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The role of communicative activities in motivating EFL learners in primary schools

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Abstract

Despite efforts to improve foreign language teaching, many learners complete primary education without adequate communicative skills. This study investigates the impact of communicative activities on motivating EFL learners in some selected primary schools in Benin. Using mixed research methods, data were collected from 17 teachers and 213 Grade 4 and Grade 5 pupils in five public and private schools during the 2024–2025 academic year. Findings reveal that activities such as role plays, discussions, debates, and group presentations significantly enhance learners' motivation and promote real-life language use. The study recommends greater integration of communicative activities in primary EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Communicative activities; Motivation; EFL teaching and learning; Primary school

1. Introduction

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning aims to develop learners' communicative competence so that they can use the language effectively in real-life contexts. However, classroom practices in many EFL settings continue to emphasize reading and writing skills at the expense of speaking and listening. Vo (2022) notes that this imbalance limits learners' opportunities for oral practice, resulting in persistent difficulties in pronunciation and spoken communication. Such challenges are often linked to the limited use of motivating classroom activities that encourage active language use. Consequently, there is a growing need for instructional approaches that promote learner engagement and meaningful communication in EFL classrooms.

Motivation is widely recognized as a central factor in successful language learning, as it initiates and sustains learners' engagement in the learning process (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). Research in second and foreign language acquisition has consistently shown that motivated learners are more willing to participate in classroom activities and to use the target language. Among the pedagogical approaches designed to enhance motivation, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has received considerable attention for its focus on interaction and meaning-oriented language use. CLT seeks to develop learners' communicative competence through activities that simulate authentic communication (Li & Song, 2007).

Within the CLT framework, communicative activities are considered essential instructional tools. These activities engage learners in understanding, producing, and interacting in the target language for meaningful purposes (Nunan, 1989). When implemented in a supportive and low-anxiety classroom environment, communicative activities can significantly enhance learners' motivation and willingness to communicate (Dörnyei, 2001a). Empirical studies conducted in various EFL contexts have demonstrated positive relationships between communicative activities and learner motivation (Al Haj, 2011; Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Chou, 2014; Masmaliyeva, 2014; Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012; Tuan,

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2012). However, much of this research has focused on specific types of activities or on secondary and tertiary education contexts.

Despite the growing body of research on communicative activities, relatively little attention has been paid to their combined impact on learner motivation at the primary school level, particularly in Francophone African contexts such as Benin. This lack of empirical evidence limits teachers' ability to make informed pedagogical decisions regarding the integration of communicative activities in early EFL instruction. As noted by Suárez Cabrera, Molina Mazón, and Abarca García (2020), communicative activities enable learners to use language for authentic purposes, including problem-solving and interaction with the surrounding world, which are especially valuable for young learners.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the influence of a range of communicative activities on the motivation of primary school EFL learners in Benin. It also explores teachers' perceptions of learners' motivation during communicative task performance and identifies the activities perceived as most motivating. By focusing on both teachers' and learners' perspectives, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on motivation and communicative language teaching in primary education.

The study was conducted during the 2024-2025 academic year in two state-owned and three private primary schools located in the Mono area of Benin. The Beninese education system comprises four levels: kindergarten, primary education, lower secondary education (Secondary Cycle I), and upper secondary education (Secondary Cycle II). English is introduced at the primary level as a compulsory subject, with learners receiving one hour of instruction per week in accordance with the national curriculum.

1.1. Research Questions

Although previous studies have examined the relationship between communicative activities and motivation in EFL learning, research at the primary school level in Benin remains scarce. To address this gap, the present study is guided by the following research questions:

- What impact do communicative activities have on primary school EFL learners' communicative competence?
- How do teachers perceive learners' motivation when they engage in communicative activities in the EFL classroom?
- Which communicative activities are perceived as the most motivating in primary school EFL classrooms?

2. Literature Review

Learning interest and motivation have been widely identified as key factors in achieving classroom success and enhancing academic performance (Ainia, 2020; Jefiza, 2017; Mustafa et al., 2015). Consequently, EFL teachers are expected to prioritize these factors in their instructional practices (Ulfa & Bania, 2019). Numerous studies have emphasized the importance of learners' interest and motivation in the language learning process, as well as teachers' responsibility in fostering and sustaining these affective variables.

