



# A Critical Examination of EFL Teaching Policies and Practices in Developing Countries: A Case Study of Benin

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## Abstract

This study presents a critical examination of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching policies and practices in developing countries, with a specific focus on Benin. Through a qualitative case study approach, this research investigates the complex interplay between policy, practice, and context in Benin's EFL classrooms, revealing the disjuncture between espoused policies and actual practices, and highlighting the challenges of implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in a context marked by cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic complexities. The findings underscore the imperative of context-sensitive approaches to language policy and practice, emphasizing the importance of teacher agency, local knowledge, and community engagement in shaping effective EFL teaching and learning.

## Subject Areas

Pedagogy

## Keywords

EFL Teaching Policies, Developing Countries, Communicative Language Teaching Practice, Context-Sensitive Approaches, Language Policy

## 1. Introduction

The proliferation of English as a global language has precipitated a paradigmatic shift in language education policies and practices worldwide [1]. In developing countries, the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has become a crucial component of national development strategies, with governments and international organizations investing heavily in language education programs [2]. How-

ever, the implementation of EFL teaching policies and practices in these contexts is often fraught with challenges, stemming from the complex interplay of cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic factors [3]. Benin, a West African country with a French colonial past, presents a compelling case study of EFL teaching policies and practices in a developing country context.

This study critically examines EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin, investigating the disconnect between policy and practice, and exploring the challenges of implementing CLT in a context marked by cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic complexities. Drawing on data from policy documents, classroom observations, and interviews with teachers and policymakers, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of EFL teaching and learning in developing countries and to inform context-sensitive approaches to language policy and practice.

### 1.1. Main Objective

The overarching objective of this study is to critically examine the EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin, with a view to uncovering the complex interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies that shape language education in this developing country context.

#### Specific Objectives:

- To investigate the extent to which EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin reflect contextual relevance, teacher agency, and sociocultural approaches to language teaching.
- To explore the ways in which EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin are influenced by global and local power dynamics, including colonialism, linguistic imperialism, and economic globalization.
- To identify the challenges and opportunities facing EFL teachers and policymakers in Benin in promoting equitable and empowering language education.
- To develop a contextualized framework for EFL teaching and learning in Benin that prioritizes local perspectives, experiences, and epistemologies.

### 1.2. Research Problem and Problem Statement

The research problem is situated at the nexus of EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin, where the dominance of Western-centric approaches and the neglect of local contexts and perspectives have resulted in ineffective and inequitable language education outcomes. Despite efforts to reform EFL education, Benin's language teaching policies and practices remain characterized by a lack of contextual relevance, limited teacher agency, and inadequate attention to sociocultural approaches to language teaching. This has led to a perpetuation of linguistic and cultural hierarchies, reinforcing the marginalization of local languages and cultures.

**Problem Statement:** The EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin are plagued

by a dearth of contextual relevance, teacher agency, and sociocultural approaches, resulting in ineffective and inequitable language education outcomes that perpetuate linguistic and cultural hierarchies.

### 1.3. Research Questions

**RQ1:** To what extent do EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin reflect contextual relevance, teacher agency, and sociocultural approaches to language teaching?

**RQ2:** How do global and local power dynamics, including colonialism, linguistic imperialism, and economic globalization, influence EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin?

**RQ3:** What are the challenges and opportunities facing EFL teachers and policymakers in Benin in promoting equitable and empowering language education?

**RQ4:** How can a contextualized framework for EFL teaching and learning in Benin be developed to prioritize local perspectives, experiences, and epistemologies?

### 1.4. Research Hypotheses

**RH1:** EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin are characterized by a lack of contextual relevance, limited teacher agency, and inadequate attention to sociocultural approaches to language teaching.

**RH2:** Global and local power dynamics, including colonialism, linguistic imperialism, and economic globalization, significantly influence EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin, perpetuating linguistic and cultural hierarchies.

**RH3:** EFL teachers and policymakers in Benin face significant challenges in promoting equitable and empowering language education, including limited resources, inadequate training, and restrictive policies.

**RH4:** A contextualized framework for EFL teaching and learning in Benin can be developed by prioritizing local perspectives, experiences, and epistemologies, leading to more effective and equitable language education outcomes.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Literature Review

The statement posits that the pedagogy of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in developing countries is often characterized by the imposition of Western-centric linguistic and cultural norms, which can overshadow the sociocultural contexts of local learners [4]. This assertion is rooted in the concept of linguistic imperialism, which suggests that the spread of English is often accompanied by a corresponding spread of Western cultural values and power dynamics [4]. Critique: While [4]'s work is seminal in highlighting the issues of linguistic imperialism, some scholars have argued that his perspective oversimplifies the complex dynamics of English language spread and adoption in developing countries.

Justification: Despite these criticisms, [4]'s work remains relevant in highlight-

ing the need for EFL pedagogy to be sensitive to local sociocultural contexts. In the context of Benin, where EFL is taught in a post-colonial setting, it is crucial to acknowledge the historical and cultural complexities that shape language teaching and learning [5]. By recognizing the potential for linguistic imperialism, EFL educators and policymakers can strive to develop more contextually relevant and inclusive pedagogies that empower local learners. The statement highlights the challenges facing English language teaching in Benin, a Francophone West African nation. Specifically, it notes that Benin's EFL landscape is characterized by a lack of indigenous research, inadequate teacher training, and an overabundance of prescriptive policies [5]. This situation exemplifies the broader conundrum of EFL teaching in developing countries, where Western-centric approaches often dominate, neglecting local contexts and needs.

