

FINDINGS OF A STUDY OF ENGLISH MATERIALS AND LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE IN AN EFL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This article uses mixed methods and presents findings of a study of English materials and language performance in an EFL context. It shows how the qualitative and quantitative paradigms were used sequentially for a large population whose sample was stratified and selected proportionally. It also shows how data and analysis were computer processed for both parts of the study. It presents both the qualitative and quantitative findings of the study, showing that not only students have a positive attitude toward learning English with materials, but come up also with better language performance when they learn with English materials.

Keywords: *Mixed Methods, Qualitative paradigm, Quantitative paradigm, English Materials, Language Performance, EFL context, Material-boundedness.*

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article a utilisé des méthodes mixtes et présente les conclusions d'une étude sur l'utilisation des matériels d'anglais et la performance réalisée dans un contexte d'anglais comme langue étrangère. Il montre comment les paradigmes qualitatif et quantitatif ont été utilisés l'un après l'autre avec une grande population dont l'échantillon a été stratifié et sélectionné proportionnellement. Il montre comment le traitement et l'analyse des données ont été faits par l'ordinateur dans les deux parties de l'étude. Les conclusions de l'étude tant qualitatives que quantitatives indiquent que les étudiants ont seulement une attitude positive sur l'apprentissage d'anglais avec matériels, mais ils réalisent une meilleure performance de la langue lorsqu'ils utilisent les matériels d'anglais.

Mots-clés : *Méthodes mixtes, paradigme qualitatif, paradigme quantitatif, matériels d'anglais, performance de la langue, contexte d'anglais comme langue étrangère, apprentissage-avec-ou-sans-matériels.*

INTRODUCTION

This article presents the methodology and findings of a study of English materials and language performance in an EFL context in a nutshell. Data from different sources were needed for the study. Besides, first-hand data were obtained from English learners of the University of Kinshasa who were the actual population in this study. The overall population was approximately 33,498 students ($N = 33,498$) per academic year and was so huge that it could not be easily accessed. But for the sake of representativeness, a sample of 350 respondents ($N = 350$), proportionate to each faculty where English was taught or learned was considered. This sample was representative enough as it included the characteristics of all the different students pertaining to the target population (Walonick, in Buhendwa, 2014: 37). The choice of the student population of the University of Kinshasa was for the generalizability of the findings. Actually, it is considered the greatest and paramount university in DRC.

1. The Problem

Many Congolese decision-makers and academic authorities have looked into the material-related issue in the universities. Some officials have indirectly or directly forbidden the sale of teacher-made materials, particularly printed ones, by claiming that it has become a kind of business (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et Universitaire, 2015). Others think that the cost of materials should be cut down and strictly comply with the price fixed by the ministerial decree (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et Universitaire, 2017). Or merely, any teaching materials should be filed in the library bookshelves or uploaded and displayed online to help any student access and read them almost for free. Some stakeholders, particularly teachers, are claiming that printed materials remain valuable tools in the teaching of many subjects (<http://www.minesu.gouv.cd>), particularly those related to second or foreign languages. These different positions have brought a real confusion in the mind of the students and their parents. While ignoring the impact of the materials on their own learning, most Congolese students have become reluctant to buy the textbook (syllabus) and simply decide to study without any materials. Only a few think they cannot study without the materials. A noteworthy opinion is that the ministerial decree neither academic nor appropriate. Actually, the use of material / textbook is a commonplace practice in colleges worldwide.

Therefore, two research questions are raised: (1) What are the patterns of materials use in language learning in the universities and colleges? (2) Is there a difference in performance between and among material-bound and material-free students?

2. Objective of the work

The objective of this thesis was to find out the performance of the material-bound and the material-free in learning English in the university. This work is an attempt to answer the two questions and solve an existing problem in higher education. The field of study is applied linguistics in its attempt to solve a language-related problem (Khansir, 2013). The questions are classified in two research paradigms. On the qualitative side, there is one major question: (1) what are the patterns of material use in language learning? On the quantitative side, there is one main question: is there a difference in language performance between students based on patterns of materials used (the material-bound and the material-free)?