For instance, Ulfa and Bania (2019) reported that motivation originating from both teachers and learners plays a significant role in English language learning. Similarly, Kusmaryati and Amertaningrum (2017) found that EFL learners demonstrated a high level of interest in learning English, which was largely attributed to teachers' ability to stimulate engagement. Their findings further indicate that strong learning interest contributes substantially to improved student achievement in English. Given the importance of motivation and interest in EFL learning, systematic investigation of these constructs is necessary. The findings of such studies may guide teachers in adopting strategies that enhance or maintain learners' engagement and motivation in English language learning.

Although extensive research has addressed learners' motivation and interest in English learning, much of this work treats English as a single, unified subject. In practice, English language learning comprises four interrelated skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—and learners' levels of interest may vary across these skills. Therefore, investigations into learners' interest in English should consider differences in language skills and individual proficiency levels. Moreover, many previous studies have failed to clearly distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the language learning process.

2.1. Motivation

Gardner (1985) conceptualizes motivation as a goal-directed construct involving four components : a goal, effortful behavior, a desire to achieve the goal, and positive attitudes toward the learning activity. Motivation serves as the starting point of learning and supports the process of foreign language acquisition. Without motivation, learners are unlikely to persist in developing language proficiency; conversely, high motivation can enable learners to achieve considerable progress in a second language (L2), even under less favorable learning conditions (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007).

Within the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), motivation has long been recognized as a critical determinant of language learning success. Research on L2 motivation has evolved through several phases, progressively integrating insights from motivational psychology while maintaining a strong focus on language-specific learning contexts (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2012).

Harmer (2002) defines motivation as the internal drive that encourages individuals to act in order to achieve specific goals. Motivation is fundamental to success in most learning contexts, as learners are unlikely to invest sustained effort without it. Harmer further distinguishes between intrinsic motivation, which originates within the learner, and extrinsic motivation, which is influenced by external factors.

Brown (2001) argues that intrinsic motivation plays a vital role in language learning success. When learners engage in language practice for personal satisfaction rather than external rewards, they are more likely to develop autonomy and communicative competence. Harmer (2002) similarly notes that intrinsic motivation may arise from enjoyment of the learning process or from a desire for self-improvement. Vallerand's (1997) model further categorizes intrinsic motivation into three dimensions : motivation related to knowledge, accomplishment, and stimulation. These dimensions reflect learners' enjoyment of exploring new ideas, achieving mastery, and experiencing pleasure or excitement during task performance.

Despite the importance of intrinsic motivation, not all learning activities are inherently motivating (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This reality highlights the role of extrinsic motivation, which originates from external influences such as examinations, rewards, or future career prospects (Harmer, 1991). Dörnyei (2001b) explains that extrinsic motivation involves engaging in activities to obtain rewards or avoid punishment. Ryan and Deci (2000) similarly define extrinsic motivation as performing an activity to achieve a separable outcome.

2.2. Sources of Motivation

Harmer (2001) identifies several sources that influence learners' motivation in learning English. These include societal attitudes, significant others, the teacher, and teaching methods.

First, societal attitudes toward English significantly shape learners' motivation. Perceptions of English as a high-status or low-status language influence learners' attitudes and determine the strength and persistence of their motivation. Second, significant others—such as parents, siblings, and peers—play a crucial role. Supportive attitudes from these individuals can enhance motivation, while negative attitudes may undermine it. Third, the teacher is a central factor in sustaining learner motivation. Teachers' enthusiasm, attitudes toward English, and commitment to teaching strongly influence classroom atmosphere and learner engagement. Finally, teaching methods affect motivation. When teachers and learners trust and feel comfortable with instructional approaches, motivation is more likely to be maintained; when confidence in the method is lost, motivation may decline sharply.

2.3. The Role of Motivation

Motivation is particularly crucial in learning additional languages. Prinder (2006) notes that while first language acquisition occurs naturally, second language learning is often driven by the desire to integrate into a new social or cultural environment. Nicolov's (1999) study further demonstrates that children draw on different sources of motivation as they grow older. Some learners are intrinsically motivated and learn English because they enjoy the learning process itself.

2.4. Communicative Competence Framework

Wild and Sage (2006) emphasize that children's communicative competence is a key determinant of academic performance. Language plays a central role in the social construction of knowledge across educational contexts (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2006). Yen (2013) found that communicative language activities provide meaningful learning contexts that encourage active participation and interaction. Similarly, Fazil, Nor, and Halim (2018) observed that while learners

showed enthusiasm for communicative activities, limited language proficiency often led them to revert to their first language (L1) during interaction.

