

# TEACHING PRONUNCIATION AND EMERGING ISSUES IN 6<sup>È</sup> AND 5<sup>È</sup> CLASSES IN NIAMEY SCHOOL DISTRICT II

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## Abstract

*This study examined the issues in teaching pronunciation in secondary schools particularly 6<sup>è</sup> and 5<sup>è</sup> in Niger. It examined the teachers' methods in teaching pronunciation, the contents of the classes and the teaching environment. It also took the ELT advisors' opinions about the matter. Questionnaires, interviews, observations and document analysis were used to collect data. Findings reveal that although teachers are aware of the importance of teaching pronunciation in EFL, many of them do not even teach it or do it unconsciously. Those who plan to teach pronunciation face tremendous challenges related to the pedagogy, the lack of teaching materials and the working conditions. Solutions and recommendations have been proffered to help cope with the problems in order to help reach the educational goals in this school district.*

**Key words:** pronunciation, intelligibility, pedagogy, teaching, learning.

## Résumé

*Cette étude a examiné les enjeux de l'enseignement de la prononciation dans les écoles secondaires, notamment en 6<sup>è</sup> et 5<sup>è</sup> au Niger. Elle a examiné les méthodes des enseignants, le contenu des cours et l'environnement pédagogique. Elle a également recueilli l'avis des conseillers pédagogiques sur la question. Des questionnaires, des entretiens, des observations et des analyses documentaires ont été utilisés pour recueillir des données. Les résultats révèlent que, bien que les enseignants soient conscients de l'importance de l'enseignement de la prononciation en langue étrangère, beaucoup d'entre eux ne l'enseignent même pas ou le font inconsciemment. Ceux qui envisagent d'enseigner la prononciation*

*sont confrontés à d'énormes défis liés à la pédagogie, au manque de matériel pédagogique et aux conditions de travail telles que la surpopulation des classes. Des solutions et des recommandations ont été proposées pour aider à surmonter ces problèmes et à atteindre les objectifs éducatifs dans ce district scolaire.*

**Mots clés** : prononciation, intelligibilité, pédagogie, enseignement, apprentissage.

## Introduction

Pronunciation is of paramount importance in any language learning. It refers to the ability of using the correct stress, rhythm and intonation of a word in spoken language. Nevertheless, people think that English pronunciation is still neglected in EFL classes throughout the world including Niger today. The negligence of this important part of linguistics may cause many issues in the teaching of English. Developing pronunciation skills can help solve these issues and also understand other aspects of English language like grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing.

The purpose of this research is then to explore and analyze strategies and emerging issues in teaching pronunciation in 6e/5e levels in six urban secondary schools (three public schools, and three private ones) in the school district of Niamey II. Many teachers have extensively talked about teaching pronunciation as they have noticed the challenges their students face when practicing the English language especially in the first two years of learning it. Students often have difficulties to make themselves understood simply because of pronunciation problems, which impedes their communication. Addressing this issue of pronunciation will shed light on the problems both students and teachers meet in and outside the classrooms.

## 1. Problem statement

English is taught in Niger as a foreign language and is almost only learnt and spoken within the school environment. In language education, several skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing need to be taught. Students encounter many challenges especially in listening and speaking. In fact, pronunciation is one of the aspects that make the teaching and learning of EFL difficult in our particular context. Thus, when someone talks to a person in real life, he/she may not notice one's limited vocabulary or grammar mistakes. But he/she will notice right away if one's pronunciation is good or bad. If someone's pronunciation is poor, good grammar and vocabulary will not help. Good pronunciation should be among the first things that someone learns in English. One can live without advanced vocabulary and grammar and yet uses them simply to convey the meaning of what he/she wants to say, but cannot do the same with pronunciation. Then, pronunciation is undoubtedly fundamental to the teaching-learning of English because it is definitely the biggest thing that people notice when someone is speaking.

Unfortunately, in Niger, many teachers seem to neglect, not to say ignore pronunciation though it is part of the curriculum, and as a result, their students pronounce English badly. The consequences of bad pronunciation can be tragic because people may simply not understand what the speaker wants to say. Moreover, it requires an effort for the listener to understand the speaker whereas good pronunciation makes communication much easier and pleasant.

