

Exploring Effective Strategies to Enhance 4Cs among EFL Learners in Beninese Secondary Schools

Hindeme Ulrich Orlando Sèna, Iwikotan Katchédé Etienne, Kottin Assogba Evariste, Dossou Mawumèvo Tchérak

Département d'Anglais (DAn); Faculté des Lettres, Langues, Arts et Communication (FLLAC); Université d'Abomey-Calavi (UAC) - Bénin

Laboratoire du Groupe de Recherche sur l'Afrique et la Diaspora (Labo GRAD)

Email: richdeme11@gmail.com

Despite the recognized importance of the 4Cs (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity) in modern education, EFL learners in Benin often struggle to develop them due to traditional teaching methods. The objective of this research is to identify and evaluate innovative instructional strategies that promote the 4Cs in EFL contexts in Benin. A mixed-methods approach is utilized, involving online surveys, questionnaires addressed to EFL learners, interviews with EFL teachers as well as class observations across various secondary schools. Findings reveal that interactive activities, project-based learning, the use of technology, critical thinking exercises, cultural exchange programs, creative writing and arts, reflective practices, games and simulations, scaffolded instruction, and encouraging a growth mindset can significantly foster the 4Cs among Beninese EFL learners. The study suggests that teacher training programs should incorporate these strategies to better prepare EFL teachers for facilitating 21st-century skills to learners in the classroom.

1. Introduction

In an era characterized by rapid globalization and technological advancement, the ability to think critically, communicate effectively, collaborate with others, and harness creativity has become essential. These skills, collectively referred to as the 4Cs, are increasingly recognized as vital components of modern education, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. For EFL students in non-English speaking countries, mastering English not only facilitates communication in a global context but also enhances cognitive abilities and interpersonal skills. In Benin, where English proficiency is increasingly linked to economic opportunities, fostering these competencies in secondary schools has emerged as a

priority for educators and policymakers alike. Critical thinking is fundamental to the 4Cs, as it empowers students to analyze information, make informed decisions, and solve problems creatively. Creativity is another vital component of the 4Cs, allowing learners to express themselves and approach problems with originality. Collaboration and communication are interlinked skills that play a significant role in both language acquisition and social interaction. Ultimately, exploring effective strategies to enhance the 4Cs among EFL learners in Beninese secondary schools is not just an educational imperative, it is a pathway to empowering young individuals to become proactive contributors to society.

Background to the Study: In today's globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become increasingly important, particularly in non-English-speaking countries like Benin. As English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs expand in secondary schools, there is a growing emphasis on developing not just language proficiency but also essential 21st-century skills. Among these, the "4Cs" (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication) are crucial for preparing students to navigate an increasingly complex and interconnected environment. Despite the importance of the 4Cs in educational frameworks, traditional teaching methods often prioritize rote memorization and grammar over interactive and student-centered approaches. This limitation can hinder students' ability to think critically, work collaboratively, and express themselves effectively in English. Consequently, there is an urgent need to explore and implement effective strategies that can enhance the 4Cs among EFL learners.

Problem Statement: The educational framework in Beninese secondary schools faces unique challenges, including limited resources, diverse EFL learners' backgrounds, and varying levels of English proficiency. These factors can hinder the effective integration of the 4Cs into the curriculum. Nonetheless, there is a growing recognition that equipping EFL students with these skills can significantly enhance their academic performance and better prepare them for future challenges. This calls for innovative strategies that are culturally relevant and practically applicable within the local context.

The main Objective: The basic objective of this study is to assess the existing teaching methods in Beninese secondary schools to understand how they currently promote critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (the 4Cs) among EFL learners. It specifically aims to design and implement specific instructional strategies and activities aimed at enhancing the 4Cs in EFL contexts, and evaluate their effectiveness through EFL learners' engagement and performance metrics in Benin. Ultimately, enhancing the 4Cs in Beninese secondary schools will not only improve English language proficiency but also equip students with the skills necessary to succeed in their future academic and professional endeavors.

Research Questions: This paper is an attempt to give answers to the following questions:

RQ1: What specific teaching strategies can be effectively implemented in Beninese secondary schools to enhance critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills among EFL learners?

RQ2: How does the integration of the 4Cs into the EFL curriculum impact student engagement and language proficiency in Beninese secondary schools?

RQ3: How do teachers perceive the implementation of 4Cs-focused strategies in their EFL

teaching?

Research Hypotheses: Based on the research questions above, the following research hypotheses have been stated:

RH1: Effective teaching strategies that can be implemented include: Project-Based Learning (PBL), Collaborative Learning Activities, Inquiry-Based Learning, Use of Technology, Role-Playing and Simulations.

