World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews
eISSN: 2581-9615 CODEN (USA): WJARAI
Cross Ref DOI: 10.30574/wjarr
Journal homepage: https://wjarr.com/

(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

# DEVELOPING ENGLISH PRODUCTIVE SKILLS AMONG THE SECONDARY EFL LEARNERS: ISSUES AND PERCEPTIONS FROM STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Sani Moussa Moullou [1,*], Fati Hassane Hamidou [2] and Mahamane Moustapha Chaibou Issaka [1]

[1] Département d'Anglais, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Université Abdou Moumouni de Niamey (Niger).
[2] Département d'Anglais, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Université Abdou Moumouni de Niamey.
* Corresponding Author

ORCID Details
Sani Moussa Moullou: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8717-8015
Mahamane Moustapha Chaibou Issaka: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9389-1098

World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2026, 32(02), 514–521

Publication history: Received on 28 September 2026; revised on 03 November 2026; accepted on 06 November 2026

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2026.32.2.2835

Copyright © 2026 Author(s) retain the copyright of this article. This article is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0

## ABSTRACT

Mastering English language is essential in students' academic and professional advancement worldwide. In Niger context, secondary school students face numerous challenges in developing English language learning competences. Studies have separately examined the key challenges faced by Nigerien students in developing their speaking skill. However, few studies, if any, have been interested in addressing the overall productive skills. From this perspective emerged the interest of the present study to unveil the different obstacles to developing the writing and speaking skills among the secondary school students. Data were triangulated through focus group discussion, interviews, and classroom observations. Using thematic analysis procedures, the findings have unveiled numerous perspectives and issues thwarting the growth of learners' productive skills. Insights generated from this study advocate for a better overall English language teaching as well as teacher professional development. The study further launches an urgent call to researchers to replicate this study involving more schools and more participants for better understanding of the phenomenon under study.

**Keywords:** English language, Productive Skills, Obstacles, Learners

## 1 INTRODUCTION

"Due to the importance governments attribute to the learning of English, in most countries today, learners in state as well as private schools are required to take English courses at some stage in their school careers" (Richards 2015: 18). As a second or a foreign language, English has become essential for learners' academic and professional career across various settings. The applied linguist, Kachru (1992) identified these in terms of concentric circles; ranging from inner, outer to expanding circle settings. As far as Niger is concerned, it represents a perfect example of Kachru's concentric expanding circle model, because of English restricted use in communication (Ousseini, 2019). Wiens et al. (2018: 2) asserted that in Niger, "English is taught as a foreign language by mostly local teachers who also learned English as a

foreign language". It is not used as official language nor used for administrative purpose nationwide. However, English is taught in Nigerien secondary schools and even in country's higher education system. In addition, English language has recently been promoted as a work language alongside French within the country.

Despite these new orientations (Moussa, 2026) as well as its extensive teaching at secondary school levels (Ousseini, 2023), students continue to display very restricted English productive skills (Fati et al., 2026). This problem is also evidenced through their poor achievement in the national exams such as BEPC and Baccalaureate (Moussa, 2026; Idrissa, 2025). Most of them finish their secondary school and embark into higher education with this remarkable gap. Against this backdrop, Goumandakoye (1992:1) stated that "teachers, students' parents, students and even administrators from the Ministry would reveal their dissatisfaction with the output of the Nigerien educational system". In the local literature, few studies have addressed this problem, which deserves more attention across the nation.

Taking this lens, the present study sought to examine EFL students' and teachers' perceptions of English productive skills – writing and speaking – development among the secondary students. It also proposed to explore the challenges that affect the development of secondary students' productive skills' growth. For the purpose of clearance, the two following research questions are reformulated to achieve the goal of the study.

How do the secondary EFL students and teachers perceive the productive skills in learning English language?

What are the challenges of developing productive skills among the secondary students?

Answers to these questions may constitute insightful evidence about the challenges that hinder the development of secondary students' productive skills in the Nigerien EFL context. They may also be the motivating factors for teachers to reflect on their own way of integrating these skills into their lesson plans, delivery and assessment. Ultimately, this study may significantly guide Nigerien English teachers towards their professional development.