It is also commonly observed that most teachers do not have useful strategies or techniques for teaching EFL pronunciation, and they do not know what strategies are appropriate when they come across a specific problem. The question is not only

whether pronunciation should be taught, but what should be taught in a pronunciation class and how it should be taught? Therefore, the following research questions have been formulated:

- 1- How do teachers perceive pronunciation in the process of teaching English?
- 2- What issues do teachers encounter in teaching pronunciation?

From our personal experience as an EFL teacher, we assume that some teachers teach pronunciation and others do not. This is due to some teachers' lack of training in pronunciation and the absence of adequate teaching materials in schools.

The main objective of this research is to investigate on teachers' perceptions on teaching pronunciation, identify the issues they encounter in this area and propose some solutions which can help solve them, especially at beginners' levels such as the 6e/5e classes.

## **2. Review of relevant literature**

In Niger, after years of learning English, the outcomes in terms of development of learners' speaking abilities are said to be unsatisfactory. This may be due to many issues among which there are language interferences, lack of adequate teaching materials, lack of training of many teachers. All these issues can affect the teaching/learning of pronunciation. Boureima (1996-1997, p. 18) argued that teaching pronunciation in 6e/5e levels should not focus only on sounds and stresses but on a general understanding and clarity of the foreign language. He contends that the mastery of phonology must be automatic in the same way as the control of grammatical structures.” In the same line,

Issoufou M. (2001, p. 130) pointed out that native speakers of Hausa (spoken by the majority of Nigeriens) encounter many problems with EFL as far as its phonology is concerned especially in pronunciation, stress and intonation. Therefore, these may partly explain the challenges in pronunciation prevailing in these levels in Niger. Niandou I. (2003, p.252) somehow confirmed these statements by pointing out that the major problem in learning a second language is the interference caused by the learners' mother tongue and the second language i.e. the foreign language. He adds that this interference is more pronounced at the phonological level.

As for Kenworthy (1987), he asserted that English pronunciation has various components such as sounds, stress and variation in pitch, and the learners need to understand the function of these as well as their form. He contended that learners also need to develop a concern for pronunciation by being aware that poor, unintelligible speech will make their attempts at conversing frustrating and unpleasant both for themselves and for their listeners.

Many educators agree that pronunciation should be taught as an integral part of oral language as it comprises phonology, stress, rhythm, intonation, sounds and accent etc. However, in this particular district, students' speech show that these aspects of pronunciation are poorly mastered despite their existence in the official textbook English For The Sahel. That is why we undertook to also examine the use of this textbook whose author, Thomas S. (1990, p. 19) asserted that "pronunciation lessons occur in almost all chapters in both the teacher's book and the student's book (first and second year)." He stressed that the lessons present and allow practice of special pronunciation problems such as the pronunciation of the -ed-endings, endings of regular past tense verbs. We notice that all oral class work serves as transposition of pronunciation point, and pronunciation should be dealt with continually by the

teacher. Therefore, teachers are offered an opportunity to teach pronunciation during their lessons.

### 3. Methodology

This study is an investigation of strategies and emerging issues in teaching pronunciation in EFL classes. It is undertaken in public and private urban secondary schools of the Niamey II school district which is composed of 33 schools among which 17 are public and 16 private ones. Our research is limited to 6 middle schools: 3 public schools (CEG M.L.D., CES Lazaret, CEG Couronne Nord) and 3 private ones (C.S.P. Fatmat Zahra/ Manou Diatta, and Mission Banifandou).

We chose twelve (12) teachers of English (6 for each level) from the three (3) private and the three public ones out of a total of forty (40) working in them and the five (5) ELT advisors of the district.

The data collection instruments used in this study consisted of questionnaires containing open and close questions that were intended for both teachers and advisors. The questionnaires allowed us to know how teachers conduct pronunciation sessions or lessons, the strategies, techniques, and teaching materials they use. As for the advisors, their task is to assist teachers to conduct their teaching of pronunciation. This helps to see the differences or the similarities in their opinions.

There were also classroom observations followed by informal interviews intended for just teachers. Each teacher was observed in his class twice to see the reality related to teaching pronunciation on the field and this helped confirm the answers to the questionnaire.