3. Hypotheses

Two main hypotheses need to be verified. Hypothesis 1: There is no variation in the patterns of use of materials. The diversity is to be viewed in terms of importance of materials, impact of materials, interest and modality preference, type of materials, best supply time for material deemed as sub hypotheses or dimensions.

Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in performance between and among the two types of students based on their characteristics. The main characteristics are gender, age, class, faculty, work or job experience, learning English, length of learning time and material-boundedness.

I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The mixed method research design was used involving two instruments with two kinds of variables. A survey with categorical variables consisted of looking at the qualitative hypothesis. And a questionnaire with numerical variables consisted of testing the students' actual performance while learning English with and without materials so as to verify the quantitative hypothesis. The two instruments were old instruments (Banyongi, 2018; Richards, 1998; Richards, 2003) that were adapted for quality. A drop-off and pick-up technique was used to help the informants for and the respondents for saving time while responding to the different items.

Data were processed and analyzed using the Microsoft Excel and SPSS software programs to generate statistics, tables, charts and graphic representations (Tailor-Powell and Renner, 2003; Muijs, 2004; Rose, et al., 2015; Gibbs, et al., 2002). Shallow statistics (frequencies and percentages) were carried out for quantitized qualitative data results and in-depth statistics to generate quantitative data results (mean scores for groups) as usually expected (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

I.1. Population and Target Population

The population in this work is all Congolese students in higher education who have English course in their curriculum and learn English in this EFL context. Such a population is multilingual (Buhendwa, 2010) in that every individual speaks at least three languages: a first language (L1), a national language (NL), and the official language (L2). As this population is so huge to be accessed all, the research targeted the students of the University of Kinshasa for accessibility and feasibility reasons with an approximately 33,498 individuals per academic year. The latter provided the number of students for two consecutive academic years of which the average made $N=33,498$ (Musao, 2019; Banza, 2020), which is still large enough and hardly accessible. Therefore, there has been a need to select a few of them proportionate to each faculty, department, and class where English is scheduled in the program. These individuals made the sample for this study as is discussed below.

I.2. Sample and Sampling Technique

Given the relevance of the research, the sample size decided went beyond what Morse suggested for ethological studies. This methodologist proposed 100-200 units of observation as a good and representative sample size (Morse, 1994 in Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007). Instead, this work used 350 cases as its sample size ($N=350$) that was stratified and selected randomly from the target population. The guess is that such a sample is representative of the whole population since it includes all the characteristics of the different students pertaining to the population under study (Walonick in Buhendwa, 2014: 37).

The stratified sample accounted for both qualitative data and quantitative data and consisted of individuals proportionate to each faculty, department, and class. The different faculties of the University of Kinshasa were considered as strata. For qualitative data, a total of 150 informants ($n=150$) were taken into account in the survey and for quantitative data, a total of 200 ($n=200$) respondents were subject to the placement test. This made a sum total of 350 cases ($N=350$) regarded as the full sample size of the current study. The quantitative data sample size overtopped that of qualitative data in order to obtain more reliable and significant findings, and also gain the possibility to generalize the findings (Muijs, 2004).

The proportions could be explained as follows. A 23.6% total of informants and respondents consisted of the students of Law, 9.8% students of Arts, 8.5% students of Medicine, 1.4% students of Engineering, 6.4% students of Psychology and Sciences of Education, 18.6% students of Sciences, 3.2% students of Agricultural Sciences, 12.9% students of Economics, 2.1% students of Pharmaceutical Sciences, 8.4% students of Social, Administrative and

Political Sciences (SSAP), 4.4% students of Petrol and Gas, and 0.5% students of Veterinary Medicine. These proportions were taken into account both in qualitative data sample size and in quantitative data sample size.

