 55% of the respondent teachers, who argue that to effectively use group work to generate interactive learning, they should assign each member of the group with a specific

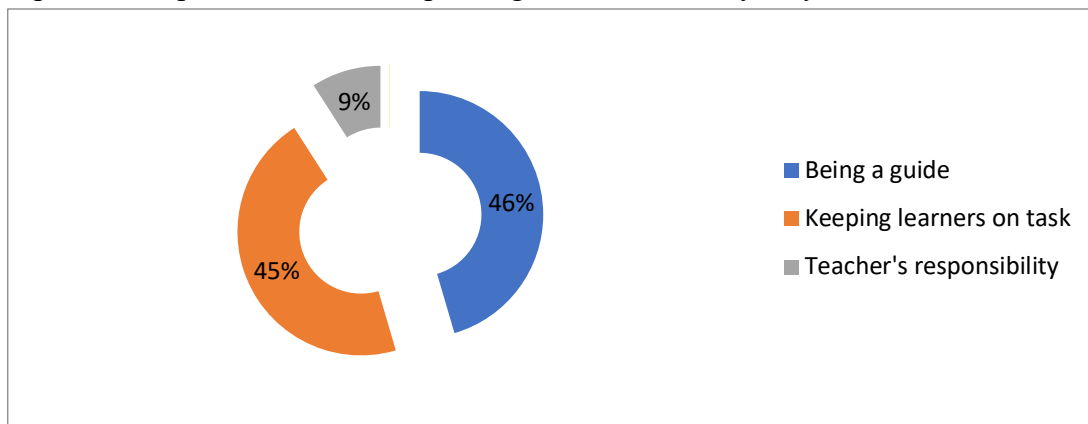
task, 18% of the respondent teachers desire a reduction of class size, 18% said it depends on the lesson objectives and finally 9% think about gender equity, age range, and adequate learning materials. Teachers have at their disposal many ways and means to make group work communicative.

**Table 6: Teachers Own Suggestion about the Use of Group Work to Improve Students Spoken English**

What is your own suggestion about the use of Group Work to Improve students' spoken English ?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mixing strong and weak learners	1	9
Considering socio-cultural realities	1	9
Different strong-ability groups and mixed ability groups, performing speaking activities regularly and enlarging STT	4	37
Forcing students to speak the target language during group work	2	18
Nothing	3	27
Total	11	100

Source: Field Investigation, November 2023

In table 6, suggestions of teachers of how the use of group work can improve learners' spoken English can be seen. 9% of the respondent teachers agreed on mixing strong and weak learners; 9% who said the socio-cultural realities should be taken into account; 37% who wrote down that setting strong-ability group apart from mixed-ability group, performing speaking activities regularly and increasing students' talking time should are ways to use group work to enhance learners' speaking skills in the language; 18% of the respondent teachers go for forcing students to speak the target language during group work and 27% answered nothing. Some teachers do not use group works to promote learners' speaking skills reason why they are short of ideas.



**Figure 6: Reason of Monitoring Small Group Works**

Source: Field Investigation, November 2023

It is quite obvious from figure 6 that three main reasons have been figured out by the respondent teachers concerning the reason of monitoring small group works framed as follows: 46% who argued being a guide, 45% agreeing on keeping the learners on task, and 9% who simply said that is the teacher's responsibility to monitor small group works.



**Table 7: Teacher’s Role at the End of Every Group Work**

At the end of every group work, what should the teacher do?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Organising groupswell	1	9.09
Plenary	3	27.28
Assessmentactivities	4	36.36
Encouraginglearners	3	27.27
Total	11	100

Source: Field Investigation, November 2022

Table 7 elaborates on the role of teachers at the end of every group work. Thus, 9.09% of the respondent teachers talked about organizing well the groups, 27.28% suggested shifting to plenary where any member of the group can be selected to present the work, 36.36% pointed out to assessment activities to check whether the goal is reached and 27.27% who said learners should be encouraged.