Interviews were also part of the data collection. Each sampled teacher was interviewed in due time at the end of the classroom observation. Notes were simultaneously during

the interview, which allowed us to get further information about pronunciation and receive teachers' suggestions and recommendations for its promotion.

Finally, information drawn from the record books (cahier de textes in French) was also used. Its thorough analysis gave us an idea of some classroom practices regarding the teaching of pronunciation

#### **4. Data presentation and analysis**

The results are presented in tables according to each section. Concerning the technique, we used percentages for the questionnaires, but we used only whole digits. For the treatment of our data, confidentiality is preserved by not identifying the advisors, teachers, and schools by name. The subject pronoun "he" was used for all the participants to hide their gender identity.

The questionnaires enabled us to discover whether pronunciation is taught in early classes of CEG (6e/5e). The questionnaires items focused on strategies, problems related to teaching pronunciation, and how to solve them. The advisors' questionnaire focused on their roles in assisting teachers in their daily task.

From the different answers the surveyed teachers gave us, we drew a scheme of the types of answers because of the similarity of certain questions. Then, we proceeded by gathering them according to their contents. For the purpose of conformity, we analyzed the two questionnaires topically. For each topic, we drew tables for both teachers' and advisors

#### ***4. 1. Teachers' views on the relevance and advantage of pronunciation***

Table 3 – Teachers' views on the relevance and advantage of pronunciation

Questions	Results	percentage
Is it important to teach pronunciation in EFL classes?	11	91
Is pronunciation worth being taught in early classes?	9	75

Table 4 – Advisors' view on the relevance and advantage of pronunciation

Question	Results	Percentage
Why is it important to teach pronunciation?	0	0

One cannot talk about teaching English in our context without taking into consideration the teaching of pronunciation. Thus, through the answers we received, almost all the surveyed teachers, ninety-one percent (91%) pointed out the relevance of this important component in the teaching-learning process. This importance may be explained by the fact that pronunciation

cannot be disintegrated from the four learning skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. As English is a foreign language, the spoken language (aural-oral) should prime on the written one especially for our target levels (6e/5e).

With regards to the importance of teaching pronunciation, 75 % of the surveyed teachers confirmed that this component is worth being taught in early classes (6e/5e). As English is a new language to our students, setting a good pronunciation basis is fundamental to its learning, because if bad habits are formed, it will require a lot of efforts to the teacher to correct them later.

During the interviews, 83% of teachers recognized that pronunciation provides many advantages in the teaching/learning process. In fact, they stated that pronunciation benefits students in a large extent. When a teacher teaches pronunciation, he raises awareness and interest in his students; therefore, it is an essential factor in the learning process. Furthermore, at this beginning level, students are more receptive on age basis and motivated to discover this new language. Emphasizing pronunciation can enable and facilitate the learning of language components like spelling and also develop skills such as reading and speaking.

Though pronunciation has many advantages, we do not expect teachers and learners to succeed in setting good pronunciation habits since in early classes like in 6e or 5e, it should come little by little as it is a long process.

As shown in the table, it is surprising to notice that no advisor answered the question about the importance of teaching pronunciation.

#### ***4.2. Awareness and frequency in teaching pronunciation***

Table 5 – Teachers' perception on the awareness and frequency in teaching pronunciation

Questions	Results	percentage
Do you teach pronunciation in your classes?	10	83
How many hours do you teach pronunciation? a-15min b 30min c-1h d-more	6 2 1 1	50 16 08 08

Table 6 – Advisors 'perception on the awareness and frequency in teaching pronunciation

Question	Results	Percentage
Do the teachers you work with teach pronunciation in their classes?	3	100

As the importance of pronunciation has been clearly demonstrated, it is good to know whether teachers teach it and how often they deal with it in their classes. 83% of the surveyed teachers affirmed that they teach pronunciation. Half of them usually teach it for fifteen minutes per week whereas some of them (16%) impart thirty minutes per week. The time imparted to the teaching of pronunciation seems very deficient accordingly to the time devoted to the English class (four hours/week) in middle school. Only eight percent of the teachers use one hour or more for the teaching of pronunciation. As four hours are imparted weekly that is to say about one hour daily for the teaching of English. This highlights the fact that though teachers recognized the positive effect of this language learning component, there is a contrast between their affirmation and their deeds. In fact, advisors affirmed that teachers neglect the teaching of pronunciation. Furthermore, one of them said that they do not even teach it at all.