I.3. Instruments for data collection

Two types of instruments were used: (1) a survey for the qualitative data and (2) a placement test (questionnaire) for the quantitative data.

I.3.1. Survey

The survey consisted of thirty-two variables. These variables were categorized into two groups: (1) Identification variables, and (2) Interest variables. The identification variables, which amounted to ten items, related to the identity of each informant. Such variables were class, department, faculty, gender, extra job, age range, marital status, learn English, material-bound or material-free, and length of time of learning English in class. The interest variables, which amounted to twenty-two items, were concerned with the very investigation. Such variables consisted of check questions, follow-up questions, and open-ended questions.

The different interest variables were some knowledge of English, since when English has been learned, the number of English courses taken in class, how want to learn it/them (with or without the material), self-appreciation learning English with the material, self-appreciation learning English without the material, score when learning with the material, score when learning without the material, advantages of using the material when learning English, disadvantages of using the material when learning English, advantages of not using the material when learning English, disadvantages of not using the material when learning English, the importance of the material for success in English, the best reason why many students don't get the materials for themselves, why some material-bound fail in English, the possibility to learn without the material and come up with a good performance, feeling when learning with the material, the type of material needed for a good command of English, when students get the materials for themselves, the best material supply time, self-appreciation on multimediated materials, and how students manage to perform well in English without using the materials.

I.3.2. Placement Test

The placement test used here was taken from Richards's series of Interchange and was administered to measure students' English performance. This measurement of skills, abilities, and/or knowledge of English consisted in finding quantitative data. The placement test consisted of fifty-three variables of which ten items were merely identification variables worth no score and forty-three scored interest variables for the sake of quantitative data.

The identification variables made similarly ten items regarding the identity of each respondent to the test. These variables were class, department, faculty, gender, extra job, age range, marital status, learn English, material-bound or material-free, and length of time of learning English in class. The identity-related variables were not worth any score but they were worthwhile since they could influence some responses being quantitative data expressed in terms of scores.

The interest variables, which were investigation-related items, were made up of six series of questions. First, the warm-up series of questions was concerned with greeting and introducing oneself. Second, the first level series of questions was adapted to the first level learners of English who might simply be called beginners. It was concerned with questions consisting in talking about oneself. Third, the second level series of questions was for the second level learners of English. It was concerned with questions consisting in talking about others. Fourth, the third level series of questions regarded the third level learners of English. It was concerned with questions consisting in talking about the environment. Fifth, the fourth level series of questions was intended for the fourth level learners of English. It was concerned with questions consisting in speculating about life. Sixth, the fifth to sixth level series of questions was intended for the fifth to sixth level learners of English. It was concerned with questions consisting in arguing.

I.4. Data Collection Instrumentation

At this juncture, the way(s) of using tools for collecting data were addressed. Two kinds of data collection instruments were administered sequentially to the individuals pertaining to the sample, starting with qualitative data collection survey and ending with the quantitative data collection through one placement test. The survey was submitted to the informants in different faculties, considered here as strata, using the drop-off and pick-up technique to help the informants gain time. Afterwards, the placement test was administered to the respondents of the different faculties with the same drop-off and pick-up technique.

Given the size of the University of Kinshasa with twelve faculties, the researcher was assisted by survey-submission helpers and test-administration helpers in the different faculties. Four data-collection helpers were used per big faculty such as the Faculty of Law, Economics, SSAP, Medicine, Arts, Sciences, and two data-collection helpers per small faculties such as the faculty of Psychology and Sciences of Education, Engineering, Agricultural Sciences, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Petrol and Gas, and Veterinary Medicine. The big faculty is defined as the high enrolment overcrowded faculty while the small faculty is defined as the low enrolment crowded.

