Exploring the use of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) to Enhance Oral Communication in Beninese ESP Teaching-Learning Process
Case Study of Lycée Technique et Professionnel of Porto-Novo (Benin Republic)

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Abstract:- This study investigates the effect of social and emotional learning (SEL) on learner's oral performance in ESP classes. The objective is to explore possibilities to provide an authentic learning environment where English can be used in real-life challenges and facilitate English for Specific Purpose (ESP) learners' professional integration by using correctly the English language. Two aspects have been taken into account: oral communication and life skills development. A mixed-method has been used. The instruments include ten (10) questionnaires addressed to ESP teachers and classroom observations were held in five (05) ESP classes. The results revealed that in most ESP classes, English is taught as mere school subject without a real context in a non-conducive classroom atmosphere frustrating for both learners and teachers. This study evidences that effective oral communication development is possible using SEL strategies and activities which provide a motivating, flexible and relaxing learning experience in ESP context. The present study suggests ESP teaching courses should be integrated into Benin EFL teachers training schools. Teachers should grab opportunities to take part in workshops and training related to innovative teaching-learning methods. Well implemented in ESP classes, SEL strategies can sustainably develop learners' communicative and social skills.

Keywords:- SEL, Advanced Classes, ESP.

I. INTRODUCTION

In preparing students to face real life challenges, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication are the crucial skills of the 21st century, and should be embedded in academic content standards. Recent days, failure of learners at ESP is a severe worry and many facets of the teaching-learning procedure are regularly scrutinised: the syllabus and its implementation; students' attitude toward the English language which is mistakenly considered for marks; the teaching-learning atmosphere as a whole…

In fact, the lowly implementation of the current teaching-learning line of Benin, the lack of materials or their desuetude if any, the strategies and activities stand as hindrances and prevent teachers from handling a communicative teaching space. In those conditions, even proficient teachers may fail their goal if they are not creative. Classroom management is crucial and both teachers and learners' attitude is the pillar for the success. Agreeing with Wong, (2012), *"classroom management refers to all the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time, and materials so that student learning can take place"*. Classrooms management is the main difficulty in utmost ESP classes. Moreover, the IQ is overvalued upon EQ. This deficit creates discouragement and apprehension, which break the flow of learning. Dollard, Christensen, and Colucci (2017) state, *"the positive connection formed within a relationship between student and teacher becomes the foundation for all interaction in the classroom"*. This means that the relation students-students and students-teachers should create an appropriate mood to facilitate exchanges. Taking those characteristics into account, the current research paper is examining how using appropriate strategies and considering each one emotional quotient (EQ), can affect learners' outcomes. Two research questions are formulated:

- What are the challenges related to effective teaching-learning?
- How can teacher achieve their objective through SEL strategies?

So, this work is undertaken to shed light on the place of learners and teachers' emotion in a course, and to display contributions of SEL based-activities for ESP teaching-learning.

II. THEORETICAL KEY STONES

➤ *The Concept of SEL*

The concept of SEL is tightly related to the notion of Emotional Intelligence (EI) or Emotional Quotient (EQ). According to Petrides (2000) and Furnham (2001) quoted by Jean-Marc Dewaele, Christina Gkonou and Sarah Mercer (2017), EI is *"a key ability for managing emotions of oneself and others, which can be thought of as a developing competence or as a level of personality trait"*. This means that EI has to do with personal sensitivities and emotive capacities of human-beings, and how they can recognize their own emotions, manage them and take action by behaving accordingly in any circumstances. So, people with high EI should be capable to regulate their emotions and influence other people's feelings. They show flexibility and easily adapt to new conditions because they also care about other people's emotional state. They are talented networkers with excellent social skills. Positive and assured, they do not give up. These characteristics are very important in establishing relationships and are very useful in a language class, mainly in a foreign language context.