To explain that contrast, it seems that they ignore the EFTS book instructions where emphasis is put on oral work for these levels (6e/5e). As a matter of facts, at 6e level, teachers should ideally begin their teaching orally for at least three months. This cannot be done without putting emphasis on the teaching of pronunciation. As a result, they should use enough time for the teaching of this important language component.

### 4.3. *Integration of pronunciation in the four skills*

Table 9 –Teachers' view on integration of pronunciation in the four skills

Questions	Results	Percentage
Do you integrate pronunciation in any of the four skills? a-Yes b- No	7 5	58 41

In this table, 58% of teachers answered that they integrate pronunciation in the four skills whereas 41% answered negatively. During the interviews, 28% of the teachers demonstrated how they integrated pronunciation in the four skills, which is one of the main concerns of the EFTS book. As teachers are reluctant to the teaching of pronunciation, integrating it seems a simple solution. For the majority of the teachers (71%), this integration happens during reading sessions, dictation, speaking and listening activities when they check sounds and help students in the pronunciation. The three skills (listening, speaking, and reading) appear clearly in their answers but as for the writing skills, we supposed that dictation is the means of integrating pronunciation for these teachers. Nevertheless, these answers are not very satisfactory for each of the teachers confessed that they integrated pronunciation in only two skills, either reading and speaking, or reading and listening. Some of them seem to ignore how to integrate pronunciation in the four skills. The results of this question lead

us to wonder about the concern of teachers in training beginners as it is fundamental to put emphasis on the spoken language at this stage.

As professionals in the field of EFL teaching, we know that the teaching of English relies on the integration of the four skills meaning reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Most English language teachers are tempted to integrate the necessary grammar, vocabulary, culture, and the four skills practice into their classes without considering integrating pronunciation instructions as well.

Unfortunately reading and writing are more developed than listening and speaking which have to be the main concern for our target levels (6e/5e). We can assure that integrating pronunciation in the four skills is something that happens inevitably and naturally when presenting any activity to the learners. For instance, to teach vocabulary, grammar, functions..., we proceed by uttering the new material then follow choral, group, and individual repetitions.

The integration of pronunciation in the four skills can allow learners to use the structures of the target language and its functions. It also helps develop learners' abilities because it provides variety in teaching and learning. To sum up, we can say that integrating pronunciation in the four skills will lead to more effective and efficient learning.

#### 4.4. Pronunciation in the English teaching Curriculum

Table 10 – Teachers' perception of the 'Ténéré programme' (Official programme)

Questions	Results	Percentage
do you know about the "Ténéré programme"?		
a-Yes		
b	6	50
-	6	50
N		
o		
16 Do you use the "Ténéré programme"		
a-Yes	4	33
b-No	8	66

As shown above, the teaching of English is clearly outlined in the 'Ténéré Program' which is the official document though only 50% of the surveyed teachers affirmed they know its existence and 33% of them use it in their teaching. We assume that they have to take it into account for the sake of conformity and also for collaboration between teachers (for common tests and examinations). Working with a syllabus allows a teacher to know from where to start and where to end.

#### 4.5. Teachers' and students' Attitude towards pronunciation

Table 11 – Teachers' attitude

Questions	Results	Percentage
Do you feel confident in teaching pronunciation? a- Yes b- No	91	75.08
Are the students motivated in learning pronunciation? a-very motivated b-less motivated c-not motivated d-others	102000	83.16.00.00

Table 12 – Advisors' attitude

Question	Results	Percentage
What is the teachers' and students' attitude regarding pronunciation?		
a- good	3	100
b. bad	0	0

Learning English as a foreign language usually implies the consideration of motivation and interest of learners. In this way, whatever a teacher does should raise the feeling of interest within learners. But there is no single way for teachers to address the selection and set of important principles to help teachers work in a lively class. As far as teaching pronunciation is concerned, the development of oral ability is a good source of motivation for most learners.