The helpers underwent training on how to submit the survey to the informants and administer the placement test to the respondents. They were told to be kind and help explain the usefulness and relevance of the study. They held in their hands a copy of the research letter issued by the faculty of Arts for the sake of easy accessibility to any service and all the faculties of the UNIKIN. They were also told to be gentle to the informants and respondents in the process of submitting the survey and administering the placement test. They had to jot down the informants' or respondents' contacts and also give theirs to the informants or respondents just in case. They had to have a friendly attitude so as to succeed in distributing more survey sheets and test sheets than the amount expected in connection with the sample size as a good reason to minimize the risk of decays or getting back fewer sheets.

I.5. Data Collection Process

The process of data collection was based on the types of data needed. The latter impacted on the various sources of information to be explored and exploited. For the purpose of this study, there was a need of second-hand data as well as first-hand data. Second-hand data were captured from preliminary sources and secondary sources whereby it was possible to unveil what other researchers said before about the problem under study. This prior knowledge helped the study build up a good literature review with a critical view. And then first-hand data were obtained from primary sources through which all the students of DRC having English class in their program constituted the population in the research. For accessibility and feasibility reasons, the students of the University of Kinshasa were chosen as the target population from which a sample of 350 cases was selected.

I.6. Data Processing and Analysis

Data processing and analysis in this study were technology-assisted for both qualitative and quantitative data. So, the Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet 2007 was essentially used for qualitative data and SPSS Version 16.0 2007 was used for quantitative data (Tailor-Powell and Renner, 2003; Muijs, 2004; Rose, et al., 2015). Indeed, qualitative and quantitative data processing and analysis were back-to-back activities, a sequential mixed methodology starting with qualitative data and ending with quantitative data.

II. FINDINGS

II.1. Qualitative findings

The attitudinal study based on qualitative paradigm has provided a new insight on the English materials and performance through qualitative findings presented with shallow statistics and graphs. The report on the findings ranged from the identification variables to the interest variables. In the identification

variables, the findings have straightforwardly proved that this research sample size consisted of the individuals proportionate to each faculty, and probably to each department but not necessarily to each class, as well. An approximate equilibrium in gender and a noticeable dominance of youth, unemployed, and single have been obvious. When it comes to the material-bound and material-free, many students pretended to be material-bound while they were actually not but merely material-holder students that constituted another learner type being freshly found in this research. This is an important breakthrough justifying the good reason why some students who learn with the materials come up with poor performance in English. As for the interest variables, check questions, follow-up items, open-ended questions, and open-ended question-resulted responses findings have also been presented, in most of the cases, with a positive attitude of learning English with materials plus other media being part of new technology for the sake of good performance. But it is not enough to infer the relevance of the English materials conducive to the implementation of material usage strategies for high-achieving performance purposes.