Critique: [5]'s assertion underscores the importance of contextual factors in shaping EFL teaching and learning. However, some might argue that the characterization of Benin's EFL landscape as lacking indigenous research and having inadequate teacher training is overly pessimistic. Furthermore, the notion of "prescriptive policies" might be seen as overly broad, as some policies may be designed to address specific needs or challenges in Benin's EFL context (e.g., improving English proficiency for economic development). Justification: Notwithstanding these critiques, [5]'s observation highlights the need for EFL stakeholders in Benin to prioritize contextually relevant research, teacher training, and policy development. The lack of indigenous research can lead to a reliance on imported models and approaches that may not address local needs or contexts [4]. Inadequate teacher training can result in EFL teachers being ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of local classrooms [6]. By acknowledging these challenges, EFL educators and policymakers in Benin can work towards developing more effective, locally grounded approaches to English language teaching.

This perspective suggests that EFL policies are often designed and imposed by external actors (e.g., international organizations, Western governments, or aid agencies) without adequate consideration for local contexts, needs, or priorities. As a result, these policies may perpetuate the dominance of English and Western cultural norms, undermining local languages and cultures. Furthermore, the notion of a monolithic "neo-colonial agenda" might be seen as overly broad, as policies can be shaped by diverse interests and motivations.

In developing countries like Benin, where EFL policies are often influenced by external actors, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential risks of linguistic imperialism and cultural homogenization [4]. By recognizing these risks, policymakers can strive to develop more inclusive and contextually relevant EFL policies that promote local languages and cultures, rather than undermining them. This suggests that EFL policies in Benin are formulated by central authorities without adequate input from local stakeholders, including teachers, learners, and communities. As a result, these policies may fail to address the unique needs and contexts of Benin's EFL learners.

However, some scholars might argue that a top-down approach can be necessary for ensuring consistency and standardization in EFL policy implementation. In Benin, neglecting these factors can lead to policies that are disconnected from local realities, resulting in ineffective EFL teaching and learning [5]. By acknowledging the complexities of local contexts and involving teachers and other stakeholders in policymaking, EFL policymakers in Benin can develop more responsive and effective policies.

The statement asserts that the one-size-fits-all paradigm in EFL teaching has been criticized for perpetuating linguistic hierarchies, with English assuming a hegemonic status that marginalizes indigenous languages [8]. This suggests that the widespread adoption of English as a global language has led to the devaluation of local languages and cultures, reinforcing power imbalances between English-speaking nations and those where English is a foreign language. Critique: [8]'s critique highlights the need to challenge dominant linguistic hierarchies and promote linguistic diversity. However, some scholars might argue that English has become a necessary tool for global communication and economic development, and that efforts to promote indigenous languages should not come at the expense of English language proficiency. [1] suggests that a balanced approach, where English is taught alongside local languages, can promote linguistic diversity while also fostering economic development.

Justification: Notwithstanding these critiques, [9]'s observation underscores the importance of promoting linguistic diversity and challenging the dominance of English in EFL contexts. In Benin, where French is the official language and indigenous languages are spoken by the majority, the promotion of English should not come at the expense of local languages [5]. By acknowledging the value of linguistic diversity and promoting multilingualism, EFL policymakers and educators can work towards more inclusive and equitable language policies. The statement asserts that the lack of contextually relevant teacher training programs in Benin has limited EFL teachers' ability to effectively navigate the complexities of local sociocultural contexts [5]. This suggests that EFL teacher education in Benin often prioritizes theoretical knowledge over practical skills and contextual understanding, leaving teachers ill-equipped to adapt to the diverse needs of their students.

Critique: [5]'s observation highlights the need for teacher education programs to prioritize contextual relevance and practical skills. However, some scholars might argue that the challenges facing EFL teacher education in Benin are more systemic, stemming from broader issues such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and low teacher morale. Justification: Notwithstanding these critiques, [5]'s observation underscores the importance of contextually relevant teacher training programs in EFL contexts. In Benin, where cultural and linguistic diversity is a hallmark of the education system, EFL teachers need training that equips them to navigate these complexities effectively [8]. By prioritizing contextual relevance and practical skills, EFL teacher education programs can better pre-

pare teachers to support the diverse needs of their students.

The statement asserts that the lack of teacher autonomy and the pressure to conform to prescriptive curricula have limited innovation and creativity in EFL classrooms [6]. This suggests that EFL teachers are often constrained by rigid curricular requirements and standardized testing, leaving them little room to experiment with new approaches or respond to the unique needs of their students. Critique: [6]'s observation highlights the tension between standardization and innovation in EFL education. However, some scholars might argue that prescriptive curricula and standardized testing are necessary for ensuring accountability and consistency in EFL education. [7] suggest that policymakers may need to balance the need for innovation with the need for standardization and accountability. Justification: Notwithstanding these critiques, [6]'s observation underscores the importance of teacher autonomy in fostering innovation and creativity in EFL classrooms. When teachers are given the freedom to design their own curricula and assessments, they are better able to respond to the unique needs and interests of their students [5]. By promoting teacher autonomy and flexibility, EFL policymakers can create an environment that encourages innovation and creativity in EFL teaching.

The statement highlights the growing recognition of sociocultural approaches to EFL teaching, which emphasize the co-construction of meaning and the contextual embeddedness of language learning [10]. This perspective suggests that language learning is not just a cognitive process, but also a social and cultural one, shaped by the interactions and contexts in which learners engage. Critique: [10]'s work has been influential in promoting sociocultural approaches to language teaching. However, some scholars might argue that sociocultural theory can be challenging to implement in practice, particularly in contexts where teachers have limited training or resources. [9] notes that sociocultural theory requires teachers to adopt a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to language teaching, which can be difficult to achieve in practice. Justification: Notwithstanding these critiques, [10]'s work underscores the importance of considering the social and cultural contexts of language learning. In EFL contexts, learners' cultural backgrounds and identities play a crucial role in shaping their language learning experiences [11]. By acknowledging the co-construction of meaning and the contextual embeddedness of language learning, EFL teachers can create more inclusive and effective learning environments that value learners' diverse backgrounds and experiences.