## 2 METHODOLGY

This research study follows constructivist positioning, according to which the researcher seeks to construct knowledge by interviewing and observing the participants in their natural setting (Johnson, 2009). Richards (2003: 39) defines constructivism as "a view holding firmly to the position that knowledge and truth are created rather than discovered and that reality is pluralistic." In this orientation, the current research relies as much as possible on the participants' views and beliefs of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2014: 34). In line with this stance, the present study takes to qualitative framework. This approach is "a means of exploring and understanding the individual or groups to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2008: 4). It also uses naturalistic approach, which seeks to understand a phenomenon of interest (Bhandari 2020: 1); therefore, it is completely different from positivist philosophical positioning. Accordingly, this study uses qualitative approaches to construct fathomable insights into secondary school students' productive skills. Against this backdrop, data were generated as well as triangulated through interviews, focus group, and classroom observations.

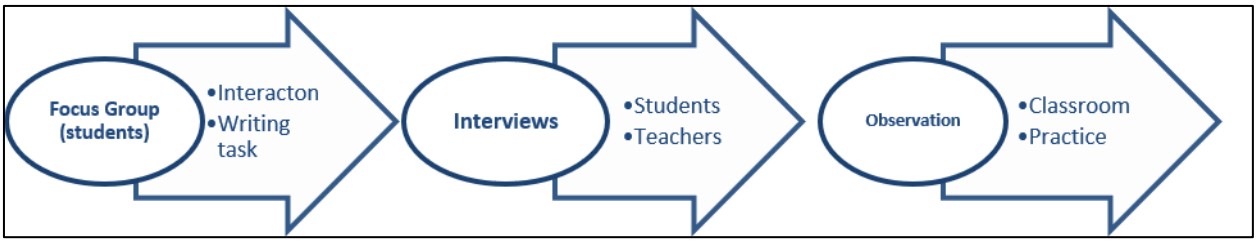
### 2.1 Participants

Based on the research approach discussed previously, data were collected through qualitative strategies. In this vein, fifty-one (51) high school EFL students and five (5) English teachers participated in the data collection process, which is presented below. All the participants were from the same high school.

### 2.2 Data collection

As previously stated, data were collected and methodologically triangulated through focus groups, interviews and classroom observations. Thus, the procedure is indicated next.

**Graphics 1**: data collection procedures



### 2.2.1 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group is one of the three data collection instruments used to collect data in this study. Kitzinger (1995) clarified that it is often used simply as a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously and explicit group interaction is used as part of the method. In this study, the purpose of using focus group was to find out the students' perceived challenges in speaking English as well as its writing. In this process, the focus group discussion involved two small groups of secondary students from high school classes. The discussions were conducted through open-ended questions related to the research objectives. With students' consent, the discussions were audio-recorded, which afterwards were transcribed for the sake of analysis. Ultimately, writing task was involved to encourage every participant to share his/her perspectives. A topic was written on the board asking them to write a paragraph about the obstacles they face in producing English. It was explained that their writings would not affect them in any way. For this purpose, the participants were asked not to write their names for the sake of anonymity. This made them feel at ease while expressing their thoughts on the phenomenon under investigation. Henceforth, both the recorded debate and written paragraphs were attentively reserved for data analysis.

### 2.2.2. Interview

Interview is one of the data collection tools used in this study. As Kasper and Prior (2014) asserted, it involves an interactional event which permits one party to ask questions on topic relevant to the goal of the study and the other party answers these questions accordingly. It was used in this study to construct comprehensive understanding on the key obstacles thwarting the students' language productive skills' development. As there are many types of interviews, semi-structured interview was used. Five secondary English teachers and five students were interviewed to generate perceptions relevant to the research focus. The interviews sessions were recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

### 2.2.3 Observation

Another data collection instrument used in this study is the classroom observation. The latter is defined as, according to Creswell (2014: 181), the process in which the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of the individuals at the research site. For this purpose, five (5) classroom observation sessions (55 minutes each) were conducted and field notes were taken for each session. Playing the role of the complete observer, the researcher observed classroom activities without participating (Creswell, 2008). No specific pre-established protocol was used during all the observation sessions. Specific attention was paid on how students speak English while participating in classroom activities and how, on the board, they write English words. The purpose of this was to examine the emerging obstacles they face in both speaking and writing skills through their participations in the classroom activities.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