Based on the advantages of EI, the concept of SEL appeared in teaching-learning English for a specific purpose (ESP) as a successful method to develop students' oral communication skills. Developing SEL skills is essential to collaborate and communicate actively. According to Diana Clark (2018), *"SEL consists in the practices that move learning toward a kind of cooperative mindset"*. Then, the role of the teachers is to reassure schoolchildren to work on team projects, to learn how to oppose their thoughts and decide solutions for conflicts. Basically, they learn to work together and interconnect.

Conferring to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) website, their official definition of SEL in 2020 is *"An integral part of education and human development"*. This means that SEL is a natural learning way which can easily be internalized by any human being. They added that SEL is *"the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions"*.

Actually, when children come to a language class, it is not only for knowledge of the language (meanings, notions, literature, testing …), but also for competences development, mainly life skills. To achieve its goals in our classes, Diana Clark (2018) named some subskills which are promoted during SEL process. She mentioned *"communication, socialization, emotional management, self-awareness, and decisions making skills"*.

One can easily identify the leadership features in all those skills and subskills. In fact, a leader has to communicate, consider others point of view, manage his/her own emotional response and make smart decisions. At that point, with the SEL implementation process, the teacher should help students develop those exact skills by boosting them. This corroborates our findings about leadership and oral communication skills development to fit with the 21st century demands.

➤ *SEL and Students' Oral Performance*

Testing and evaluation are the third part in the teaching learning process to measure learners' achievement at a given period. It tends to check observable manifestation of their acquisition. According to Fadipe (2009), *"academic performance takes into cognizance both quality and quantity of internal and external results accomplished"*. To optimize students' performance, scholars have been suggesting methods through ages. Communicative language teaching approaches seem to meet more approval in the education field, and SEL is one of them.

Understanding previous studies, helps to identify that high ranks of EI in teachers imply better classroom organization and practice. For instance, in their investigation, Brackett et al. (2010) have presented that *"highly emotionally intelligent teachers are better able to deal with the challenges of contemporary classroom life such as working with diverse heterogeneous classes, managing group dynamics or coping with increasing levels of teacher stress and burnout"*. This means that teachers' EQ is very important in classroom management. In the same trend, Elias and Arnold (2006) revealed that *"such teachers tend to design more engaging lessons aimed at promoting learners' motivation and work at reducing rates of bullying and antisocial behaviour in their classes"*. Since classroom management and engaging activities for students are essential for a successful language class, one can recognize that SEL is an appropriate teaching-learning method to create a conducive classroom atmosphere where learning easily takes place.

In fact, as found by Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham (2008), *"a high EI is linked with lower levels of communicative anxiety in the foreign language (FLA), whereas low EI participants, on the other hand, remained in the dark … leading to increased anxiety across their languages"*. With regard to these words, FLA inhibits communication and its reduction with SEL, is a great advantage for the promotion of EFL/ESP. A consequence of this finding is that people with low EQ find teaching profession on the whole difficult. Nevertheless, specific trainings increase their EI and change their attitude towards students for the benefit of their performance.

III. DIFFERENT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES IN SEL CONTEXT

Many people find changes and adaptations difficult to integrate, but teaching is evolving and educators should update too. Fortunately, in Benin Republic, the current curriculum, the CBA, is perfectly adaptable.

➢ CBA and SEL strategies in an ESP Class

François Lasnier (2000) explained competency as *"a complex practical knowledge resulting from the integration and mobilization of a set of abilities and pieces of knowledge efficiently used in a correlated situation to solve more or less complex situations"*. It means that CBA is designed to help learns to grow capacities in finding solutions in real life situations. Three main categories are identified:

- **Disciplinary competencies** are the aptitudes each subject aims at rising the required skills in every student, in the different fields of human knowledge. In English, they are communicating orally; reacting to texts after reading or listening; and producing texts of various types and functions.
- **Transdisciplinary competencies** help in linking the school subjects such as French, English, Mathematics, Physics and Biology etc.
- **The transversal competencies** deal with students' skills that must be developed throughout all the school subjects while carrying out the teaching/learning activities. Transversal competencies help students face real-life situations better in their future life. Principally, they are: exploiting available information; solving problem; using one's critical sense; performing tasks; cooperating and communicating appropriately.