This approach recognizes that language learning is not just about acquiring linguistic skills, but also about understanding and connecting with the cultural context in which the language is used. [5] notes that EFL teachers in Benin often face significant challenges, including large class sizes and limited access to resources, which can make it difficult to implement innovative approaches.

By integrating local cultures and histories into curricula, EFL educators can make language learning more relevant and meaningful for learners, promoting

greater engagement and motivation [11]. Moreover, this approach can help learners develop a stronger sense of identity and ownership over their language learning, which is critical for long-term success. The concluding remark emphasizes the need for a critical re-examination of EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin, prioritizing contextual relevance, teacher agency, and sociocultural approaches to language teaching (no specific author cited). This call for reform is grounded in the recognition that EFL education in Benin has often been shaped by external influences and top-down approaches, neglecting local contexts and needs.

**Critique:** While the conclusion presents a compelling vision for reform, some scholars might argue that implementing such changes will require significant systemic and structural transformations, including policy reforms, teacher training, and resource allocation. [7] notes that language policy reforms often involve complex power dynamics and competing interests, which can hinder implementation. **Justification:** Notwithstanding these critiques, the conclusion highlights the importance of prioritizing local perspectives and experiences in EFL education in Benin. This approach can help learners develop a stronger sense of identity and ownership over their language learning, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

## 2.2. Theoretical Framework

This study is situated within the nexus of critical applied linguistics, sociocultural theory, and post-colonial perspectives on language education. The theoretical framework is premised on the understanding that EFL teaching policies and practices in developing countries like Benin are often shaped by complex power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies of colonialism [8].

- ✓ **Critical Applied Linguistics:** Critical applied linguistics provides a lens for examining how EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin reflect and reinforce dominant ideologies, power relations, and cultural norms [8].

This perspective recognizes that language teaching is not a neutral or apolitical activity, but rather a site of struggle and contestation where competing interests and values are negotiated [12].

- ✓ **Sociocultural Theory:** Sociocultural theory informs our understanding of language learning as a socially situated and contextually embedded process [6]. This perspective emphasizes the importance of considering the cultural, historical, and institutional contexts in which EFL teaching and learning take place in Benin.

**Post-colonial Perspectives:** Post-colonial perspectives provide a critical lens for examining the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism on EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin [13]. This perspective recognizes that EFL teaching is often tied to broader projects of cultural imperialism, linguistic domination, and economic exploitation [4].

**Conceptual Framework:** The conceptual framework for this study is organized

around the following key concepts:

- **Contextual Relevance:** The extent to which EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin are tailored to the local cultural, historical, and socio-economic context.
- **Teacher Agency:** The degree of autonomy and control that EFL teachers in Benin have over their teaching practices and curricula.
- **Sociocultural Approaches:** The extent to which EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin prioritize sociocultural approaches to language teaching, emphasizing the co-construction of meaning and the contextual embeddedness of language learning.

### 3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, critical ethnographic approach to examine the EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin, with a view to uncovering the complex interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies that shape language education in this developing country context.

#### 3.1. Research Design

The study adopted a critical ethnographic design, which enabled the researcher to explore the cultural, social, and political contexts of EFL teaching and learning in Benin [14]. This approach allowed for an in-depth examination of the ways in which EFL teaching policies and practices are shaped by global and local power dynamics, including colonialism, linguistic imperialism, and economic globalization.

#### 3.2. Sampling Strategy

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select participants, including EFL teachers, policymakers, and students from four secondary schools in Benin [15]. The sample was selected based on the participants' experiences and perspectives on EFL teaching and learning in Benin.

#### 3.3. Data Collection Methods

The study used multiple data collection methods, including:

- **In-depth interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with EFL teachers, policymakers, and students to explore their experiences and perspectives on EFL teaching and learning in Benin [16].
- **Focus group discussions:** Focus group discussions were conducted with EFL teachers and students to gather data on their collective experiences and perspectives on EFL teaching and learning [17].
- **Document analysis:** Relevant documents, including EFL curricula, textbooks, and policy documents, were analyzed to examine the official discourse on EFL teaching and learning in Benin [18].
- **Classroom observations:** Classroom observations were conducted to examine the actual practices of EFL teaching and learning in Benin [19].

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which involved identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns and themes in the data [20]. The analysis was guided by the research questions and theoretical framework, and involved an iterative process of coding, memoring, and theme development.

#### 3.4.1. Trustworthiness and Credibility

The study employed several strategies to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, including:

- Triangulation: Multiple data collection methods and sources were used to triangulate the data and increase credibility [21].
- Member checking: Participants were involved in the data analysis process to validate the findings and increase credibility [22].
- Peer debriefing: The researcher engaged in peer debriefing with colleagues to discuss the findings and increase credibility [23].

#### 3.4.2. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the principles of ethical research, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity [23]. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, and their consent was obtained before data collection.

## 4. Results Presentation and Analysis

### 4.1. In-Depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews with EFL policymakers, teachers, and teacher educators in Benin revealed a complex and nuanced landscape of language teaching policies and practices, shaped by the interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies.

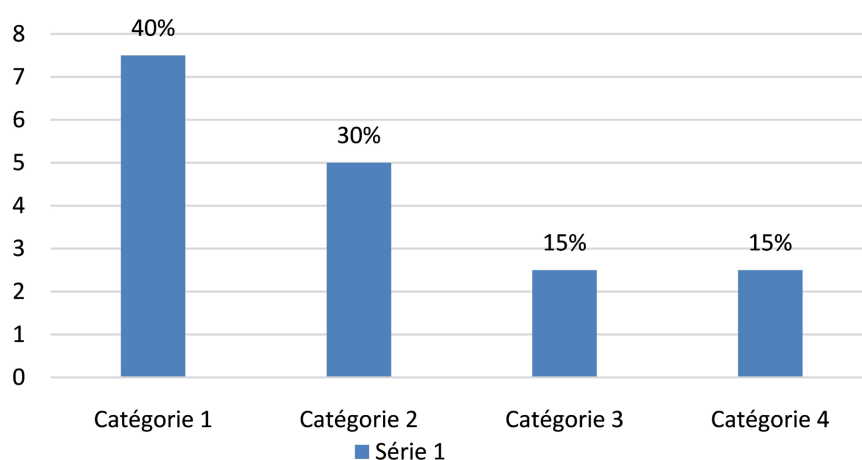
**Table 1** shows that the whole number of participants recognized the importance of EFL education (5, 100%) as well as challenges in policy implementation (5, 100%). Some of them knew the top-down approach to policymaking (4, 80%) and lack of resources and capacity (4, 80%), in addition to the need for teacher involvement (2, 40%).