In order to analyze the insights collected from focus group discussions, interviews, and classroom observation, the data were firstly made cleanly workable. The recorded interviews were transcribed at the same time correcting the minor mistakes before codifying the observation notes. After being familiarized to the data, thematic analysis was used in the process. Braun and Clark (2006) defined thematic analysis as a demarcated, rarely-acknowledged, yet widely-used qualitative analytic method. They further explained it into six phases: familiarizing oneself with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Braun & Clark, 2006: 87). In this respect, data were categorized, coded descriptively, and grouped under relevant themes for findings presentation. It is worth noting that, in the data presentation, the relevant quotations from students are reproduced verbatim, without correcting any linguistic errors, to illustrate the level of the problem under investigation.

# 3 RESULTS

This section concerns itself with the research results. It highlights the consistent obstacles that emerged from the analyzed data. These insights are organized into themes that meet the objectives of the study.

## 3.1 Restricted Lexical Resources

Having adequate lexical repertoire is crucial in the process of developing productive skills of any language. Data emerged from our analysis point to the limited lexical knowledge as the most recurrent obstacle that hinder students' writing and speaking abilities. This is evidenced throughout all the triangulated data collection instruments employed in this study. For instance, in focus group discussion, the students (year 11) tended to replace the unknown English words with their native language and/or lexis from their L1. This has been consistent as evidenced in the following excerpt from focus group discussion.

*My problem to learn my exercise and to have a good revision is (manque) concentration; the very little distraction can have impact about me and stop me in my revision, that is one of the problems when I learn* (Student, 10/10/2021).

From this quote, one may understand that this student lacks the appropriate lexis and struggles to link his learning obstacle to his lack of concentration and lust for distraction. Evidence also was seen in another student's comments, when she tried to relate her main obstacle to not only the absence of classroom practice in English but also the stress:

*I don't know how to say it but I don't really have a bad time speaking English in class but it is just a little too stressful speaking* (10/10/2021).

Furthermore, this obstacle has also been emerged in our interviewing strategies. Students pointed to not only their limited words possession for productive skills but also intelligible pronunciation for speaking skill. This is indicated into the inappropriate words used by a student as extracted next:

*My difficulties are pronunciation and vocabulary. To write redactions, I must to have a rich vocal and understand what I am missing. I can't enough detail and develop my ideas not knowing how to pronounce certain words* (10/102021).

This problem was not only depicted in students' verbatim but also in their temptation to speak English. It has been observed many times during the classroom participations and their oral presentations. While presenting his oral presentation, for instance, one student said:

*Good evening monsieur and classroom, I am here to want to speak my oral presentation who is on the book on page 106* (07/2/2022).

From this extract, one can easily realize there is wrong words usage such as *good evening* which was supposed to be *good morning*; the use of *who* instead of *which*. The student also tried to tell the audience that he was there to talk about his oral presentation but he used inappropriate words such as "to speak my oral…" rather than using '*to talk about*' for instance. **Teacher 2** explained that students have big trouble in choosing the correct words in their activities, especially oral activities. As for **teacher 1**, he saluted the courage of his students and linked the lack of appropriate vocabulary to the lack of practice.

### 3.2 Curriculum requirement and students' poor mastery of grammar

The curriculum requirement as well as participants' inability to command English grammatical structures correctly stand for another remarkable obstacle to developing their writing and speaking skills. They struggle with grammar rules such as usage of appropriate prepositions and nearly all the grammatical structures, as evidenced in all data obtained. This problem does not surprise **teacher 1** who asserted that

*Students have grammatical limited knowledge because they do not put into practice the grammatical rules being taught to them in class. Sometimes, we, as teachers, tolerate their grammatical mistakes as we want them to speak; correcting them directly may discourage them and prevent them (07/2/2022)*

In line with this argument, one student confirms that their teachers do not focus on students' grammatical problems in class. Therefore, they are all liable to grammar mistakes in both their writing and speaking.