83% of the teachers said that students are very motivated while learning pronunciation. In fact, as experienced teachers, we assume that at the beginning levels, motivation is a salient point to be taking into account because at this age, students are eager to learn the new language as they are still receptive. Motivation is then an important factor because it is the basis for successful learning. It is as well the essence of any teaching because it permits the teacher to reach his goals. The role of teachers of English is to raise their students' interests

and design motivating pronunciation activities to keep the students involved.

Being aware that we are dealing with beginners, we know that it is too demanding to talk about a high level of proficiency. Teachers, still, should be good models and expect their learners to do their best in learning pronunciation as some learners are more adept at acquiring good pronunciation than others.

Although the surveyed teachers mentioned many difficulties in teaching pronunciation, 75% of them affirmed that they feel confident when dealing with pronunciation in their classroom. The great majority of teachers affirmed their confidence and their students' motivation about the teaching-learning of pronunciation. This certainty is contrary to the advisors' opinions who stated that both teachers and students are reluctant and evasive towards it. Furthermore, as far as pronunciation is concerned, they find it funny; consequently, teachers can teach it very easily. To sum up, motivation and confidence are important factors in achieving teachers' and students' goals.

#### 4.6. Assessment in teaching pronunciation

Table 13 – Teachers' view

Questions	Results	Percentage
Which test form(s) do you preferably use to assess your students' performance in pronunciation? a-Written form		
b-Oral form	0	00
c-Oral and written forms	3	25
	9	75
Which test form(s) do you think is/are more efficient for teaching pronunciation? a-Written form		
b-Oral form	0	00
c-Oral and written forms	3	25
	9	75

In order to greatly motivate learners, teachers should use adequate assessment methods that focus on success and achievement. Ideally, it should be seen as a means to help

teachers guide students on their road to learning. Most of the surveyed teachers (75%) affirmed that they prefer the combination of oral and written tests which are more efficient to assess their learners' performance. Only 25% of teachers use oral tests which are time consuming, but indispensable for judging oral production of sounds, stress, rhythm, intonation, and fluency. It is a good idea to grade students throughout the trimester for their oral activities.

In our context, teachers usually use written tests but, rarely, not to say never oral tests to assess their students' performance. Pronunciation can indeed be tested through written exercises such as drilling, transformation, completion, multiple choice like with minimal pairs, cloze tests which are objective, easily and quickly graded.

Testing pronunciation should occur daily by means of short oral quiz, a long quiz integrating pronunciation aspects at the end of each chapter, an oral examination in the middle or at the end of the term. These are called achievement tests. Another form of testing students' pronunciation is through combinations of aural and written tests such as dictations and aural comprehension exercises. All these types of testing enable the teacher to test the phonemic systems of English and the students' ability to speak English.

Focusing on successes and achievements can help build a good relationship between the teacher and the students, develop positive self-esteem, and then make learning pleasant and successful. Knowing that teaching and testing are two inseparable aspects of the teachers' task and evaluation is an integral part of the overall teaching process, testing pronunciation should not be neglected.

#### 4.7. *Difficulties related to teaching pronunciation*

Table 14 – Teachers' view

Questions	Results	Percentage
Is pronunciation difficult to teach in early classes (6e/5e)	4 2 5 1 00	33 16 41 08 00
a-not difficult		
b-less difficult		
c-difficult		
d-very difficult		
e-too difficult		
Is the environment helpful?		
a-		
Yes	6 6	50 50
b-No		

As English is a foreign language for Nigerien students, it may be difficult for them to pronounce some of the English sounds correctly. Thus, 75% of the surveyed teachers acknowledge that they face difficulties while teaching pronunciation in Middle school, and 66% recognized these difficulties in teaching early classes (6e/5e). From the answers received, we come to know that difficulties related to teaching pronunciation are of three types: sociocultural, linguistic, and pedagogical. The sociocultural type refers to the habits created

by the habits of using the mother tongue and French. 25% of learners face difficulties such as language interference as they naturally tend to pronounce the English sounds as they do in French and do not discriminate the sounds of the known languages from the ones of the target language (EFL).

The second type is about phonetics and phonology. Thus, in phonetics, 16% of teachers mentioned difficulties at alphabet level and 41% for particular sounds which are confusing for beginners as they neither exist in their mother tongue (s) nor in the official language (French). In Phonology, the surveyed advisors pointed out mainly difficulties in the use of stress, rhythm, and intonation whereas teachers evoked only difficulties in the use of stress at this point. They only talked about one of the segmental features (consonant and some difficult sounds) omitting the supra segmental features i.e. intonation, rhythm, and stress.