Figure 1. Perception about Learning English with Materials

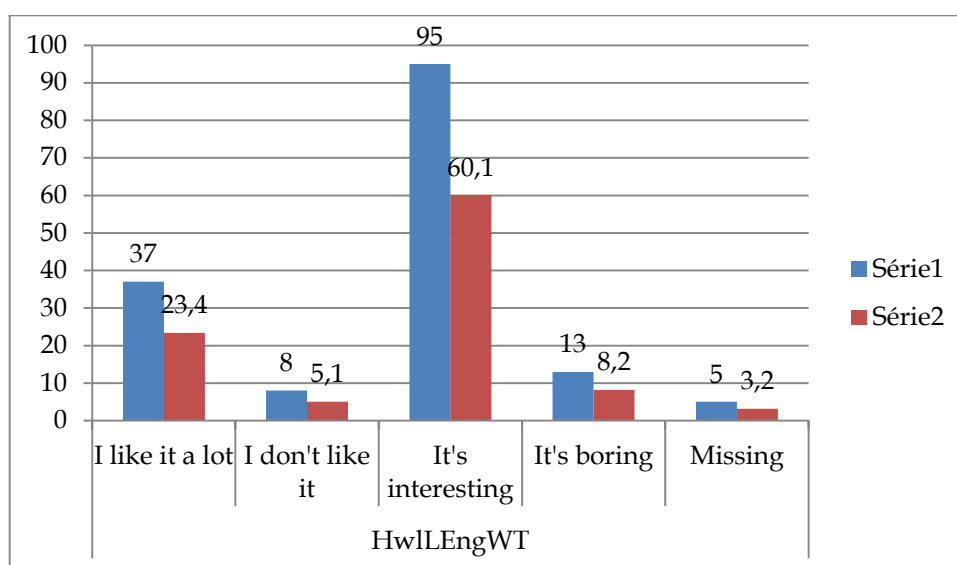
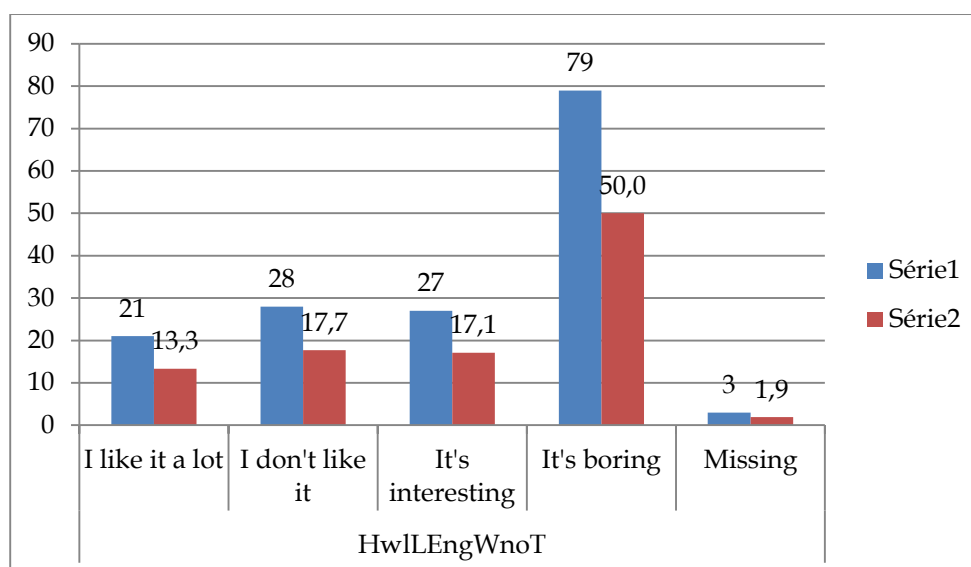


Figure 2. Perception about Learning English without Materials



II.2. Quantitative Findings

This part of the study on the quantitative paradigm was intended to run in-depth statistics consisting of the descriptive statistics, and ANOVA in order to come up with a wide spectrum of evidence on English learners' performance when they learn with or without the materials. The quantitative data analysis report ranged from identification variables to interest variables, which were parceled out into six series of questions viz. the Warm-up series of questions (WUPSQ), First Level series of questions (FLSQ), Second Level series of questions (SLSQ), Third Level series of questions (TLSQ), Fourth Level series of questions (FOLSQ) and Fifth to Sixth Level series of questions (FISLSQ).

For the identification variables, the findings have straightforwardly shown throughout descriptive statistics that the participants in the test belonged to almost all the classes with a dominance of the First Year students over each of the other classes. They belonged to almost all the departments with a dominance of the Department of Economic and Social Law over each of the other, and belonged to all the faculties with a dominance of the Law students over each of the other faculties, and were from every gender with a dominance of males over females. There was a strong dominance of unemployed participants over the other, a strong dominance of those aged 18 to 23 over the other age ranges, an extremely high dominance of single over the other marital statuses. There was a high dominance of those who learn English in their class program over those who don't. There was a strong dominance of the material-

bound over the material-free, and a strong dominance of those who learn English just for 30 hours over the other.