2.5. Communicative Language Teaching and Communicative Activities

Richards and Rodgers (1986) describe Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as an approach rather than a method, allowing flexibility in classroom implementation. CLT emphasizes meaningful communication over the mere mastery of linguistic forms and seeks to develop learners' sociolinguistic and communicative competence (Li & Song, 2007).

Empirical research supports the effectiveness of communicative activities (CAs) in EFL instruction. Suárez Cabrera et al. (2020) demonstrate that CAs enable learners to use language meaningfully in authentic contexts. Ali Rezalou and Yağiz (2013) identify several benefits of CAs, including increased exposure to the target language, authentic practice opportunities, learner enjoyment, and the use of authentic materials. Dewi et al. (2016) further highlight activities such as role plays, debates, picture description, and group discussions as effective tools for promoting interaction and motivation.

Studies also show that specific activities such as role plays (Huff, 2012), picture description (Lavalle & Briesmaster, 2017), sharing personal experiences (Richards, 2006), and debates (Firmansyah & Valatansa, 2019 ; Pradana, 2017 ; Elmiyati, 2019) enhance communicative competence, motivation, and critical thinking. However, challenges remain. Limited vocabulary, insufficient instructional time, and large class sizes hinder the effective implementation of communicative activities (Al Hosin, 2014 ; Su, 2006).

Many scholars have investigated the use of communicative activities (CAs) to promote language teaching and learning among EFL pupils, providing empirical evidence that supports this research area. For example, Suárez Cabrera et al. (2020) found that CAs enable learners to use the language meaningfully and appropriately as a medium of exchange in authentic contexts.

Rezalou and Yağiz (2013) identified four main benefits of communicative activities for learners: (a) exposure to the target language, (b) authentic opportunities for language practice, (c) engaging and enjoyable learning experiences, and (d) access to authentic materials. These activities aim to use the target language for meaningful interaction, aligning with the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT). Accordingly, Ahmad et al. (2014) argue that CLT creates an interactive learning environment and offers learners opportunities to use the target language in authentic contexts (as cited in Obenza & Mendoza, 2022).

Research indicates that teaching is most effective when learners are actively involved in the learning process. Dewi et al. (2016) observe that:

“Communicative activities like language games, picture description, debates, self-stand presentations, role plays, sharing personal experiences, group oral presentations, and group discussions are used to facilitate active teaching and learning. These activities can motivate pupils and help them use the target language to exchange information through meaningful interaction with peers and teachers” (p. 62).

Consequently, CAs support pupils in improving their language skills. Huff (2012) suggests that role play creates realistic scenarios in which learners must communicate effectively with classmates. Similarly, picture description is a communicative activity that requires learners to produce language to describe visual material. It is considered a valuable technique for improving speaking skills and engaging pupils in the learning process (Brown, 2007, as cited in Lara Velarde et al., 2022). Lavalle and Briesmaster (2017) also note that picture description provides pupils with opportunities to practice the language they acquire in the classroom.

Sharing personal experiences is another authentic communicative activity that enables learners to express insights about moral dilemmas or personal reflections, thereby promoting interaction through ideas, thoughts, and emotions (Richards, 2006).

Firmansyah and Valatansa (2019) emphasize that debates are valuable communicative activities because they create an enjoyable learning environment and encourage active participation. In debates, learners not only present prepared arguments but also use language spontaneously when responding to opposing views (Pradana, 2017). Elmiyati (2019) further argues that debates not only develop language skills but also enhance critical thinking.

Phisutthangkoon (2021) and Bashir et al. (2011) also note that CAs increase pupils' interest in learning and help connect prior knowledge to new content. Moreover, Vo (2022) highlights that communicative activities make learning enjoyable and help foster positive teacher–learner relationships, which in turn motivates pupils to improve their speaking skills.

Despite these benefits, implementing CAs can be challenging. Al-Hosni (2014) argues that without a sufficiently developed vocabulary, pupils may struggle to express themselves in the foreign language. Additionally, Su (2006) notes that limited teaching time and large class sizes can hinder effective communication and the implementation of authentic activities.

3. Methodology

This study aims to investigate how communicative activities (CAs) can be effectively used to motivate primary EFL learners. To achieve this goal, a descriptive mixed-methods design was employed. Seventeen primary school teachers participated in the study. They were selected from 13 private and 4 state-owned primary schools in the Mono region of Benin, where English is taught as a foreign language.