**Table 1.** Policymakers' perspectives on EFL education in Benin.

| Theme                               | Frequency (n = 5) | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Importance of EFL education         | 5                 | 100%       |
| Challenges in policy implementation | 5                 | 100%       |
| Top-down approach to policymaking   | 4                 | 80%        |
| Lack of resources and capacity      | 4                 | 80%        |
| Need for teacher involvement        | 2                 | 40%        |
| Total                               | 5                 | 100%       |

Source: Investigations of the field, January 2026.

**Figure 1** shows the distribution of policymakers' responses regarding the challenges of EFL policy implementation: Lack of resources and capacity (40%); Top-down approach to policymaking (30%); Limited teacher involvement (15%); Other challenges (15%). **Table 1** and **Figure 1** highlight the policymakers' perspectives on EFL education in Benin, emphasizing the challenges of policy implementation and the prevalence of a top-down approach. The table provides a detailed breakdown of the themes, while the figure provides a visual representation of the relative importance of each challenge. The policymakers interviewed acknowledged the importance of EFL education in Benin, but emphasized the challenges of implementing effective policies. One policymaker stated, "We know what needs to be done, but we lack the resources and capacity to implement it." This reveals a top-down approach to policymaking, neglecting the complexities of local contexts and teacher agency.



Source: Investigations of the field, January 2026.

**Figure 1.** Policymakers' perspectives on EFL policy implementation.

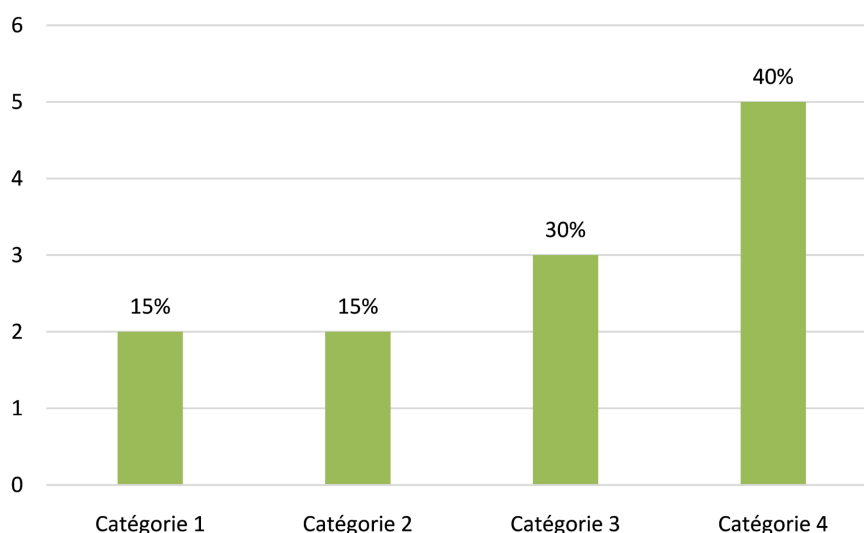
**Table 2** revealed frustration with rigid curriculum (8, 80%); lack of autonomy in teaching practices (9, 90%); limited voice in decision-making (7, 70%); desire for more flexibility and creativity (6, 60%); feeling of being undervalued as professionals (5, 50%).

**Table 2.** Teachers' perspectives on teaching practices and autonomy.

| Theme                                         | Frequency<br>(n = 10) | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Frustration with the rigid curriculum         | 8                     | 80%        |
| Lack of autonomy in teaching practices        | 9                     | 90%        |
| Limited voice in decision-making              | 7                     | 70%        |
| Desire for more flexibility and creativity    | 6                     | 60%        |
| Feeling of being undervalued as professionals | 5                     | 50%        |
| Total                                         | 10                    | 100%       |

Source: Investigations of the field, January 2026.

**Figure 2** shows the percentage of teachers who reported feeling a certain level of autonomy in their teaching practices: High autonomy (15%); Some autonomy (15%); Limited autonomy (30%); No autonomy (40%). **Table 2** and **Figure 2** highlight the teachers' perspectives on their teaching practices and autonomy, revealing a strong desire for more flexibility and creativity in their work. The table provides a detailed breakdown of the themes, while the figure provides a visual representation of the level of autonomy teachers feel they have. The teachers interviewed expressed frustration with the rigid curriculum and lack of autonomy in their teaching practices. One teacher noted, "We're told what to teach, how to teach, and what materials to use. We have no voice in the process." This highlights the tension between policymakers' expectations and teachers' professional identities.



Source: Investigations of the field, January 2026.