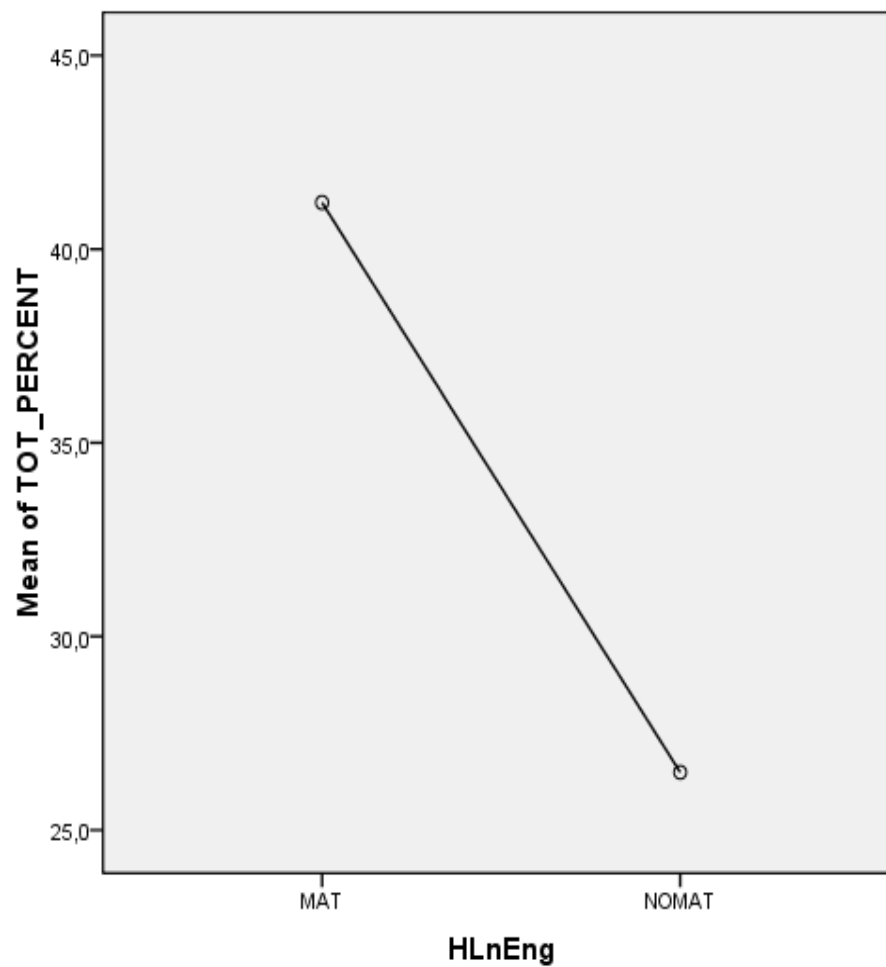
As for the interest variables, the descriptive statistics have proven, apart from the Warm-up Level, that the minimum scores were obtained far more than the maximum scores from Level1 to Level5. The findings have proved that the test was taken by 220 participants who came up with a range 62.0, minimum 5.0, maximum 67.0, mean 36.364, standard deviation 15.2736, and variance 233.283, which is to say they came up with a poor performance while looking at their overall mean and standard deviation as well. The findings show that there is no significant variation in performance for all the students.

When it comes to look at the ANOVA statistics, it has straightforwardly been shown that there is no difference in performance between and among students overall and no difference based on their class, gender, work/job experience, age, marital status, learning English but only on their faculty, length of learning time, and more importantly based on material-boundedness. That is, there is a significant difference in performance between and among students overall based on their faculty. For example, those of Arts came up with the best performance. There is a significant difference between and among students overall based on their length of learning time; those who learn for more than 90 hours came up with the best performance. More importantly, the material-bound students always came up with better performance than the material-free.