RH2: The integration of the 4Cs into the EFL curriculum positively impacts student engagement and language proficiency in several ways: increased engagement, enhanced language skills, development of critical thinking, and creative expression.

RH3: Teachers' perceptions of implementing 4Cs-focused strategies in their EFL teaching vary, with common themes including: positive attitudes towards 4cs, perceived benefits, challenges faced, need for professional development, and variability in experience.

2. Literature Review

The integration of the 4Cs into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education is crucial for preparing learners for the challenges of the 21st century. Recent studies emphasize the need for instructional strategies that foster these competencies in Beninese secondary schools. For instance, Akingbe et al. (2022) argue that project-based learning (PBL) effectively enhances critical thinking by allowing students to engage with real-world issues, thereby promoting deeper cognitive engagement and language use. This approach not only aids in language acquisition but also equips learners with essential problem-solving skills. Communication skills are vital in EFL contexts, and fostering these abilities through interactive methods has been highlighted by Mensah and Adomako (2023). Their research demonstrates that incorporating debates and group discussions into the curriculum significantly improves students' oral proficiency and confidence in using English. Moreover, Zinsou and Akindele (2023) emphasize the importance of collaborative learning, suggesting that structured group activities not only enhance communication but also build social skills, enabling students to work effectively in teams. This collaborative environment is particularly beneficial in culturally diverse classrooms, such as those found in Benin.

Additionally, the role of creativity in language learning cannot be overlooked. Ouedraogo and Kone (2023) highlight that creative tasks, such as storytelling and role-playing, engage students and encourage personal expression, leading to greater motivation and language retention. Furthermore, integrating technology in the classroom has emerged as a powerful strategy for enhancing the 4Cs. Ahouangni and Avognan (2023) point out that digital tools facilitate interactive and collaborative learning experiences, allowing EFL learners to develop their critical thinking and creativity in innovative ways. Collectively, these strategies provide a framework for enhancing the 4Cs among EFL learners in Beninese secondary schools, paving the way for a more effective and relevant educational experience. Prominent authors identify some innovative strategies in fostering the 4Cs of EFL learners as follows:

2.1. Interactive Activities

Interactive activities are vital for developing communication skills in EFL learners. These methods engage learners in dynamic exchanges, fostering both spoken and listening skills essential for effective language use. According to Mensah and Adomako (2023), activities such as group discussions, debates, and role-playing create a stimulating environment where students can practice English in authentic contexts. This interaction helps learners articulate their thoughts clearly and respond to peers, enhancing their fluency and confidence. Moreover, the collaborative nature of interactive activities encourages peer learning, which can be particularly beneficial in diverse classrooms. Zinsou and Akindele (2023) emphasize that these activities allow students to draw on their unique cultural backgrounds, enriching discussions and providing varied perspectives. This not only enhances the learning experience but also fosters respect for diversity, a critical component of effective communication in a globalized world.

Interactive activities can also be designed to align with specific learning objectives. For example, a teacher might incorporate a debate on a relevant social issue, prompting students to research, prepare, and present their arguments in English. This structured approach ensures that learners not only practice their language skills but also engage critically with content. Tchamyoun and Tchekoun (2023) point out that such activities cultivate critical thinking, as students must analyze different viewpoints and construct reasoned arguments. Additionally, incorporating technology into interactive activities can further enhance their effectiveness. Tools like discussion forums and video conferencing platforms enable students to connect with peers beyond their classroom, fostering a broader dialogue. Ahouangni and Avognan (2023) argue that these digital interactions can lead to more meaningful engagement, as students collaborate on projects or participate in global discussions, enhancing their language proficiency and intercultural awareness.

The assessment of interactive activities can also provide valuable feedback for both students and educators. By observing students' participation and communication styles during these activities, teachers can identify areas for improvement and tailor instruction to meet learners' needs. Adoukonou and Gbadamassi (2023) suggest that formative assessments, such as peer evaluations and self-reflections, can enhance the learning process by encouraging students to reflect on their contributions and set goals for improvement.

2.2. Project-Based Learning (PBL)

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an educational approach that encourages students to engage in real-world projects, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Akingbe et al. (2022) assert that PBL empowers learners to take ownership of their education by exploring topics of interest and relevance. This method requires students to conduct research, collaborate with peers, and present their findings, effectively integrating language skills with practical application. One of the primary benefits of PBL is its emphasis on authentic learning experiences. By working on projects that relate to their communities or global issues, students see the real-world relevance of their language skills. For instance, a project focused on environmental conservation might require students to research local ecosystems, interview community members, and present their solutions in English. This hands-on approach not only enhances language proficiency but also cultivates a sense of responsibility and civic

engagement.