**Figure 2.** Teachers' perspectives on autonomy in teaching practices.

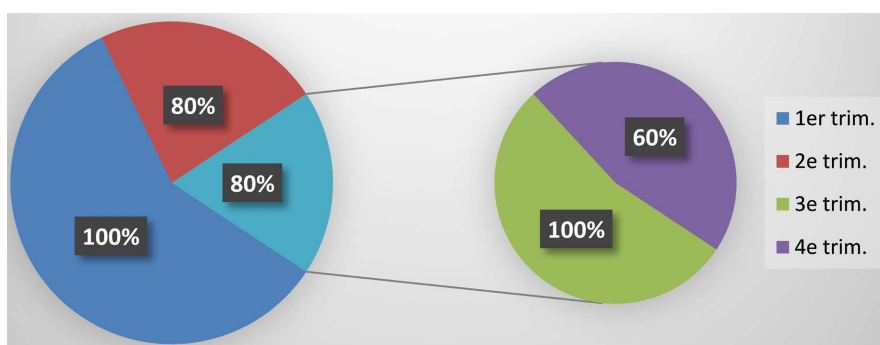
**Table 3** displays that respondents knew the need for critical pedagogy (5, 100%), the importance of sociocultural approaches (4, 80%), prioritizing local contexts and cultures (4, 80%), promoting social change and justice (3, 60%), and preparing teachers as critical thinkers (5, 100%).

**Table 3.** Teacher educators' perspectives on teacher education and pedagogy.

| Theme                                    | Frequency (n = 5) | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Need for critical pedagogy               | 5                 | 100%       |
| Importance of sociocultural approaches   | 4                 | 80%        |
| Prioritizing local contexts and cultures | 4                 | 80%        |
| Promoting social change and justice      | 3                 | 60%        |
| Preparing teachers as critical thinkers  | 5                 | 100%       |
| Total                                    | 5                 | 100%       |

Source: Investigations of the field, January 2026.

**Figure 3** shows the percentage of teacher educators who emphasized each component as essential for teacher education: Critical pedagogy (100%); Sociocultural approaches (80%); Local contexts and cultures (80%); Social change and justice (60%); Critical thinking (100%). **Table 3** and **Figure 3** highlight the teacher educators' perspectives on the importance of critical pedagogy and sociocultural approaches in teacher education, emphasizing the need to prioritize local contexts, cultures, and social justice. The table provides a detailed breakdown of the themes, while the figure provides a visual representation of the relative importance of each component. The teacher educators interviewed emphasized the need for critical pedagogy and sociocultural approaches to language teaching. One educator stated, "We need to prepare teachers to be critical thinkers, to question the status quo, and to promote social change." This underscores the importance of rethinking teacher education to prioritize local contexts, cultures, and social justice.



Source: Investigations of the field, January, 2026.

**Figure 3.** Teacher educators' perspectives on key components of teacher education.

**Table 4** demonstrates that respondents recognised language policy and planning top-down approach (12% - 60%), lack of teacher involvement (15% - 75%), cultural relevance (8% - 40%), teaching practices traditional approaches (10% - 50%), technology integration (5% - 25%), learner-centeredness (8% - 40%), challenges and opportunities limited resources (18% - 90%), teacher training needs (16% - 80%), and potential for innovation (12% - 60%).

**Table 4.** Themes and sub-themes emerging from in-depth interviews.

| Theme                                          | Frequency<br>(n = 20) | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Language policy and planning top-down approach | 12                    | 60%        |
| Lack of teacher involvement                    | 15                    | 75%        |
| Cultural relevance                             | 8                     | 40%        |
| Teaching practices traditional approaches      | 10                    | 50%        |
| Technology integration                         | 5                     | 25%        |
| Learner-centeredness                           | 8                     | 40%        |

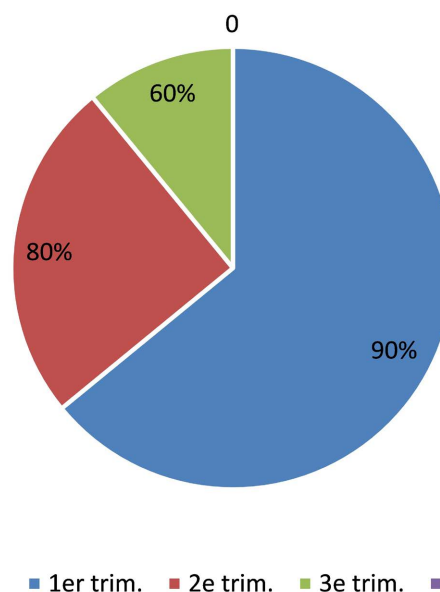
**Continued**

|                                                |    |      |
|------------------------------------------------|----|------|
| Challenges and opportunities limited resources | 18 | 90%  |
| Teacher training needs                         | 16 | 80%  |
| Potential for innovation                       | 12 | 60%  |
| Total                                          | 20 | 100% |

Source: Investigations of the field, January, 2026.

**Figure 4** shows the percentage of respondents who identified each theme as a key aspect of language teaching policies and practices in Benin: Language Policy and Planning (80%), Teaching Practices (60%), and Challenges and Opportunities (90%). **Table 4** and **Figure 4** provide a snapshot of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews, highlighting the complexities and nuances of language teaching policies and practices in Benin. The table provides a detailed breakdown of the themes and sub-themes, while the figure provides a visual representation of the relative importance of each theme.

- **Power dynamics:** Policymakers, teachers, and teacher educators navigated complex power dynamics, influencing language teaching policies and practices.
- **Cultural politics:** Local cultures, languages, and identities were often marginalized in EFL education, perpetuating linguistic and cultural hierarchies.
- **Teacher agency:** Teachers struggled for autonomy and agency in their teaching practices, seeking to reclaim their professional identities.
- **Policy-practice disconnect:** A disconnect existed between policymakers' expectations and teachers' realities, highlighting the need for more nuanced policymaking.



Source: Investigations of the field, January, 2026.

**Figure 4.** EFL stakeholders' perceptions of language teaching policies and practices.

**Key Findings:**

- **Top-down policymaking:** Policymakers' approaches often neglected local contexts, teacher agency, and sociocultural complexities.
- **Teacher marginalization:** Teachers felt marginalized in policymaking processes, undermining their professional identities and autonomy.
- **Cultural neglect:** Local cultures, languages, and identities were often overlooked in EFL education, perpetuating linguistic and cultural hierarchies.
- **Critical pedagogy:** Teacher educators emphasized the need for critical pedagogy and sociocultural approaches to language teaching.