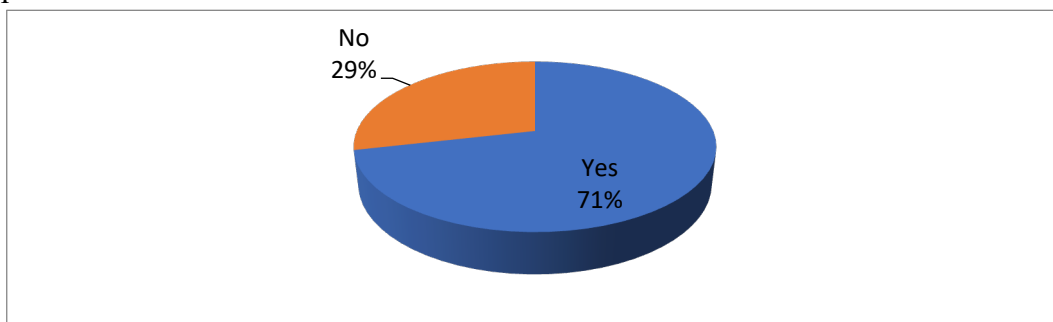
**8.2 Answers to Questionnaire Administered to EFL Learners**

**Table 8: Use of Group Work**

Does your teacher use group work in the classroom?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	94	38.68
No	149	61.31
Total	243	100

Source: Field Investigation, November 2023

According to table 8, 38.68% of the respondent students asserted that teachers often use group work during English classes. Nonetheless, 61.31% maintained that their teachers do not use group work during English classes. Therefore, many teachers still underestimate the considerable value of group work.



**Figure 7: Monitoring Group Work**

Source: Field Investigation, November 2023

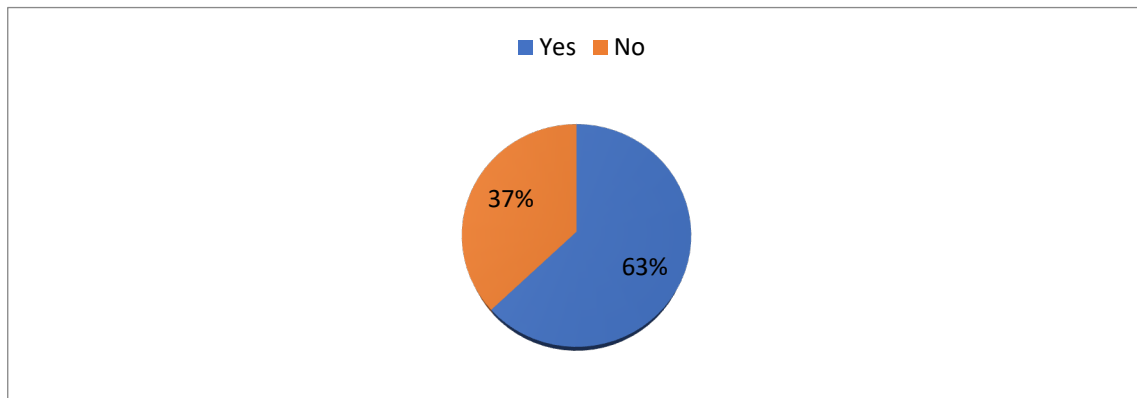
From this figure, 71% of the respondent students asserted that the teacher comes to help them during group work. On the contrary, 29% of respondent students argued that the teacher does not come to help. Teachers should be monitoring constantly group work to find out the challenges faced by them so as to provide assistance.

**Table 9: The Reduction of Shyness to Speak through Group Work**

Does group work help timid students speak English in the classroom?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	94	38.68
No	149	61.31
Total	243	100

Source: Field Investigation, November 2023

Table 9 unveils that 38.68% of the respondent learners support that group work allows shy students to express themselves. Yet, 61.31% argue that group work does not resolve the problem of timid learners. The teacher should find the root of shyness to speak then to make the class participative.



**Figure 8: Integration of Group Work in TEFL**

Source: Field Investigation, November 2023

Figure 8 exposes that 62.96% of the respondent learners think their teachers should integrate group work in EFL teaching. Surprisingly, 37.04% regard the incorporation of group work in EFL teaching as unnecessary.