The third type deals with the pedagogical difficulties that are among the most important ones faced by teachers of English as several of them expressed the need to integrate pronunciation into their classes to a large extent, but most lacked the requisite knowledge and training to do so. In addition, 33% of the teachers talked about the lack of teaching materials and 50% reported that the environment in which they teach pronunciation is not helpful.

As we can see teaching pronunciation is subject to many difficulties though 25% of the teachers did not mention difficulties they encounter or they may not teach pronunciation. This leads us to a contrast because only 16% confessed not dealing with it in their teaching whereas they should find time for the teaching of this component.

#### 4. 8. How to overcome problems related to teaching pronunciation

Table 15 – Teachers' view on solutions

Questions	Results	Percentage
How do you overcome problems related to pronunciation? -by remedial activities	6	50
I plan remedial activities by:		
-repetitions	6	50
-discrimination of sounds	6	50
-games (tongue twisters, songs)	6	50

Table 16 – Advisors' view on solutions

Question	Results	Percentage
How do you assist teachers to overcome these weaknesses?		
a- workshop	3	
b- lesson plan	0	100
c- others	0	0

Table 16 shows that 50% of put emphasis on repetitions as remedial activities. The same percentage chose identification, discrimination, and repetitions of sounds through more practice by multiplying pronunciation activities; and reading to overcome problems of pronunciation.

All the advisors (100%) affirmed that they assisted teachers to overcome their weaknesses by organizing workshops. One advisor (33%) suggested teachers' self-training to minimize their weaknesses. We agree with him because opportunities for training in pronunciation are actually very rare not to say nonexistent for teachers. Two advisors (66%) supported that teachers should be assisted through observations, feedback, and advice.

We think that these proposals can help assist teachers, but unfortunately as former EFL teachers, we affirm that workshops have never been organized specifically on this matter. As for observations and feedback, they can help if only they are conducted regularly with pronunciation as target which is not the case as teachers are generally observed only once a year. We also think that lesson planning should not be neglected, as we know that most of the teachers do not have qualified training for teaching English.

#### 4.9. ELT Advisors' suggestions and recommendations

Table 17 – ELT advisors' suggestions and recommendations

Question	Results	Percentage
If you were called on to promote the teaching of pronunciation, what can be your suggestions and recommendations? -to teach listening-comprehension -to teach phonetics	1 1	33 33
-to self-train in phonetics	1	33

As far as the promotion of the teaching of pronunciation is concerned, one advisor suggested that teachers teach listening-comprehension, and listening to native speakers through recordings. Another advisor suggested that teachers should learn phonetics in order to master the English sounds. On the same line, one of them recommended teachers' self-training in phonetics for the problem lies there. Here, we back the advisors because though the surveyed teachers affirmed that they have enough training (through the informal discussion during classroom observations), this issue is real. He added that teachers should invite native speakers for a talk in their classes from time to time.

To sum up, even though all the advisors are aware of the problems related to the teaching- learning pronunciation, we notice that they are not involved in how to minimize these

issues. We notice that teachers and advisors did not deepen their answers. In fact, they answered superficially and partially some of the questions even though we expected more information from these professionals of the English language teaching.

## 5. Analysis of classroom observations

During the classroom observations, we noticed that some of the teachers did not prepare their lessons. We even observed teachers who arrived in their classrooms without any teaching materials, not even a preparation book. Among all the observed teachers, only two of them (16%) presented a pronunciation session on minimal pairs and 8% did exercises on simple past of regular verbs (-ed. endings). We cannot confirm that it is part of their daily work or it is only because they knew what we expected from them as they were aware of our topic. Though they presented pronunciation sessions, the procedure was not respected. It appears to us that either they improvised, or they ignored the appropriate procedure. Some of them did not even master the material they presented. For instance, while presenting the -ed endings (simple past form of regular verbs), a teacher pronounced all the verbs with the sound /id/: cleaned /klinid/, jumped /dʒ^mpid/ etc. This simply denotes his low level in English as he did not know the right pronunciation of the words. The worse thing about it is that he should have checked the correct answer in a dictionary, but he did not. Therefore, this teacher exhibited both the problem of level (content knowledge) and the problem of pedagogy (imparting knowledge). According to Aina, Sunday and Ayinde (2015), a teacher who remains on the job and failed to develop his or herself through seminar, conference and workshop for years has lost his or her professional focus. Unfortunately, this represents the case with the majority of teachers in the school district under study.