A total of 213 primary pupils were randomly selected to participate. The study focused on pupils in Grade 4 (CM1) and Grade 5 (CM2). Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations.

3.1. Questionnaires and Interviews

Both teacher and pupil questionnaires comprised seven items each. A total of 213 questionnaires were distributed to the selected pupils and completed on-site during school hours. To ensure honesty and accuracy, participants were assured of confidentiality, and responses were used solely for research purposes.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers only. These interviews consisted of five open-ended questions designed to obtain detailed insights about the use of CAs and their motivational impact. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to guide the discussion while also permitting flexibility for follow-up questions.

3.2. Classroom Observation

Classroom observation was used to examine teaching practices and student behavior during communicative activities. Six lessons were observed in total. Prior to observations, the researcher obtained permission from school authorities and informed participants about the research objectives and confidentiality measures. Teachers briefly introduced the researcher to the class, after which the lessons were observed from the back of the classroom. The researcher focused on teachers' instructional strategies and pupils' engagement, taking detailed notes of observed practices.

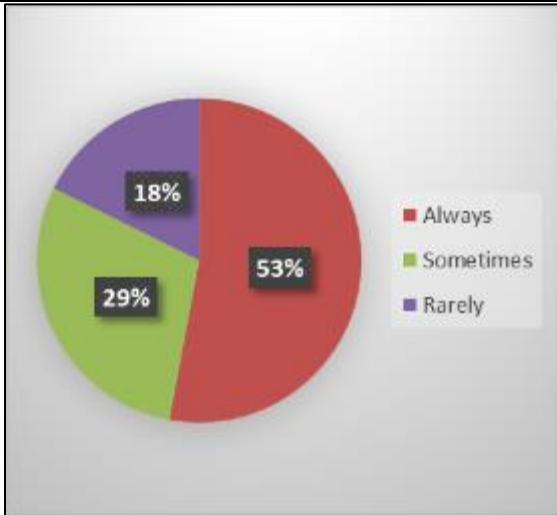
3.3. Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed thematically based on the research objectives. Observation findings were summarized in narrative form and integrated with interview results. Key data were presented using figures for clarity.

4. Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of the Results

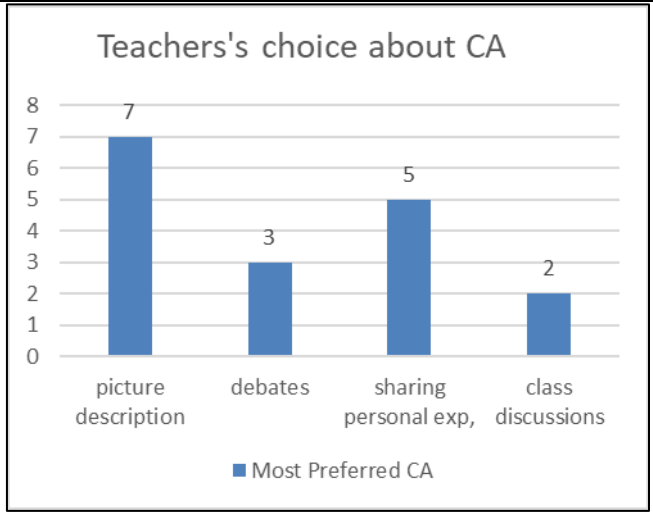
4.1. Results from Questionnaires

The results related to each questionnaire, that is, the teachers' questionnaire and the pupils' questionnaire are displayed below.