In addition to fostering critical thinking, PBL promotes collaboration among students. Tchamyou and Tchekoun (2023) highlight that group projects encourage learners to communicate effectively, negotiate roles, and resolve conflicts. These experiences mirror real-life scenarios, preparing students for future teamwork in academic and professional settings. By learning to value each other's contributions, students develop social skills that are crucial for collaboration. Moreover, PBL can be structured to incorporate various forms of assessment, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of students' learning. For example, educators can assess students not only on the final product but also on their process, teamwork, and individual contributions. This holistic approach provides valuable insights into students' strengths and areas for improvement, guiding future instruction. PBL also fosters creativity, as students are encouraged to think outside the box and explore innovative solutions to the challenges they encounter. Ouedraogo and Kone (2023) emphasize that creative projects stimulate learners' imaginations, allowing them to express themselves in unique ways. Whether through designing a campaign, creating a video, or organizing an event, students have the opportunity to showcase their talents while enhancing their language skills.

2.3. Use of Technology

The integration of technology in EFL classrooms has revolutionized teaching and learning practices, offering innovative ways to engage students. Ahouangni and Avognan (2023) highlight that digital tools such as language learning apps, online collaborative platforms, and multimedia resources enhance interactive learning. These technologies enable students to access a wealth of information and engage with diverse content, making language learning more engaging and relevant. One of the key advantages of using technology in the classroom is its ability to facilitate communication and collaboration among students. For instance, platforms like Google Classroom or Zoom allow learners to work together on projects, participate in discussions, and share resources in real-time. This fosters a sense of community and enhances language practice, as students must articulate their thoughts and ideas in English. According to Zinsou and Akindele (2023), these digital interactions prepare learners for global communication in an increasingly interconnected world.

Technology also provides opportunities for personalized learning experiences. Learners can access tailored resources and activities that match their individual needs and interests. For example, language learning apps often include adaptive features that adjust to students' proficiency levels, allowing them to progress at their own pace. This flexibility not only promotes a growth mindset but also encourages students to take ownership of their learning, as they can choose how and when to engage with the material. Furthermore, the use of technology can enhance the development of critical thinking and creativity among EFL learners. Interactive tools such as simulations, online games, and virtual reality experiences encourage students to analyze scenarios, make decisions, and solve problems creatively. Akingbe et al. (2022) suggest that these engaging formats stimulate learners' imaginations and encourage them to think critically about the content, making learning more impactful. Incorporating technology into assessment practices also allows for innovative evaluation methods. For example, teachers can use digital portfolios, online quizzes, and collaborative projects to assess students' progress. Adoukonou and Gbadamassi (2023) argue that these tools

provide immediate feedback and insights into students' understanding, enabling educators to adjust their instruction to better meet learners' needs.

2.4. Critical Thinking Exercises

Critical thinking is an essential skill for EFL learners, enabling them to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information effectively. Tchamyoun and Tchekoun (2023) emphasize that integrating critical thinking exercises into the curriculum is vital for fostering analytical skills. Activities such as case studies, debates, and reflective writing encourage learners to engage with content critically and develop their reasoning abilities. By challenging students to question assumptions and consider multiple perspectives, educators can cultivate a more intellectually rigorous learning environment. One effective method for promoting critical thinking is through structured debates. In this format, students must research their assigned positions, articulate arguments, and respond to counterarguments, thereby honing their analytical and communication skills. Mensah and Adomako (2023) suggest that this practice not only enhances language proficiency but also develops students' ability to think on their feet and articulate their thoughts clearly. Such exercises are instrumental in preparing learners for discussions in both academic and real-world contexts.

Additionally, reflective writing activities encourage students to analyze their learning experiences and articulate their thoughts in English. By maintaining learning journals or engaging in self-reflective essays, students can assess their progress and identify areas for improvement. Adoukonou and Gbadamassi (2023) highlight that this practice fosters metacognition, allowing learners to become more aware of their thought processes and learning strategies. Critical thinking exercises can also be seamlessly integrated into project-based learning. For instance, while working on a collaborative project, students might be tasked with analyzing different viewpoints on a particular issue, fostering both critical thinking and teamwork. This interconnected approach ensures that learners not only develop their language proficiency but also enhance their ability to think critically about the information they encounter. Moreover, technology can play a significant role in facilitating critical thinking. Digital tools, such as online discussion forums and research databases, provide students with access to a wide range of resources and perspectives. Ahouangni and Avognan (2023) argue that this access empowers learners to conduct thorough research and engage with diverse viewpoints, enriching their understanding and critical analysis.