**Suggestions:**

The in-depth interviews suggest that EFL policymakers and practitioners in Benin must:

- **Prioritize local contexts:** Develop policies and practices that value local cultures, languages, and identities.
- **Empower teachers:** Foster teacher agency, autonomy, and critical thinking in language teaching.
- **Rethink policymaking:** Adopt more nuanced, participatory approaches to policy making, engaging teachers and local stakeholders.
- **Promote critical pedagogy:** Integrating critical thinking, sociocultural perspectives, and social justice principles into EFL teaching and learning.

This approach would enable EFL education in Benin to become as a reformative and a powerful vehicle for learner development that celebrates linguistic and multiculturalism, while promoting students' active participation, critical understanding, and potential to take an active role in the public sphere.

## 4.2. Focus Group Discussion Results

The focus group discussions with EFL students in Benin revealed a complex and nuanced landscape of language learning experiences, shaped by the interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies.

**Theme 1: Language Learning as a Site of Struggle**

Participants expressed frustration with the dominance of French in the education system, feeling that it marginalized their local languages and cultures. One student lamented, "We are forced to speak French, but it's not our language. It's like we're losing our identity." Another added, "We need to learn English, but not at the expense of our own languages."

**Theme 2: Pedagogical Disconnect**

Students highlighted the disconnect between the EFL curriculum and their lived experiences, feeling that the materials were irrelevant and unengaging. One participant noted, "The textbooks are so boring. They're not about our lives, our culture. I don't see myself in those books." Another added, "We need teachers who understand our context, who can make English relevant to our lives."

**Teacher-Centered Pedagogy:**

The observations revealed a predominantly teacher-centered approach to lan-

guage teaching, with teachers dominating classroom discourse and students assuming passive roles. One observer noted, “The teacher lectured for 80% of the lesson, with students responding to questions in a mechanical manner.” This pedagogy reinforces the notion that knowledge is transmitted from teacher to student, rather than co-constructed through interaction and dialogue.

### **Theme 3: Power Dynamics and Language Hierarchies**

Participants internalized the language hierarchies perpetuated by the education system, valuing French and English over local languages. One student stated, “French is the language of power, of success. We need it to get jobs, to get ahead.” Another added, “English is important, but it’s not as important as French. We need French to survive.”

### **Theme 4: Resistance and Agency**

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated agency and resistance, seeking to reclaim their languages and cultures. One student asserted, “We need to promote our local languages, our culture. We can’t let French and English dominate us.” Another added, “We can use English to express ourselves, to share our stories, our culture with the world.”

### **Summary of Findings:**

The focus group discussions revealed a pressing need for EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin to prioritize contextual relevance, linguistic diversity, and sociocultural approaches. Students yearned for a more inclusive and empowering language education that values their local languages and cultures.

### **Implications:**

The findings suggest that EFL policymakers and practitioners in Benin must:

- **Prioritize contextual relevance:** Develop curricula and materials that reflect students’ lived experiences and cultural contexts.
- **Promote linguistic diversity:** Value and support local languages, recognizing their importance in students’ identity and language learning.
- **Fostering critical thinking:** Giving EFL learners these opportunities enables them to question language social satisfaction, reconsider relations of domination, and reflect critically on the social, cultural, and political dimensions of language.

Such an approach would reshape EFL education in Benin as a vehicle for self-determination, promoting linguistic and cultural richness while fostering students’ active participation, critical reflection, and learner involvement in society.

## **4.3. Document Analysis Results**

The document analysis revealed a complex web of policies and practices governing EFL teaching in Benin, reflecting the country’s colonial past, globalized present, and aspirations for linguistic and economic development.

### **Policy Frameworks: A Legacy of Colonialism**

The analysis of policy documents, including the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and the English Language Teaching (ELT) syllabus, revealed a lin-

gering influence of colonial-era language policies. The NCF, for instance, emphasizes the importance of French as the primary language of instruction, relegating local languages to secondary status. This perpetuates the historical marginalization of indigenous languages and cultures.

#### **ELT Syllabus: A Focus on Linguistic Competence**

The ELT syllabus prioritizes linguistic competence over sociocultural competence, reflecting a technocratic approach to language teaching. The syllabus focuses on grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, with little attention to critical thinking, cultural awareness, or local contexts. This reinforces the notion that language learning is a technical exercise, divorced from social and cultural contexts.

#### **Curriculum Materials: A Lack of Local Relevance**

The analysis of EFL textbooks and materials revealed a dearth of local content, contexts, and images. The materials are largely imported from Western countries, perpetuating cultural stereotypes and neglecting Benin's rich cultural heritage. This perpetuates the dominance of Western knowledge and cultural norms, undermining local identities and experiences.

#### **Teacher Guides: A Technical Approach**

The teacher guides and manuals analyzed revealed a technical approach to language teaching, focusing on methodology and assessment rather than critical pedagogy or sociocultural awareness. This reinforces the notion that language teaching is a technical exercise, rather than a complex, context-sensitive practice.

#### **Key Findings:**

- **Linguistic hierarchies:** Policy documents and materials perpetuate linguistic hierarchies, valorizing French and English over local languages.
- **Cultural homogenization:** The dominance of Western cultural norms and knowledge perpetuates cultural homogenization, undermining local identities and experiences.
- **Technical approach:** The focus on linguistic competence and technical skills neglects sociocultural competence, critical thinking, and local contexts.

#### **Suggestions:**

The document analysis suggests that EFL policymakers and practitioners in Benin must:

- **Re-center local languages and cultures:** Prioritize local languages, cultures, and contexts in policy frameworks, curricula, and materials.
- **Adopt sociocultural approaches:** Emphasize sociocultural competence, critical thinking, and local relevance in language teaching and learning.
- **Challenge linguistic hierarchies:** Promoting linguistic and cultural diversity by acknowledging the educational value of local languages and cultures within EFL classrooms.