Source: Field investigation, April 2025

Figure 1 Teachers' Frequency of using CAS in Primary EFL Classes



Source: Field investigation, April 2025

Figure 2 Teacher's opinions on the most used CAS in Primary EFL Classes

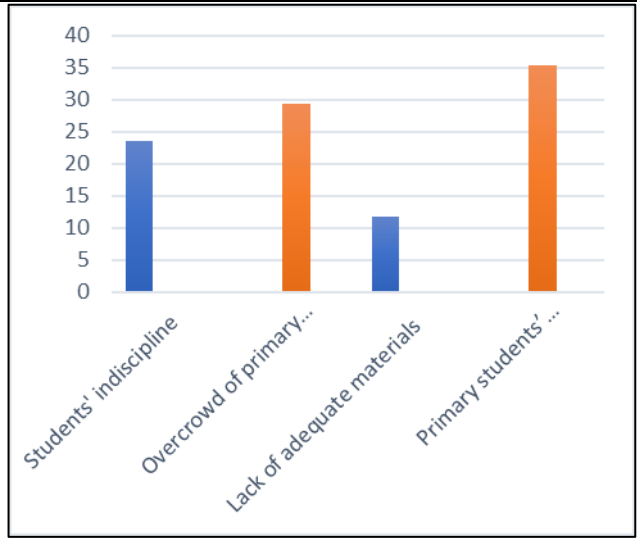


Figure 3 Conditions of the pupils' learning environment

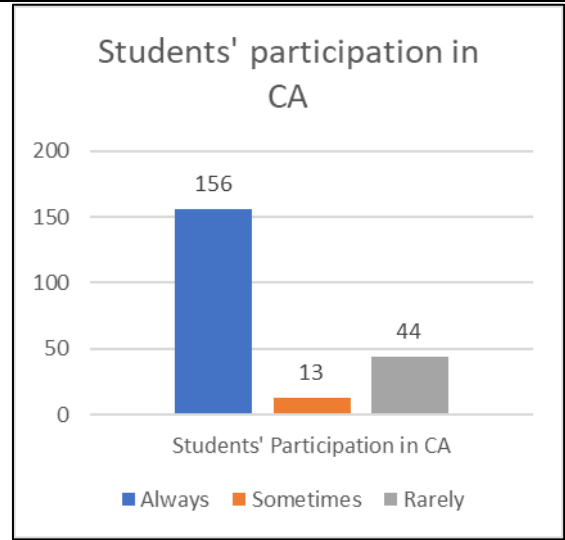
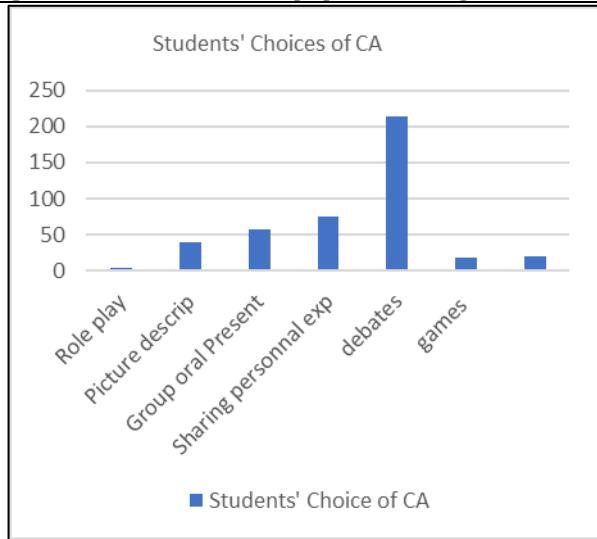
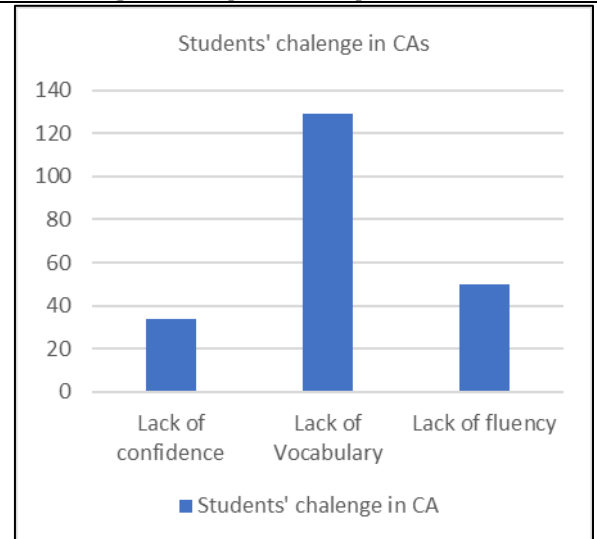


Figure 4 Pupils' Participation in CAs



Source: Field investigation, April 2025 investigation, April 2025

Figure 5 Pupils' choices of Cas



Source: Field

Figure 6 Pupils' challenges during CA lessons

Figure 1 indicates that 53% of the teachers who participated in the study always use communicative activities (CAs) in their primary EFL classrooms. A further 29% reported that they sometimes use such activities, while 18% stated that they rarely rely on communicative activities to motivate their pupils. Overall, these results suggest that a majority of primary EFL teachers incorporate communicative activities into their teaching practices.