In the context of the CBA, SEL strategies perfectly match with the leaners-centred approach to languages teaching-learning. Many activities can be integrated into the current curriculum to achieve our goals easily.

➢ SEL-Based Activities

While adopting SEL, the good news is that we do not need to change the present curriculum before integrating SEL activities. In the magazine George Lucas Educational Foundation, Emelina Minero (2017) suggested thirteen activities for building EQ. These activities are divided into three categories: opening activities, group sharing activities and closing activities.

- *Opening Activities:*

  - ✓ *Mindfulness:* Relaxation songs, meditation, Yoga practices, … can be used to introduce a session to make students and teachers think the pressure is released, and for noise isolation to help everybody to focus.
  - ✓ *Naming emotion:* Learners express their feeling for better interactions with their peers based on how their emotion of the moment.

- ✓ *Write down, rip up, and throw away your stress:* This activity helps learners to acknowledge their barriers and create a safe space.
- ✓ *Growth mindset vs. fixed mindset share-out:* learners share instants growth and fixed attitude.
- ✓ *Quote of the day:* bringing a quotation to shared experience each morning and facilitate debate.
- ✓ *Where we came from:* Project one baby picture from students at the start of class to prompt discussions.
- ✓ *Starting positive:* promote positive qualities about peers before each class.
- ✓ **2.2.2 Group Sharing**
- ✓ *Circle sharing:* creation of small groups to inspire active listening.
- ✓ *Writing poem:* from someone else's perspective
- ✓ *Conversation with someone you do not know:* aid learners to see their mates profoundly.
- ✓ *Bingo:* using learners' personal information.

- ➢ *Closing Activities:*

  - *Appreciation, Apology, Aha:* Cheer trustworthy and judicious excuses and admirations.

All those activities can be localized and adapted in any context, provided teachers are trained for. The outcomes of the experimentation of this research is a proof.

IV. METHODOLOGY

➢ Research Design and Sampling

The investigation followed a mixed-method for integrating both numerical and qualitative data for complementary reasons. An experimentation was carried out in LTP/P-N.

Table 1 Sampled Population

School	Teachers	Class observations
LTP/P-N	10	05

➢ Instruments

Questionnaires are addressed to teachers, and classroom observations were also part of data collection. Purposefully designed with the primacy given to close-ended questions, this teachers' questionnaire scrutinises teachers' experiences, their roles, and their management procedures. It also assesses strategies used by teachers to sustainably get their students' attention, and to help them develop the required skills.

Conducted with a premeditated observation grid, the main goal of the observations is to assess management practices, teaching-learning strategies and to crosscheck data provided through questionnaires.

➢ *The Experimentation*

For reliable statistics showing the impact of SEL strategies effects on students' performance, experiments have been completed in LTP/P-N. Forehand, one class of fifty (50) students were tested. The fifty students (50) were randomly split into two groups: a control group (CG) and an experimental group (EG). In the control group no particular management was applied, but in the experimental group teachers applied SEL. The testing is carried out using a quasi-experimental designed labelled in table 2.

Table 2 Quasi-Experimental Plan

Phases	EG	CG
Phase 1	Pre-test	Pre-test
Phase 2	Treatment (SEL-based strategies)	No-action
Phase 3	Post-test	Post-test
Phase 4	Interpretation	

V. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

➢ *Presentation*

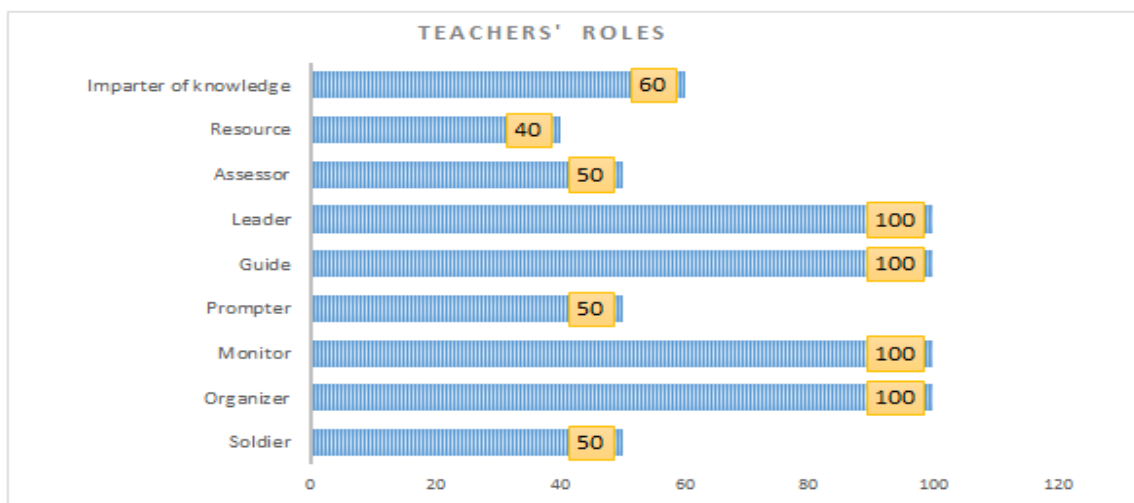• *Results from Teachers' Questionnaires*

Fig 1 Teachers' Roles

Figure 1 concerns instructors' characters. Leader, guide, monitor, and organizer are put forth by all the respondents. Fifty percent added the characters of assessor, prompter and soldiers. Regrettably, sixty out of a hundred consider that they are imparter of knowledge.
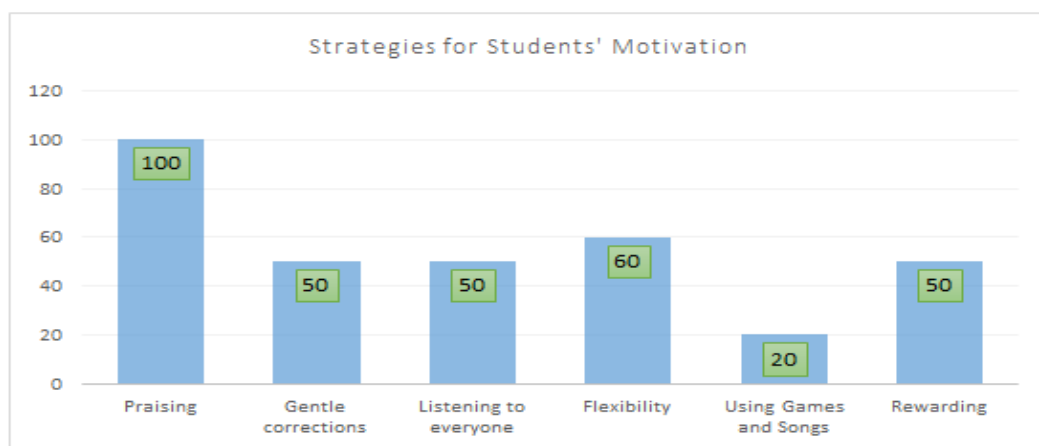