*There is no enough exercise on our weak points in grammar and vocabulary for example but we are also punished if we make grammar mistakes in both writing and speaking.* (07/2/2022)

**Teacher 4** clarified that their program does not include a specific teaching of grammar. According to him, students have already had the prior knowledge of grammar from their previous classes. Another student lists his main concerns about grammar by asserting that he has problems of pronunciation and grammar. He furthermore explains that they have insufficient knowledge about English articles, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions in general. This problem has also been examined in oral presentation of a Year12 student during their individual oral,

*Good evening monsieur and classroom, I am here to want to tell my oral presentation who is on the book on page 106* (07/2/2022).

In his excerpt, he used the relative pronoun *who* instead of *which*; and it is not grammatically correct. This kind of grammar mistakes is recurrent in the works of those students. For instance, it was noticed during their internal assessment, some students looked careless about adding "**s, es, or ies**" in third person singular in simple present tense while participating. As matter of fact, it becomes one of the factors that hinder the effectiveness of students' learning skills mainly writing and speaking.

`

### 3.3 The effect of French language

French language stands for Nigerien students' L1. It influences their English speaking and writing skills in the learning process. In this vein, the current study's data unveil the remarkable interference of French with students' production of English. To illustrate this point, one student in presenting her oral presentation, appeared to pronounce most the keywords of her presentation in French. At the around the end, she even asked the teacher if she could continue in French language:

*In conclusion, this picture is related to the chapter of Experience because….. ahhhhhh….Monsieur, je peux parler en Français s'il vous plait?* (Sir, can I speak in French, please?) (07/2/2022).

This is a reflection to the influence of students' L1 which constitutes a noteworthy problem affecting their productive skills. It has severally been remarked in the intervention of students during the classroom activities. Most of students started speaking in English but they don't finish speaking with no French words or pronunciation. One student defended the idea that it was never easy for them to find the ideas, combining them, and to articulate at the same; therefore, "teachers have to tolerate our Franglais (the mixture of French and English while speaking)". For his intervention, **teacher 5** did not blame the students thoroughly but their linguistic background.

*It may not surprise if the French language influences our students' English productive skills. These students speak French everywhere they go: at school, at home, in the market, etc. they don't have opportunity to speak English, there are no places to go to practice English; so, it is normal they seek refuge from French language while speaking in English if necessary (for students). (07/2/2022).*

**Teacher 2** stated that sometimes they (teachers) had to tolerate that influence of French language in the process of teaching because it was something they could not stop in one day.

### 3.4 Learner-related and Pedagogical issues

Learners' lack of motivation to practice is another issue that affects the participants' productive skills. This has firstly been raised by their teachers, who explicated that, students were very reluctant to practice. In this orientation, **teacher 1** asserted that it was evident everywhere that students' lack of practice hinders the effectiveness of their English learning. In lending support to this, **teacher 3** clarified that in addition to their lack of motivation, students don't have the opportunity to practice English outside classroom due to the francophone context. Seemingly, even the students are aware of their lack of practice and its negative effect on their learning. For instance, one student (Year 12) admitted that:

*I don't speak English except when we have English course, which means that I do not often involve myself to learning it neither in practical nor theoretical way* (10/10/2021).

Her words are indicative to her speaking as well as writing skills' problems. This problem has also been depicted in another student's arguments,

*The teacher is doing his best to see us participate but we, the students, remain the problem in our learning process. Most of us are not motivated because we don't like to make what we learn in practice (10/10/2021).*

Other evidence has been observed during classroom activity. It was when **teacher 2** asked students to form a group work for oral activity in class that one student asked,

*Monsieur, c'est noté ? (Sir, is it graded?)*

Those students were seen very reluctant in the treatment of that activity when they knew that it was not to be graded. The **teacher 2** confirmed that most of them work hardly only to have grades; they do not care a lot about other classroom activities that involve speaking.

*If you want to see their efforts, everybody's participation, ovation, and so on, tell them that you will grade it. Only grades motivate them. Eighty per cent of them have the capacity to speak English correctly if the matter of grade rises. They prepare it. They even memorize what to say in their internal assessment (oral activity that requires students to speak English for three to four minutes) to have good grades to pass in terminal (07/2/2022).*

Lack of practice and motivation has been recognized in both teachers and students' arguments. Together with the above-mentioned problems, they constitute remarkable factors causing difficulties to Nigerien EFL students' productive skills in this study.