As shown in Figure 2, 41.18% of the teachers identified picture description as their preferred communicative activity for motivating pupils in English language learning. Sharing personal experiences was selected by 29.41% of the respondents, while 17.65% considered debates to be an essential component of English instruction. Class discussions were regarded as the most important activity by 11.76% of the teachers. These findings indicate variation in teachers' preferences, although activities with a strong visual or personal dimension appear to be favored.

Figure 3 illustrates the challenges teachers encounter when implementing communicative activities. The most frequently reported difficulty (35.29%) was pupils' limited awareness or insufficient knowledge of English, which teachers considered the most difficult obstacle to overcome. Classroom overcrowding was identified by 29.41% of respondents, followed by pupils' unruly behavior (23.53%). A smaller proportion of teachers (11.76%) pointed to the lack of appropriate teaching materials. These results highlight learner-related and contextual constraints that limit the effective use of communicative activities.

Figure 4 shows that 93.9% of the pupils expressed interest in learning English, while only 6.1% reported low interest. This finding suggests that the vast majority of primary pupils hold positive attitudes toward English language learning.

Figure 5 presents pupils' frequency of participation in communicative activities. Most pupils (73.24%) reported that they always participate in communicative activities, while 20.66% indicated occasional participation. Only 6.1% stated that they rarely participate. These results demonstrate a generally high level of learner engagement during communicative activities.

Figure 6 addresses the challenges pupils face during communicative activity sessions. A majority of pupils (60.57%) reported lack of vocabulary as their main difficulty. This was followed by lack of fluency (23.47%) and lack of confidence (15.96%). These findings suggest that linguistic limitations remain a significant barrier to effective participation in communicative activities.

4.2. Results from Interviews and Classroom Observations

Data from the interviews reveal that teachers generally hold positive views regarding the use of strategies that enhance pupils' motivation in the EFL classroom. One interviewee emphasized that teachers can improve learners' communicative ability by placing pupils at the center of the learning process, varying communicative activities, and rewarding active participation. Overall, teachers agreed that activities such as class discussions, games, role plays, picture description, sharing personal experiences, and group oral presentations are effective in motivating pupils and supporting language proficiency development.

Classroom observations revealed notable differences in teaching practices across classrooms. A common practice involved repetition, with teachers frequently asking pupils to repeat words or sentences. However, pupils often appeared to have limited understanding of the content. Picture description emerged as the activity that elicited the highest level of pupil participation. Observations also showed that many teachers relied heavily on French rather than English when explaining lessons. When pupils indicated lack of understanding, teachers often switched entirely to French, sometimes spending extended periods explaining concepts in the first language.

Despite these challenges, several positive classroom dynamics were observed. In some classes, pupils displayed high enthusiasm, responding eagerly to teachers' greetings and actively participating in lessons. In these classrooms, teachers spoke less, while pupils took greater responsibility for interaction and participation. This learner-centered approach appeared to foster a more motivating learning environment.

5. Discussion

The findings from the questionnaires reveal a generally consistent pattern across teachers' and pupils' responses. A slight majority of primary EFL teachers in Benin (53%) reported regular use of communicative activities, indicating awareness of their pedagogical value. However, teachers expressed differing opinions regarding which activities are most effective for motivating pupils.

Picture description was identified by 41.18% of teachers as particularly effective, especially for young learners who tend to respond positively to visual stimuli. Sharing personal experiences was also strongly favored by both teachers and pupils, suggesting alignment between instructional practices and learners' preferences. Furthermore, more than half of the pupils reported frequent participation in communicative activities, reflecting high engagement levels.

Overall, the results suggest that communicative activities are essential for improving pupils' communicative competence, with picture description and sharing personal experiences emerging as the most motivating activities. These activities are effective because they allow pupils to use English in meaningful, realistic, and enjoyable contexts.

These findings are consistent with previous research. Phisutthangkoon (2021) and Bashir et al. (2011) similarly found that communicative activities enhance learners' interest and help connect prior knowledge with new information. This supports the view that primary learners benefit most from activities that reflect real-life experiences. Vo (2022) likewise argues that communicative activities create a positive classroom atmosphere and strengthen teacher-learner relationships, thereby enhancing speaking proficiency.