Fig 2 Motivation Strategies

The chart 2 displays motivation stratagems. Hundred percent of the respondents praise learners, fifty percent correct them gently, or reward them. Sixty percent of them try to be flexible, whereas twenty out of a hundred base their strategies on games and songs.
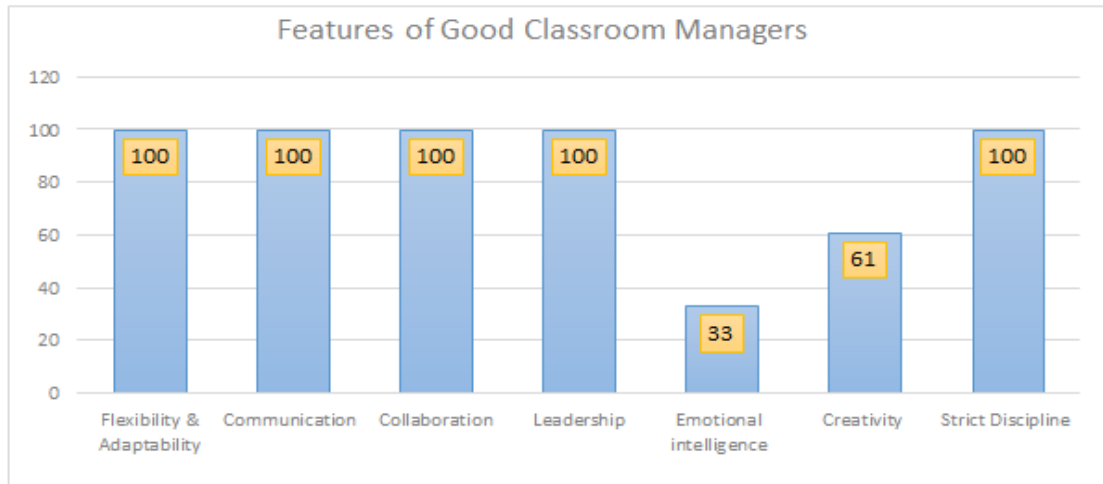
Fig 3 Features of Good Classroom Managers

One hundred per cent, in figure 3, respondents admit flexibility, communication, collaboration, strict discipline and leadership to be the main features of a good classroom manager. But, some devalue the influence of creativity (61%) and EQ (only 33%). Evidently, most teachers ignore the relationship between classroom manager's features.
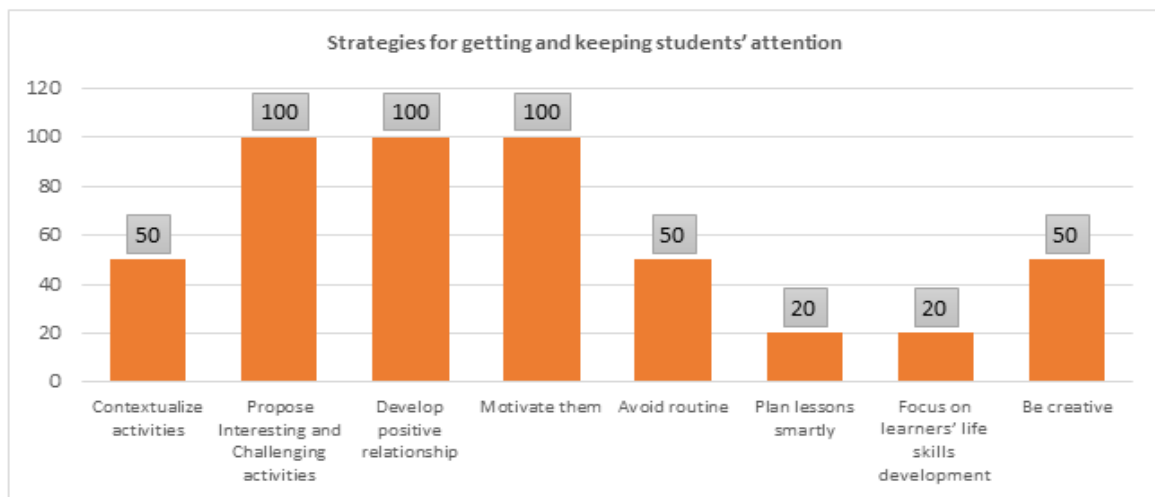