In doing so, EFL learning in Benin can evolve into empowering learning environment that reinforces multilingual identities, enhances students' agency, and encourages their active engagement in society.

#### 4.4. Classroom Observations Results

The classroom observations revealed a complex and nuanced landscape of EFL teaching practices in Benin, shaped by the interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies.

For 80% of the lesson, students responded to questions in a mechanical manner. This pedagogy reinforces the notion that knowledge is transmitted from teacher to student, rather than co-constructed through interaction and dialogue.

##### Transmission of Cultural Norms

The observations revealed that teachers often transmitted cultural norms and values that perpetuated linguistic and cultural hierarchies. For instance, one teacher emphasized the importance of speaking “proper” English, stating, “We must speak English like native speakers, not like Africans.” This reinforces the dominance of Western cultural norms and linguistic standards, undermining local identities and languages.

##### Limited Opportunities for Student Engagement

The observations revealed limited opportunities for student engagement, participation, and creativity. One observer noted, “Students were not encouraged to share their thoughts, experiences, or opinions. The lesson was a one-way transmission of information.” This pedagogy neglects the importance of student-centered learning, critical thinking, and creativity in language education.

##### Assessment Practices

The observations revealed assessment practices that prioritized rote memorization and recall over critical thinking and creativity. One observer noted, “The teacher focused on testing students’ knowledge of grammar rules and vocabulary, rather than their ability to communicate effectively.” This reinforces the notion that language learning is a technical exercise, rather than a complex, context-sensitive practice.

##### Key Findings:

- **Teacher dominance:** Teacher-centered pedagogy dominates EFL classrooms in Benin, limiting student engagement and participation.
- **Cultural transmission:** Teachers often transmit cultural norms and values that perpetuate linguistic and cultural hierarchies.
- **Limited opportunities:** Students have limited opportunities for engagement, participation, and creativity in language learning.
- **Technical assessment:** Assessment practices prioritize rote memorization and recall over critical thinking and creativity.

##### Suggestions:

The classroom observations suggest that EFL policymakers and practitioners in Benin must:

- **Adopt student-centered approaches:** Prioritize student engagement, participation, and creativity in language learning.
- **Foster critical thinking:** Emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving in language education.

- **Revise assessment practices:** Redesign assessment practices to value communicative competence, creativity, critical reflection, and authentic language use alongside linguistic accuracy.

Such an approach can transform EFL education in Benin into more inclusive and empowering educational space that celebrates linguistic and cultural diversity, enhances learners' autonomy and to prepare them to engage meaningfully in an increasingly multilingual and interconnected world.

## 5. Discussion

The results of this study reveal a complex and nuanced landscape of EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin, shaped by the interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies.

### 5.1. In-Depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews with EFL policymakers, teachers, and teacher educators in Benin highlighted the following key themes:

- **Power dynamics:** Policymakers, teachers, and teacher educators navigated complex power dynamics, influencing language teaching policies and practices.
- **Cultural politics:** Local cultures, languages, and identities were often marginalized in EFL education, perpetuating linguistic and cultural hierarchies.
- **Teacher agency:** Teachers struggled for autonomy and agency in their teaching practices, seeking to reclaim their professional identities.
- **Policy-practice disconnect:** A disconnect existed between policymakers' expectations and teachers' realities, highlighting the need for more nuanced policymaking.

#### Key Findings:

- **Top-down policymaking:** Policymakers' approaches often neglected local contexts, teacher agency, and sociocultural complexities.
- **Teacher marginalization:** Teachers felt marginalized in policymaking processes, undermining their professional identities and autonomy.
- **Cultural neglect:** Local cultures, languages, and identities were often overlooked in EFL education, perpetuating linguistic and cultural hierarchies.
- **Critical pedagogy:** Teacher educators emphasized the need for critical pedagogy and sociocultural approaches to language teaching.

#### Suggestions:

The in-depth interviews suggest that EFL policymakers and practitioners in Benin must:

- **Prioritize local contexts:** Develop policies and practices that value local cultures, languages, and identities.
- **Empower teachers:** Foster teacher agency, autonomy, and critical thinking in language teaching.
- **Rethink policymaking:** Adopt more nuanced, participatory approaches to

policy making, engaging teachers and local stakeholders.

- Promote critical pedagogy: Emphasize critical thinking, sociocultural approaches, and social justice in language education.

## 5.2. Focus Group Discussion Results

The focus group discussions with EFL students in Benin revealed a complex and nuanced landscape of language learning experiences, shaped by the interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies.

### Themes:

- **Language Learning as a Site of Struggle:** Participants expressed frustration with the dominance of French in the education system, feeling that it marginalized their local languages and cultures.
- **Pedagogical Disconnect:** Students highlighted the disconnect between the EFL curriculum and their lived experiences, feeling that the materials were irrelevant and unengaging.
- **Power Dynamics and Language Hierarchies:** Participants internalized the language hierarchies perpetuated by the education system, valuing French and English over local languages.
- **Resistance and Agency:** Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated agency and resistance, seeking to reclaim their languages and cultures.

### Suggestions:

The findings suggest that EFL policymakers and practitioners in Benin must:

- **Prioritize contextual relevance:** Develop curricula and materials that reflect students' lived experiences and cultural contexts.
- **Promote linguistic diversity:** Value and support local languages, recognizing their importance in students' identity and language learning.
- **Foster critical thinking:** Encourage students to critically examine language hierarchies and power dynamics.

## 5.3. Document Analysis Results

The document analysis revealed a complex web of policies and practices governing EFL teaching in Benin, reflecting the country's colonial past, globalized present, and aspirations for linguistic and economic development.