Interview data further confirm that pupils respond positively to realistic and interactive activities. One teacher noted that pupils' facial expressions and level of engagement visibly change when they are interested in a lesson, particularly during picture description or oral presentation tasks. These observations align with the findings of Ochoa et al. (2016), who reported increased learner confidence through peer interaction. Brooks and Wilson (2015) also found that communicative activities promote motivation by enabling learners to practice language skills collaboratively and observe tangible outcomes of their efforts.

While the primary goal of language learning is effective communication, not all pupils succeed in using the target language due to frustration, limited proficiency, or lack of confidence. Nevertheless, the present findings suggest that communicative activities—especially those involving interaction, collaboration, and authentic language use—significantly enhance learners' motivation. According to teachers' perceptions, pupils' motivation is largely driven by increased confidence and peer support during communicative tasks such as discussions, games, role plays, pair work, and group oral presentations.

To address the research question concerning the most motivating communicative activities, the findings indicate that both teachers and pupils consider games, pair work, group work, and role play to be the most effective activities. These activities allow learners to use the target language in a realistic, meaningful, and enjoyable way, thereby enhancing their performance. Games, in particular, are viewed as highly engaging for learners of all ages. As Vyas and Patel (2009) note, when learners encounter a new game with unfamiliar rules, they actively engage in a learning process to understand both the rules and the content of the game (p. 240). Interviewed teachers confirmed that they frequently integrate games into their lessons to provide pupils with an enjoyable and motivating learning experience.

Pair work and group work promote cooperative learning, as pupils collaborate to complete tasks. In these settings, learners tend to participate more actively, develop greater autonomy, and feel less pressure compared to whole-class activities. Harmer (2007) emphasizes that pair and group work are particularly effective in encouraging quieter learners to engage in communicative activities. Regarding role play, Porter (1987) argues that it is a powerful communicative technique that enhances fluency, promotes interaction, and increases learners' motivation.

However, questionnaire and interview results reveal that activities such as class discussions and group oral presentations are perceived as less motivating by some learners. This is largely due to differences in pupils' English proficiency levels, which can lead to unequal participation. Learners with higher proficiency tend to dominate interaction, while those with lower proficiency may withdraw. In heterogeneous discussion groups, introverted pupils may feel discouraged by more expressive peers, whereas confident learners may feel that progress is limited (Green, Christopher, & Lam, 1997).

Despite these perceptions, Brooks and Wilson (2015) argue that group oral presentations offer valuable opportunities for learners to practice language skills, teach content to peers, and increase motivation by allowing students to observe the tangible outcomes of their efforts. In the present study, classroom observations revealed that when pupils engaged in individual communicative activities such as oral presentations, they often appeared highly motivated. These activities helped improve learners' fluency and pronunciation, thereby supporting the development of communicative competence. Similarly, Richards (2006) describes sharing personal experiences as an authentic communicative activity that enables learners to express ideas, values, and feelings related to real-life situations.

Overall, communicative activities play a pivotal role not only in pupils' language development but also in shaping a positive EFL classroom environment. By incorporating such activities, the English language learning process becomes more manageable and meaningful for both teachers and learners. Communicative activities foster effective language teaching by motivating pupils to learn English through innovative and authentic practices.

Nevertheless, the implementation of communicative activities is not without challenges. The findings suggest that limited vocabulary knowledge remains a major obstacle to effective communication. Without adequate teaching materials and sufficient classroom space, managing large and overcrowded classes becomes difficult, further restricting opportunities for meaningful interaction. These results align with Al Hosin (2014), who notes that insufficient vocabulary limits learners' ability to express themselves, and with Su (2006), who highlights limited instructional time and large class sizes as barriers to communicative language teaching.

In summary, the findings highlight the significant benefits of communicative activities for EFL learners both inside and outside the classroom. These activities encourage active language use by providing clear communicative goals, thereby enhancing learners' fluency and confidence. Moreover, communicative activities increase motivation and facilitate language use in ways that reflect real-life communication.

Although the primary goal of language learning is effective communication, not all learners are equally willing to use English, particularly when they experience frustration or fear of making mistakes. In this study, pupils reported high motivation during individual communicative tasks such as oral presentations, as these activities improved fluency and pronunciation. In contrast, teachers perceived that some pupils experienced low motivation due to anxiety about making errors in public. This discrepancy highlights the need to balance fluency-focused activities with supportive feedback strategies.