In addition, all the interviewed teachers pointed to the negative effects of large classroom size, learning conditions and teaching approaches on developing English productive skills among the secondary students. To put it differently, the poor classroom conditions and teachers' instructional approaches impede the growth of learners' English writing as well as speaking skills.

## 4 DISCUSSION

This research objective was to examine the productive skills challenges that encounter EFL learners in secondary schools. Accordingly, multitudes of issues were identified through the lens of learners and teachers. To start, the study has demonstrated that secondary students lack the appropriate words to promote their English productive skills. They are obliged to use the words they have or to keep quiet in class instead of participating with the inappropriate vocabularies. Similarly, this finding corroborates with the study of Fati et al. (2026) who revealed the impact of limited lexical knowledge among the secondary learners in Zinder. In the same line, the study of Seffar (2015) also revealed that both teachers and learners identified vocabulary deficiency as the main factor behind students' inability to speak English. However, the study of Keong et al. (2015) found similar problem but with different nature. Their study revealed that the English courses are not inadequate to provide enough vocabulary knowledge to students. The study of Al Hosni (2014) has also revealed that students struggle to find the appropriate vocabulary items when trying to speak in English, which reflects their insufficient vocabulary repertoire. More specifically, many learners lack the necessary vocabulary to get their meaning across, and consequently, they cannot continue the interaction.

Another interesting finding from this research is the insufficient knowledge of grammatical structures that face secondary students. Some of the latter encounter the difficulties in constructing a correct grammatical sentence either in spoken or written form. Similar result is found in the work of Tokoz-Goktepe (2013) who reported that most of the students complained about their language such as the limited grammar structures. It is in the same line that Loubazid (2012) explained that the students see themselves as grammatically incompetent. Conversely, El-Enein' (2011) study revealed that the students focused rather on the grammar accuracy than fluency. Moreover, this study has pointed to the interference of French language as a crucial challenge to students' productive skills. On contrary, Al Hosni (2014) found that the main speaking difficulties encountered by grade 5 students are linguistic difficulties among which there is mother tongue use. Nonetheless, the present study has not identified students' mother tongue as a challenge but the country's official language.

It is worth noting that this study has revealed the learner-related and pedagogical issues. In this respect, secondary students' lack of motivation as well as practice affect the development of their productive skills. This is relevant to the existing scholarship. To illustrate it, Rico (2014) pointed to students' unwillingness of to use the target language in class as a notable factor. Regarding the poor classroom conditions as well as teaching pedagogy revealed in this study, few studies have addressed these in the Nigerien scholarship and across the globe at large. This delineates the needs to improve the teaching and learning conditions for the betterment of learners' English language proficiency.

Based on the findings obtained from this study, the following recommendations are made for teacher professional development, for students to improve their productive skills, and for policy-makers, and finally for the directions for further studies.

For teachers' professional development, they should have spirits of positive reinforcement towards their students in the classroom. This would not only help students to overcome the fear of practicing English but also motivate them to continue making. For the purpose of motivation, moreover, teachers should take initiative of doing "plus" to the grades of the active students. It might motivate students to speak and participate to all activities since some students went to have grades. Teachers are also required to innovate, to create, or to implement new strategies in their teaching; such as involving motivating games in their classroom activities. The latter can involve practice of oral strategies such as describing, predicting, simplifying and asking for feedback, through activities such as filling in questionnaire and guessing unknown information (Donough and Saw, 2003 cited in Salima and Zahira, 2015).

For students, they should take initiative to create social media platforms such as English WhatsApp Group (EWG), English Imo Group (EIG) etc. whereby they should practice both speaking and writing in English. This initiative should be supported by school administrations and teachers who, from time to time, might send assignments to students.

For researchers, it would be necessary to replicate such studies including more schools. Further studies should be undertaken in quantity, in quality and in variety to have more insights about the phenomenon.

Coming back to the present study, findings contribute to the existing literature on the complex and diverse factors that affect worldwide EFL students' effectiveness of productive skills.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted multitude of issues affecting the development of secondary EFL students' productive skills. These include but not limited to the language-related, student-related and pedagogy-related issues. Significantly, this study might lead to the improvement of the English teaching profession in the republic of Niger and beyond.

## STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

### *Acknowledgments*

We would like to thank the American Corner Niamey as well as its main Coordinator, Prof. Hamissou Ousseini for all the invaluable assistance and support. We would also like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Head of the English Department at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Université Abdou Moumouni de Niamey, for granting us access to the English Language Laboratory, which served as a working space for writing this article.

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding this manuscript.

## REFERENCES

[1] Al Hosni, S. (2014). Speaking difficulties encountered by young EFL learners. International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), 2(6), 22-30.

[2] Bhandari, P. (2020). What is a qualitative research? methods and examples. Available: https://www.scribbr.com/what_is_qualitative_research_Methods_and_examples.

[3] Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77-101.

[4] Creswell, J. (2008). Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Person Education.

[5] Creswell, J. (2014). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

[6] El-Enein, A. A. (2011). Difficulties encountering English majors in giving academic oral presentations during class at Al-Aqsa University. Unpublished M.ED thesis. University of Gaza.

[7] Fati, H. H., Sani, M. M., & Moussa, T. (2026). The impact of limited lexical knowledge on EFL students' oral communication skills in secondary schools in Zinder: Teachers' perspectives. Revue Internationale GRECE, 2 (3), 348-355.

[8] Goumandakoye, A. (1992). An evaluation of secondary school education in Niger with particular reference to English language teaching. Doctoral thesis. Durham University, UK.

[9] Idrissa, A., M. (2025). Causes of the fourth-year (3è) students' poor performance in English from students', teachers' and advisers' perspectives in the secondary school district (DDES) of Niamey 5. Revue EVALU'A Experts et Evaluateurs d'Afrique, N°2, 88-102.

[10] Johnson, K.E. (2009). Second Language Teacher Education: A Sociocultural Perspective. New York: Routledge.

[11] Kachru, B. (1992). World englishes: Approaches, issues and resources. Language Teaching, 25, 1-14.

[12] Kasper, G., and Prior, M. (2014). Analyzing storytelling in TESOL interview research. TESOL Quarterly, 42(2), 226-255.

[13] Keong. Y. C., Ali, A. I., & Hameed, F. W. (2015). Speaking competence of Iraqi EFL undergraduates of Garmiyan University. International Journal of Education and Research, 3(5), 157-170.

[14] Kitzinger, J. (1995). Qualitative research: introducing focus group. BMJ, 299-311. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.311.7000.299

[15] Loubazid, M. (2012). Exploring the difficulties facing EFL students' participation in oral expression course. Unpublished M.A thesis. Mohamed Khider University of Biskra.

[16] Moussa M., S. (2026). Key factors impeding English language practice among secondary school students in Niamey city: Students and teachers' perspectives. Conference paper, Niamey.

[17] Ousseini, H. (2023). EFL teachers' cognitions and practices in grammar teaching: A qualitative multiple case study from Niger. Educational Journal, 1 (2), 240-248.

[18] Ousseini, H. (2019). ESL through the lenses of EFL: Constructing the experiences of ESL students in an EFL program. Advance Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Discoveries, 42(1), 1-7.

[19] Richards, J. (2015). Key Issues in Language Teaching. U.K: Cambridge University Press.

[20] Richards, K. (2003). Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

[21] Rico, L. (2014). Identifying factors causing difficulties to productive skills among foreign language learners. Opening Writing Doors Journal, 11(1), 65-86.

[22] Salima, S. &, Zahira Board, O. (2015). Exploring EFL learners' difficulties in the productive skills: The case study of first year LMD students At Tlemcen University. Unpublished M.A Thesis. University of Tlemcen.

[23] Seffar, S. (2015). The effect of vocabulary knowledge on EFL oral competence. Journal of Research in Education, 5(6), 08-13.

[24] Tokoz-Goktepe, F. (2013). Speaking problems of 9TH grade high school Turkish learners of L2 English and possible reasons for those Problems: Exploring the teachers and students' perspectives. 5TH World Conference on Educational Sciences, 11(6), 1875-1879.

[25] Wiens, P. D., Andrei, E., Anassour, B., & Smith, A. (2018). Expending circle: The case of Nigerien EFL teachers' English, training and career satisfaction. The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language, 22(2), 1-26.