Table 1. MAT and NOMAT Mean Differences

| ANOVA | | | | | | |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|------|
| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| WUPSQ_6 | Between Groups | 15,301 | 1 | 15,301 | 12,426 | ,001 |
| | Within Groups | 252,438 | 205 | 1,231 | | |
| | Total | 267,739 | 206 | | | |
| FLSQ_24 | Between Groups | 568,257 | 1 | 568,257 | 50,938 | ,000 |
| | Within Groups | 2286,960 | 205 | 11,156 | | |
| | Total | 2855,217 | 206 | | | |
| SLSQ_18 | Between Groups | 348,049 | 1 | 348,049 | 30,453 | ,000 |
| | Within Groups | 2342,975 | 205 | 11,429 | | |
| | Total | 2691,024 | 206 | | | |
| TLSQ_18 | Between Groups | 319,279 | 1 | 319,279 | 28,494 | ,000 |
| | Within Groups | 2297,078 | 205 | 11,205 | | |
| | Total | 2616,357 | 206 | | | |
| FOLSQ_10 | Between Groups | 79,640 | 1 | 79,640 | 21,676 | ,000 |
| | Within Groups | 753,210 | 205 | 3,674 | | |
| | Total | 832,850 | 206 | | | |
| FISLSQ_10 | Between Groups | 78,925 | 1 | 78,925 | 23,342 | ,000 |
| | Within Groups | 693,142 | 205 | 3,381 | | |
| | Total | 772,068 | 206 | | | |
| TOT_PERCENT | Between Groups | 9129,316 | 1 | 9129,316 | 49,479 | ,000 |
| | Within Groups | 37824,665 | 205 | 184,511 | | |
| | Total | 46953,981 | 206 | | | |

Figure 3. MAT and NOMAT Mean Differences TOT_PERCENT



CONCLUSION

The study was intended to find out the truth on the students' language performance when they learn English with or without the materials. Those who learn with the materials were termed as material-bound students and those who learn without the materials were termed as material-free students. Based on the two groups of L2 learners, the study has created the theory of Material-boundedness.

The study was carried out at the University of Kinshasa deemed as the greatest university of the DRC. Two data collection tools, a survey and a questionnaire, were used for the sake of mixed method research design to check the congruity, incongruity and complementarities of the findings. The first instrument was based on the qualitative paradigm being an attitudinal study focused on the students' perceptions and feelings when they learned English with or without materials. The second was based on the quantitative paradigm being a placement test administered to the two different types of English learners to see how they scored when they learned English with and without materials.

The findings have straightforwardly showed that not only students have a positive attitude about learning English with the materials but also come up with better language performance when they do it with English materials. The latter impact the most on the DRC English teaching / learning context. Given the low level of English exposure in DRC, the English material is really helpful and qualifies as a necessary, important and relevant tool for Congolese English learners. It allows the students to have well organized course notes that they can shuffle, read, review and check all the time. In so doing, the students are more likely to be exposed to the language they don't have more chance to hear in their habitual environment which is not an English-speaking one. Of course, the English materials reduce the complexity of the language to the learners.

With new technologies as additional modes, the English materials should use multiple modes to play a role and impact on English learners' language acquisition or any learning. Such multimediated materials should consist of active sounding, pictures, video, and written texts to give information clearly. Multimediated materials are comprehensive in that they work for the improvement of all the skills. The English materials will still play and undoubtedly continue to play an important role in language teaching / learning and provide a useful resource for both teachers and learners, though. That is, English language teaching / learning is inextricably linked to the material.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Considering the findings to this research, a number of recommendations and suggestions have been made, among others, three have been taken into account.

1. The decision-makers should be aware of the sociolinguistic status of English language and the edge it is taking nowadays in the country as well as in the world in order to promote English materials and help Congolese students perform better. There is a real need of appropriate materials to help English learners to be at the same level as other learners on international grounds.
2. English as a foreign language cannot be taught or learned material-free because even native learners from English-speaking countries learn using English materials. Being a foreign language, English is, unlike French for example, a complex language of which the script is largely different from the sounding or pronunciation.
3. The decision-makers should invest in the materials in order to promote English language teaching and learning to help students communicate in English worldwide. They ought to create a well equipped corporation of skilled and trained brains in education and TESOL in charge of designing materials in connection with students' needs and current realities.

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