**Table 10: Presenting the Work in Group before the Class**

Do you generally do individual work before group work?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	94	60
No	149	40
Total	243	100

Source: Field Investigation, November 2023

Table 10 displays that 60% of respondent learners confirm that they actually present the findings of the work in group before the whole class and 40% say they do not share the answers before the whole class.

## 9. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This section presents the discussion of the findings addressing the research questions.

### 9.1 Difficulties Related to an Effective Use of Group Work in an EFL Classrooms.

In the course of this investigation, it is noted that a great majority of EFL learners love English and group work as well. That is possibly the reason why 90.91% (table 2) of the respondent teachers often use group work during EFL classes. Although this considerable number of teachers said to be often using group, the learners did not confirm the authenticity of their sayings. Rather,

61.31% (table 8) of the respondent learners affirmed their teachers do not use group work. This implies that so many EFL teachers involved in this study do not integrate the great teaching strategy, that is, group work in their daily teaching surely because of their misconception of group work whereby 18.18% of teachers (table 5) still believe that group work makes learners lazier. Moreover, according to figure 3, 25% of the respondent teachers agreed that group work does not foster accuracy and fluency. This denotes that despite group work being used by some of the EFL teachers, the main purpose is not to make learners speak the language being taught and learnt. In the field of study, because learners move tables and benches from a class to another, it has been prohibited by the administration to displace school furniture. And to reinforce that measure, they made sure a carpenter settles the tables and benches permanently. Tables and benches are then set one after the other just like an exam room. Though 100% (figure 1) of the respondent teachers agree that the use of group work encourages the learners to speak English, they do not use it which is not an appreciable situation. To sum up, factors that influence the use of group work in EFL teaching and learning in Benin Republic is the classroom arrangement of table and benches in the classroom as well as teachers' carelessness. In this light, Hindémè et al. (2018, p.297) argued that 'teaching is a profession that requires a full carefulness and constant practice'.

## **9.2 EFL Teachers and Learners' Perceptions of the Impacts of Group Work on EFL Teaching and Learning in Beninese Secondary Schools**

Consulting the teachers to find out whether group work promotes interactive learning in the classroom resulted in 90.91% (table 3) of the respondent teachers who answered assuredly yes while 0% disagree it and 9.09% neither agree nor disagree. Teachers should then make sure that the ultimate goal of group work which consists in promoting the spoken English among learners and between learners and the teacher is teacher. This failure in speaking of EFL learners may be due to the fact that some EFL teachers, that is, 29% of the respondent students (figure 7) could claim that their teachers do not monitor group work while the students are working although 100% (figure 4) of the respondent teachers acknowledge that they should be going round the classroom to provide help to students having problems in solving the task assigned as well making sure the work is being done. According to Brown and Lee (2015, p.140) while providing explanation about the role of the teacher when teaching beginner learners of the English language, clearly explained that 'beginning level classes' need not to be devoid of the modicum of student-centred work'. In other words, group work must really be used and the most must be made in the sense of making learners speak the target language even though they are at the beginner level.

## **9.3 Effective Measures for Better Use of Group Work in EFL Beginner Classrooms**

On the ground of the data collected, it could be noticed that 55% (figure 5) of the respondent teachers argue that to effectively use group work to generate interactive learning, they should assign each member of the group with a specific task and 18% talked about class reduction. These two ways are complementary. A crowded class will surely give birth to too many small groups which cannot all be monitored by the teacher in spite of the fact that 100% (figure 4) of the respondent teachers recognise that they should be going round the classroom to check whether students are really doing the work given. The reasons why group work should be monitored are

namely: being a guide supported by 46% (figure 6) and keeping the learners on task with a rate of 45%. At the end of every group work, 60% (table 10) of the respondent students said they present their production before the whole class as group reporter. Yet, this view of learners is weakly supported by teachers since just 18.18% (table 7) talk about plenary and 9.09% point out to assessment activities. Eventually, teachers' own suggestion about the use of group work to improve students spoken English are much diversified. Only 9% (table 6) of the respondent teachers talked about a mixture of strong-ability learners and mixed-ability learners.