Overall, the study identifies the most effective communicative activities for motivating primary EFL learners and highlights the challenges teachers face in implementing them. These findings provide a basis for proposing pedagogical solutions to enhance communicative language teaching in primary schools.

6. Suggestions

Based on the findings, several measures can be adopted to improve the implementation of communicative activities and address the challenges faced by teachers and pupils. First, EFL teachers should strive to create an enjoyable and supportive classroom environment that encourages learners to engage in communicative activities and understand their purpose.

Second, teachers are encouraged to increase the use of communicative activities such as picture description, sharing personal experiences, group discussions, and class discussions. These activities promote learner autonomy, provide ample language practice, and foster a positive and affective learning atmosphere. When designing communicative tasks, teachers should ensure equal participation by considering learners' proficiency levels and assigning roles accordingly.

Additionally, oral presentations should be carefully structured. While one group presents, other pupils can act as the audience by preparing questions, which encourages attentive listening and meaningful interaction. This approach integrates speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in a balanced manner.

Third, teachers should consistently use the target language in the classroom to maximize learners' exposure to English. The use of self-recorded videos is also recommended. Recording pupils' performances and reviewing them in subsequent lessons can raise learners' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, build confidence, and encourage self-reflection. Sharing these recordings with parents may further extend language practice beyond the classroom and reinforce learning at home. School authorities also play a crucial role. They should support English language teaching by providing adequate materials, improving classroom conditions, and ensuring the recruitment of qualified EFL teachers. Regular in-service training should be organized to help teachers effectively and confidently implement communicative activities.

Recommendations

Teachers should consistently maintain a positive and engaging classroom environment that motivates learners and clarifies the purpose of communicative activities. Increased use of games and role plays is recommended, as these activities promote learner independence, interaction, and enjoyment. Games can also be effectively used to teach grammar, which learners often perceive as uninteresting.

During communicative activities, teachers should provide constructive feedback and appropriate error correction without excessively interrupting learners' speech. A supportive teacher–student relationship enhances learners' motivation and willingness to participate (Yunus, Osman, & Ishak, 2011). Error correction should focus on improving accuracy while maintaining learners' confidence (James, 2013). As noted by Ming-chu and Hung-chun (2009), effective feedback raises learners' awareness and supports the development of communicative competence.

While communicative activities are primarily fluency-oriented (Tait, 2001), teachers should remain sensitive to learners' anxiety and fear of making mistakes. Balancing fluency with supportive feedback can help learners overcome reluctance and build confidence in using English.

Finally, communicative activities offer multiple benefits: exposure to the target language, authentic practice opportunities, enjoyment, and the use of authentic materials. These activities should be carefully selected to promote information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and interaction. Functional activities such as information-gap and problem-solving tasks, as well as social interaction activities that simulate real-world communication, are particularly effective in achieving these goals.

Conversations, discussions, dialogues, role plays, and debates are typical examples of social interaction activities in communicative language teaching. In designing communicative activities, teachers must ensure that tasks are genuinely communicative by carefully planning them and providing clear guidelines for their implementation. During the practice phase, teachers should act primarily as facilitators or consultants rather than as direct instructors. In addition, teachers are responsible for creating a supportive classroom environment in which learners feel comfortable expressing their opinions, making mistakes, and actively practicing the target language.

Encouraging learners to use English authentically and meaningfully in context is a core principle of communicative activities. For such activities to be successfully implemented, they must be learner-centered and conducted in interactive and authentic settings (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 163). This approach is consistent with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes learner autonomy, interaction, and meaningful communication.

7. Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of communicative activities (CAs) on primary EFL learners' motivation in Benin. Data collected through questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews indicate that both teachers and pupils perceive CAs—especially picture description, sharing personal experiences, games, role plays, and group work—as highly motivating and effective for improving oral communication. These activities support authentic language use and increase learner engagement by providing meaningful opportunities for interaction.

However, the implementation of CAs is constrained by challenges such as insufficient teaching materials, large class sizes, limited vocabulary, classroom management issues, and time constraints. These factors hinder both teachers' ability to conduct CAs and learners' capacity to participate actively. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that with adequate resources, teacher training, and supportive classroom environments, CAs can significantly enhance EFL motivation and communicative competence in primary education.

Future research should address the limitations of this study and explore additional communicative strategies that promote speaking fluency and learner confidence across diverse primary school contexts in Benin.

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