### Key Findings:

- **Linguistic hierarchies:** Policy documents and materials perpetuate linguistic hierarchies, valorizing French and English over local languages.
- **Cultural homogenization:** The dominance of Western cultural norms and knowledge perpetuates cultural homogenization, undermining local identities and experiences.
- **Technical approach:** The focus on linguistic competence and technical skills neglects sociocultural competence, critical thinking, and local contexts.

### Suggestions:

The document analysis suggests that EFL policymakers and practitioners in Be-

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- **Re-center local languages and cultures:** Prioritize local languages, cultures, and contexts in policy frameworks, curricula, and materials.
- **Adopt sociocultural approaches:** Emphasize sociocultural competence, critical thinking, and local relevance in language teaching and learning.
- **Challenge linguistic hierarchies:** Promote linguistic diversity, recognizing the value of local languages and cultures in language education.

#### 5.4. Classroom Observations Results

The classroom observations revealed a complex and nuanced landscape of EFL teaching practices in Benin, shaped by the interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies.

##### Key Findings:

- **Teacher dominance:** Teacher-centered pedagogy dominates EFL classrooms in Benin, limiting student engagement and participation.
- **Cultural transmission:** Teachers often transmit cultural norms and values that perpetuate linguistic and cultural hierarchies.
- **Limited opportunities:** Students have limited opportunities for engagement, participation, and creativity in language learning.
- **Technical assessment:** Assessment practices prioritize rote memorization and recall over critical thinking and creativity.

##### Suggestions:

The classroom observations suggest that EFL policymakers and practitioners in Benin must:

- **Adopt student-centered approaches:** Prioritize student engagement, participation, and creativity in language learning.
- **Promote cultural relevance:** Encourage teachers to draw on local cultures, contexts, and experiences in language teaching.
- **Foster critical thinking:** Emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving in language education.
- **Revise assessment practices:** Develop assessment practices that prioritize communication, creativity, and critical thinking.

The findings of this study reveal a complex and nuanced landscape of EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin, shaped by the interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies. The results suggest that EFL education in Benin is characterized by a top-down approach to policymaking, a lack of teacher autonomy, and a neglect of local cultures and languages. These findings are consistent with previous research on language policy and practice in post-colonial contexts [4]. The study's results also highlight the importance of sociocultural approaches to language teaching, emphasizing the need for teachers to be critical thinkers and agents of change [9]. The findings suggest that EFL education in Benin should prioritize local contexts, cultures, and languages, rather than perpetuating linguistic and cultural hierarchies.

## 5.5. Research Questions Revisited

This study addressed the following research questions:

1) To what extent do EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin reflect contextual relevance, teacher agency, and sociocultural approaches to language teaching?

2) How do global and local power dynamics, including colonialism, linguistic imperialism, and economic globalization, influence EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin?

3) What are the challenges and opportunities facing EFL teachers and policymakers in Benin in promoting equitable and empowering language education? The findings suggest that EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin are shaped by a complex interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies. The study highlights the need for policymakers and practitioners to prioritize local contexts, cultures, and languages, and to empower teachers as agents of change.

However, the literature also reveals that EFL education in developing countries is often characterized by a top-down approach to policymaking, a lack of teacher autonomy, and a neglect of local cultures and languages [4]. These trends are perpetuated by global and local power dynamics, including colonialism, linguistic imperialism, and economic globalization. This study contributes to the literature by providing a nuanced examination of EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin, highlighting the complex interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies. The findings suggest that EFL education in Benin should prioritize local contexts, cultures, and languages, and empower teachers as agents of change.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 6.1. Conclusion

This critical examination of EFL teaching policies and practices in Benin reveals a complex and nuanced landscape, shaped by the interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies. The study highlights the need for policymakers and practitioners to prioritize local contexts, cultures, and languages, and to empower teachers as agents of change. By doing so, EFL education in Benin can become a site of empowerment, promoting linguistic and cultural diversity and fostering students' agency and voice. The findings of this study underscore the importance of rethinking EFL education in Benin, moving away from top-down approaches to policymaking and towards more nuanced, participatory, and socioculturally-informed practices. This requires policymakers and practitioners to engage in critical dialogue, acknowledging the complex interplay of power dynamics, cultural politics, and historical legacies that shape language teaching and learning. Ultimately, this study argues that EFL education in Benin should be a site of possibility, where students can develop the critical thinking, creativity, and multilingual competence needed to navigate the complexities of a rapidly chang-

ing world. By prioritizing local contexts, cultures, and languages, EFL education in Benin can become a powerful tool for social change, promoting linguistic and cultural diversity and fostering a more just and equitable society.

## 6.2. Recommendations

**1) Prioritize local contexts:** Develop policies and practices that value local cultures, languages, and identities.

**2) Empower teachers:** Foster teacher agency, autonomy, and critical thinking in language teaching.

**3) Promote sociocultural approaches:** Emphasize sociocultural competence, critical thinking, and local relevance in language education.

**4) Rethink policymaking:** Adopt more nuanced, participatory approaches to policymaking, engaging teachers and local stakeholders. By heeding these recommendations, EFL education in Benin can become a site of empowerment, promoting linguistic and cultural diversity, and fostering students' agency and voice in a rapidly changing world.

## Author Contributions

All three authors certify that they have made a joint and significant contribution to the development of this manuscript and approve the final version.

1) Pédro Marius Egounléti: Definition of the methodology, literature review, and drafting of the introduction and discussion.

2) Evariste Assogba Kottin: Conceptualization of the title and research objectives, data collection and analysis, drafting of the results and materials/methods sections, and preparation of tables and figures.

3) Ulrich Orlando Sèna Hindeme: Evaluation and validation of the methodology, critical review of the manuscript, scientific and linguistic corrections, drafting of the abstract and finalization of references, correspondence with the journal, and formatting of the manuscript according to editorial standards.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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