Fig 4 Features of SEL Activities

Figure 4 shows tactics to develop and keep learners' attention. Hundred percent of the respondents consider that interesting undertakings, positive relationship and motivation come first. Fifty percent proposed contextualized activities focussing on life skills development.
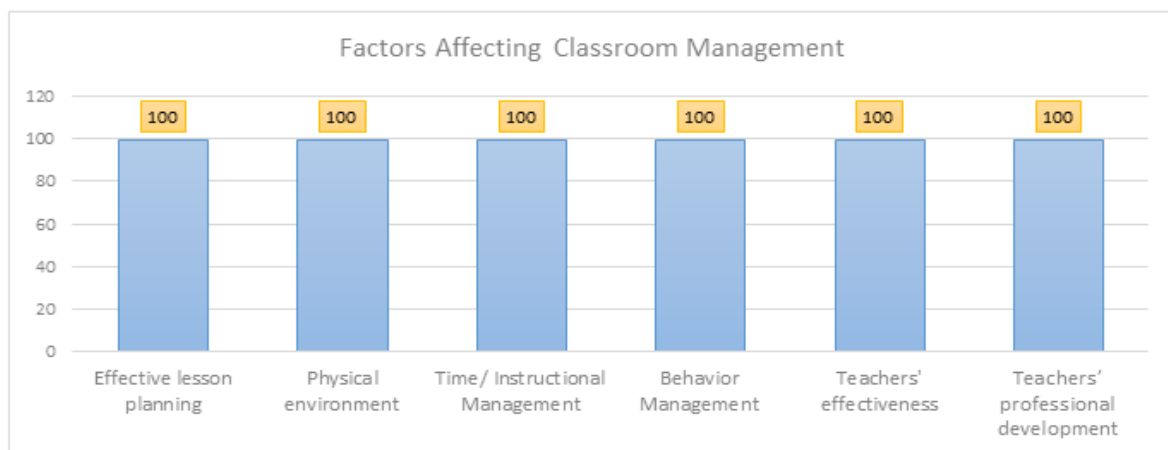

Fig 5 Factors Affecting Classroom Management

From figure 5, lesson planning, physical environment, time and behaviours' management, instructions, teachers' effectiveness and professional development are the key factors affecting classroom management.

- *Experimentation Report*

Here two groups have been taken into account: EG where SEL strategies are implemented and CG where those strategies are not tested. This analysis is based on the students' marks, the progression rate in the curriculum, and the teachers' performance during classes.

At the beginning of the year, the pre-test revealed that almost all the students have the same level at English. Through the post-test and the classroom observations, the following results were obtained.

Table 3 CG Results

Students' marks	Frequency	Percentage (%)
[0 ; 9] Poor	17	68
[10 ; 11] Average	05	20
[12 ; 13] Fair	02	08
[14 ; 15] Good	01	04
[16 , 20] Very good	00	00
Progression Rate: 40% (Teacher's poor performance)		

Table 3 shows that the twenty-five students of the CG are dispatched as following: 68% got a mark under the average. And only 2% got good and no one reached sixteen out of twenty.

Table 4 EG Results

Students' marks	Frequency	Percentage (%)
[0 ; 9] poor	04	16
[10 ; 11] Average	06	24
[12 ; 13] fair	08	32
[14 ; 15] good	05	20
[16 , 20] Very good	02	08
Progression Rate: 95% (Excellent Teacher's performance)		

Reversely, table 4 shows that the twenty-five students of the EG performed better than those of the CG: 16% got a mark under the average. 24% grasped average, 20% got good and 08% went beyond 16 out of twenty. Moreover, the teacher reached 95% of the planning.

Table 5 Contrast between Groups

Students' marks	EG	CG
[0 ; 10[	04 (16%)	17 (68%)
M ≥ 10	21 (84%)	08 (32%)
[16 ; 20]	02 (10%)	00
The level reached in the planning	95%	40%
Conclusion	Good progression and good performances	Poor achievement and low performances

This comparison table shows that SEL strategies influence the productivity of both teachers and students.