#### **9.4 Implications of the Use of Group Work in EFL Beginner Classrooms**

Working in groups can have a variety of effects on both instructors and students. The following are a few of the most important implications:

- Implications for teachers :
  - Planning and preparation: Teachers must carefully plan and prepare for group work, including choosing suitable tasks, dividing students into group, and setting clear standards and guidelines.
  - Facilitation and monitoring: In order to make sure that all the students are engaged, making progress, and achieving their learning goals, teachers must facilitate and monitor group work activities while also offering advice and feedback.
  - Assessment and evaluation: Teachers must evaluate how well their students performed in group work tasks, paying particular attention to their speaking, cooperating, and critical thinking abilities.
  - Classroom management: To effectively handle group dynamics, resolve conflicts, and foster a supportive and encouraging learning atmosphere, teachers must possess effective classroom management skills.
  - Professional growth: Group projects can give educators the chance to hone their instructional techniques, such as their capacity to create and execute successful collaborative learning activities.
- Implications for learners :
  - Students must actively participate in group works, which includes having the capacity to listen, share, and have meaningful conversations with peers.
  - Collaboration and teamwork: Group work activities give learners the chance to cooperate and function as a unit, strengthening critical interpersonal and communication skills that are required in many career contexts.
  - Critical thinking and problem-solving: When working in groups, students must exercise both of these skills as they collaborate to finish tasks and meet learning goals.
  - In order to contribute to the success of the group as a whole, group work calls for learners to take ownership of their own learning and hold each other responsible.
  - Diversity and cultural sensitivity: Group work exposes students to different viewpoints and cultural backgrounds, fostering cultural awareness and understanding.

In summary, group work can be very beneficial for both instructors and students, as they present chances for cooperative learning, communication, and skill development. Group work must be

carefully planned and prepared for, actively facilitated and monitored, and implemented in a supportive and encouraging learning atmosphere.

## 10. RECOMMENDATIONS

As learners' preference of group work is already known by all educational authorities, a peculiar emphasis should be put on the potentials of group work to create and sustain interaction in the classroom. Group work as a teaching strategy capable of fostering beginner EFL learners' speaking ability is concealed from many teachers. As such, regular in-service trainings should be organized for teachers to unveil the interactional role of group work and how to implement it in order to have effective results. These new techniques that will be shown to EFL beginner teachers related to group work in the light of making learners speak English will require teachers to go the extra and make more efforts. Since 'motivation is the driving force behind any human action' (Iwikotan, et al., 2019, p.108), the government should establish some incentives with the purpose of sparking and sustaining their motivation for a job well done. Also, they should provide teaching facilities namely school furniture. Thus, even the seating arrangement will be a facilitating factor of group work. Further, increasing the humble financial income of teachers will be great in this day and age whereby everything keeps getting more expensive.

## 11. CONCLUSION

The ongoing study aims at using group work to foster learners' speaking skills. The analysis of the literature review report led to the awareness of the contribution of group work to speaking skills through generating interactive learning, offering an embracing affective climate, promoting learner responsibility and autonomy, and a step toward individualizing instruction. For data collection purposes, questionnaires were designed and administered to 11 teachers and 243 learners to unveil the challenges faced in using group work to promote learners' speaking skills. This analysis of the results revealed that group work is rarely used by EFL teachers because of the seating arrangement, teachers' underestimation of the interactional role of group work, neglectedness, class size. Regarding all those difficulties, some recommendations are made both to teachers and learners in order to enjoy the benefits of a well group work activity. Organizing regular workshops, in-service training, and conferences on group work to keep reminding EFL beginner teachers the significance of training learners to stay in a group and acquire knowledge in addition to sharing what one knows is therefore important. Also, building and equipping school infrastructures are of momentous importance. The reduction of the number of learners per classroom will definitely be advisable. Libraries setting will doubtlessly help learners do their individual work before attending classes. Further, the seating arrangement in classes should group work. As far as teachers are concerned, they should not focus too much on the cognitive knowledge. They should stress as well the speaking aspect both within the classroom and outside the classroom. Learners should know that it is not for entertainment purposes that they are put together to work in groups. They should also be aware that the local language or French is prohibited in the course of group work. They should try their best to communicate with mates and teachers in the target language. In the end, I would

like other researchers to replicate this study by focusing more on intermediate and advanced learners.

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