As for the majority of teachers, they allowed us to see the reality as they brought no changes to the routine that prevails in their teaching. The worse thing is that there is no variety as they often teach only either vocabulary, grammar, function, or reading all alone during the whole period of class. Teachers should rather teach several different skills for short periods of time rather than teach a single skill for an extended period. Even though they taught one component, they did not respect the procedure which is the ‘three ps.’ (presentation, practice, production/transposition). Finally, we noticed that through their presentations, teachers did not integrate pronunciation tips like repetitions, checking mispronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation which should be part of every presentation. This is not surprising as most did not receive any initial training and sadly lacked professional development which would have helped alleviate some of the challenges they face.

## 6. Informal interviews

In addition to the classroom observations, we conducted an informal interview with the target teachers. Here are the questions and answers we received for this purpose:

1-As a trainee, did you receive enough training in pronunciation?

To the first question, almost all the teachers affirmed that they received enough training in pronunciation. The DAP/CEG holders (25%) said they had pronunciation training through oral practicum and phonetics course. The other teachers said that they also had phonetics courses.

**2 - Is pronunciation an important component in the training you received?**

To the second question, almost all the target teachers (83%) attested that pronunciation was important as they affirmed that it can be a source of motivation for language learning.

**3 - Is EFTS adapted enough to teach pronunciation?**

Question three: Many teachers (75%) said that the EFTS book is not adapted enough to teach pronunciation because there are not enough pronunciation activities in the students' book.

**4 - Do you plan pronunciation sessions during your UP (pedagogical unit) meetings?**

All the teachers confessed that they do not plan pronunciation sessions during U.P. meetings because the purpose of the meetings is only for the planning of the progression.

**5 - Have you ever participated to workshops on pronunciation?**

All the teachers affirmed they have never participated to such workshops. We assume that having workshop on pronunciation can considerably benefit teachers.

**6 - What are your suggestions and recommendations in order to promote the teaching of pronunciation?**

Teachers recommended adequate materials like tape recorders to allow students listen to conversations. Some of them suggested the teaching of phonetics at early stage and also emphasizing on pronunciation.

These informal interviews enabled us to enrich our data as we got new information that contradict some answers we received like in the question about workshop where teachers denied the advisors' statement. Teachers affirmed that EFTS is not adapted enough though it is the only resource they used.

To validate the veracity of our findings we proceeded by checking the record books (cahiers de textes- in French) after we observed each teacher. We found out that there is a contradiction between our target teachers' deeds and their statements. We could not see any trails of real pronunciation activities except for a few teachers from a private school who dealt with sounds through minimal pairs. All that appeared was vocabulary, grammar, function or reading in the textbooks.

## **7. Synthesis of the data (questionnaires and classroom observations)**

The teaching of English as practiced by teachers of middle school, particularly the ones concerned by our study does not lead to efficient learning of pronunciation. This can be explained by the fact that teachers do not apply strategies and techniques appropriately. As for the activities, only minimal pairs, -ed endings, reading out loud were conducted by teachers, but the procedure was not respected.

Through our findings, divergences arose from advisors and teachers. Actually, teachers affirmed they deal with pronunciation in their classes, which was denied by advisors. We agree with the advisors because during our observation, only three teachers presented pronunciation activities. Here, the question to ask is: isn't that advisors' duty to ensure the effectiveness of the teaching of pronunciation in English classes? Another divergence occurred concerning the attitude of teachers and students towards pronunciation. In fact, teachers affirmed their confidence and their students'

motivation while dealing with pronunciation whereas, advisors confessed that both teachers and students are reluctant. We can confirm teachers' reluctance but not students' as we observed them participating in pronunciation activities with interest and motivation. However, as we said in the questionnaire analysis, the teaching of pronunciation is scheduled in the English curriculum. Some activities are mentioned as well in the teachers' and students' books. Therefore, teachers only have to integrate them in their daily teaching.