➤ *Discussion*

- *Influence of SEL on the Academic Performance of the Students*

Youki Terada (2019) found that *"there is a link between classroom discipline and learners' performance"*. After investigation, he established that *"in a classroom, where teachers used a series of techniques centred around creating, maintaining, and restoring relationships, academic engagement increased by 33 % and disruptive behaviour decreased by 75 %, making the time students spent in the classroom more worthwhile and productive"*. This investigation, make known that a well-managed classroom increases real teaching-learning time, that can positively affect learners' productions. In the similar tendency, Moore (2008) evaluated two hundred and seventy students and nineteen grammar school teachers and advocated that *"relationship exists between SEL strategies and students' scores"*. This corroborates the outcomes of our experimentation revealing the effect of SEL on the academic performance of teachers and students. Data displayed in table 5 indicate that there is a significant and strong correlation between SEL strategies and students' academic performance. Then, SEL-based activities are dependable point of reference to succeed in achieving the main goal of teaching-learning English as a foreign language or for a specific purpose.

- *Implementation of SEL in an ESP/EFL Classroom*

This investigation reveals many challenges of ESP teachers in Benin technical schools. In large classes, considering individually students, managing their own emotions and the students' ones, proposing effective and efficient activities, ... are some of those defies. Therefore, the greatest challenge is how to get and keep their students' attention on the common goal. The expression of the feeling of some students can disturb or inhibit their comrades and themselves during collaborative works. So, recognising and monitoring students' feelings and reactions which can halt the learning speed and demolish the teaching-learning progression is a necessity.

Many tactics can be used by ESP teachers to retain learners' attention. Brown and McIntyre (1993), talked about *"conditions such as fashioning comfortable and pleasurable atmosphere, minding presentations, making clear instructions, minding judgment, helping students with difficulties, developing individual and courteous connexions with learners".*

SEL is proved to be very efficient to establish the appropriate atmosphere in a language class. The implementation of SEL while lacking the basic materials and basic supports coupled with CBA exigence, is another challenge. The collected data show that SEL is applicable in schools for better results. Talking about the importance of SEL in promoting students' achievement, Roger Weisberg (2016) stated that *"Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides a foundation for safe and positive learning, and enhances students' ability to succeed in school, careers, and life".* This is clearly in line with the fallouts of the investigation conducted in the framework of the current research and corroborates the research questions.

The conclusions of the study urge the researcher to formulate some recommendations in the direction of every Benin stakeholder.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are made:
- Teachers should be trained to be aware of their EI competences, self-efficacy, and foreign language proficiency, as they are likely to affect their professional well-being as well as the relationships with learners in their classrooms.
- Teachers should diversify classroom activities in order to avoid monotony and boredom to encourage students' participation resulting in their high academic performance.
- Teachers should be trained to integrate SEL in their daily routines;
- Adequate educational facilities and resources should be provided in all communities in Benin without a concentration in a particular geo-political zone to enable a widespread and better academic performance of students;

- Parents should also ensure they play an active part at home to ensure that students do not abandon their studies at home. As many wise men asserted, *"practice makes perfect"*, then only continuous learning, repetition and doing by oneself is the right way. They should try tutoring for their children.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper investigates the use of SEL-based activities and tactics to raise the performance of the students in an ESP context. The collected data from questionnaires, classroom observations and tests, show that most of the problems that teachers face emanate from their failure in managing their language classes appropriately. Teachers do not know the way they can handle activities so that they reach each session's goal. Despite their training and certifications, many fail to satisfy the needs of the students.

To overcome the above problems, education specialists should organize suitable training to integrate recent innovative and communicative teaching-learning methods. This study has confirmed the impact of SEL on students' performance. This has proved that effective classroom management leads to higher academic achievement. It comes out that ESP learners' results are enhanced when students control their mind-sets, their emotions and collaborate to solve projects with the teacher as a participant, a monitor.

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