Both teachers and advisors pointed out many difficulties related to pronunciation. They identified several issues such as lack of training, misuse of phonetics and phonology, language interferences, lack of didactic materials, over-crowdedness of classes. These issues are truly factors that affect the teaching of pronunciation. Still, there are other factors like the lack of integration of pronunciation in the four skills, problems of discipline that can as well hinder the teaching of pronunciation.

Thus, teachers and advisors suggested many ways of overcoming difficulties related to the teaching of pronunciation such as workshops, feedback, self-training, discussion, etc. Though not proposed by teachers and nor advisors, some important solutions like error correction, drillings, and variety of opportunities for practicing the English language are other points of concern which can help solve these difficulties. Advisors affirmed they assist teachers through workshops but no teacher mentioned this.

In the light of the answers received from teachers and advisors, we noticed that teaching pronunciation is neglected despite its importance in the teaching of English. At times, we even wonder whether teachers and advisors are aware of the importance of pronunciation in the teaching of English. In fact, advisors did not even answer the question about the importance of teaching pronunciation. Without denying the fact that the major issues can handicap the teaching of this important

component of language teaching, as teachers are trained to teach, they should be aware and resourceful to overcome almost any issue when it arises.

## **8. Suggestions and recommendations**

Suggestions and recommendations that can help in teaching pronunciation include creating an environment as far as possible which provides learners with language input and activities that best aid them in the teaching-learning process in order to favor the acquisition of pronunciation abilities. Teachers should take into consideration the teaching of pronunciation during UP meetings by planning pronunciation activities regularly and make efforts to train themselves by means of books, magazines, news-papers, tv. and radio programs in English, language laboratories etc. teacher development (awareness, generating change and a continuous process) is the best guaranty for the effectiveness of any committed teacher.

As for the government, it should involve teachers when designing the English curriculum and provide teachers with immersion program in English speaking countries and create better working conditions for teachers and students and minimize strikes for better results. Finally, advisors and inspectors should assist teachers to develop strategies and techniques for teaching pronunciation and should pay teachers a visit on regular basis (at least once a month) and follow up with constructive feedback.

## **Conclusion**

This research investigated the problems related to the teaching of pronunciation particularly at the 6e/5e levels. It dealt with some of the important features, strategies,

techniques, abilities and factors which enable a learner to have positive performance for communication. Also, factors that hinder the teaching-learning of pronunciation in the school curriculum were analyzed.

All the surveyed teachers recognized the importance of pronunciation especially at the beginning levels (6e/5e classes) in which the habits acquired at the start of language study are often difficult to change. Therefore, the teacher should stress pronunciation and teach it at the same time that he teaches grammar or vocabulary. He will find that this is not only necessary but it also adds variety to his teaching. The findings show that though the importance of teaching pronunciation is not questionable, the majority of teachers neither teach it nor integrate it in their teaching. Therefore, our assumption is confirmed. Teachers and advisors should rethink the integration of pronunciation in the teaching of English as phonetic symbols instructions should be completed at the early stages of learning because once students have some facility in reading words, they no longer need instruction in this skill unless there is a special need. The knowledge of phonetic symbols and letter sound combination should also support the growth of students' English vocabulary, structures and reading.

The study revealed that to teach pronunciation, all the surveyed teachers mainly focus on reading out loud, pronunciation of simple past form of regular verbs, minimal pairs, simple present tense of the third person singular as activities and as techniques repetitions and sounds discrimination. There are, however, many other activities and techniques for teaching pronunciation that are overlooked or ignored due to the majority of teachers' lack of initial training.

The study enabled us to confirm our research question about issues that teachers face in teaching pronunciation as many of the pronunciation emerging issues are found to be a clear

reflection of French and native languages phonological transfer and interference.

In order to overcome the above pronunciation problems, the ELT advisors suggested feedback after observations, training and in-service training through workshops. Teachers also proposed repetitions, remedial activities, and error correction to overcome these issues. Now, it is the government's duty to take into account all the critics, the recommendations and the suggestions proffered by the teachers and advisers and provide the financial means in order to reach the educational goals in Niger in general and in this school district in particular.

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