2.5. Cultural Exchange Programs

Cultural exchange programs are vital in fostering global understanding and tolerance among diverse populations. According to Robert (2020), these initiatives not only provide participants with firsthand experiences of different cultures but also promote critical thinking and empathy. Participants often engage in activities that challenge their preconceived notions, fostering a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity. This exposure plays a crucial role in breaking down stereotypes and enhancing interpersonal skills, which are essential in today's globalized society. Recent studies emphasize the long-term impact of cultural exchange on both personal and professional development. Anne-Mari (2021) discusses how these programs create networks of mutual understanding that can lead to collaborative efforts across borders. By establishing friendships and partnerships, participants become informal ambassadors for their cultures, further enriching international relations. This perspective highlights the broader

implications of cultural exchange beyond individual experiences, suggesting a transformative potential for global diplomacy.

The role of technology in facilitating cultural exchanges has also gained attention. As outlined by Huang (2022), online platforms enable virtual exchanges that can reach more participants than traditional programs. This accessibility allows individuals from varied socioeconomic backgrounds to engage in cultural dialogues, promoting inclusivity. Such innovations demonstrate the adaptability of cultural exchange programs in addressing contemporary challenges, ensuring that they remain relevant in a digital age. Furthermore, educators increasingly recognize the educational value of cultural exchange programs in schools. According to Susan (2023), these experiences enhance students' global competence, equipping them with the skills necessary to thrive in diverse environments. By integrating cultural exchange into curricula, schools not only foster cross-cultural understanding but also prepare students for the complexities of the global workforce. Challenges remain, however, in ensuring that cultural exchange programs are equitable and truly beneficial to all participants. According to Adina (2022), there are ongoing concerns about who benefits from these exchanges and how the experiences are structured. Ensuring that programs prioritize authentic engagement rather than superficial interactions is crucial for maximizing their impact. This calls for continuous evaluation and adaptation of program designs to meet the evolving needs of participants.

2.6. Creative Writing and Arts

Creative writing and the arts have emerged as pivotal tools in education, enhancing both emotional and cognitive development. Julia (2021) asserts that engaging in creative expression fosters a deeper understanding of oneself and the world. By encouraging students to articulate their thoughts and feelings through writing and artistic endeavors, educators create an environment where creativity flourishes. This approach not only cultivates individual expression but also enhances critical thinking skills, essential for navigating complex societal issues. Research indicates that integrating creative writing and arts into curricula significantly impacts student engagement and retention of knowledge. Patricia (2020) highlights how artistic practices stimulate imagination and innovation. EFL learners exposed to creative methodologies often demonstrate improved problem-solving abilities and adaptability, traits that are increasingly important in today's fast-paced job market. By nurturing these skills through creative outlets, educators prepare students for a future where creativity is a key driver of success.

Moreover, the therapeutic benefits of creative writing and arts cannot be overlooked. As noted by James (2020), expressive writing has been shown to reduce stress and improve mental health. Schools that incorporate reflective writing exercises and artistic activities create safe spaces for students to process their emotions and experiences. This holistic approach to education promotes overall well-being, emphasizing the connection between mental health and academic performance. In higher education, the significance of creative writing and arts is further underscored by their role in interdisciplinary studies. Susan (2021) argues that creative practices foster collaboration across disciplines, enhancing students' ability to think critically and innovatively. By blending creative writing with scientific inquiry or historical analysis, students develop a more nuanced understanding of complex subjects, preparing them

for multifaceted career paths. The rise of digital media has also transformed the landscape of creative writing and arts education. As highlighted by Brian (2022), technology provides new platforms for artistic expression and collaboration. Students can now share their work with a global audience, receiving feedback and engaging with diverse perspectives. This democratization of creativity not only enriches the educational experience but also empowers students to become active contributors to cultural dialogues.

2.7. Reflective Practices

Reflective practices are essential for promoting deeper learning and professional development in various fields. Engaging in reflection allows individuals to critically assess their experiences and integrate new knowledge into their practice. This process of self-examination fosters continuous improvement and adaptability, which are crucial in today's fast-paced environments. Schön's framework emphasizes the importance of reflection not just as a retrospective activity but as an integral part of the learning cycle. Current research supports the effectiveness of reflective practices in educational. According to Jennifer (2020), structured reflection enhances EFL learners' ability to connect theoretical knowledge with practical application. By incorporating reflective journals, peer feedback, and guided discussions, educators can create a culture of inquiry that encourages students to take ownership of their learning. This approach empowers learners to identify strengths and areas for growth, promoting a proactive attitude toward skill development.

Moreover, reflective practices play a critical role in fostering resilience and emotional intelligence. As highlighted by Kim (2021), regular reflection helps individuals manage stress and navigate interpersonal challenges more effectively. By encouraging learners to reflect on their emotional responses and interactions, educators can cultivate greater self-awareness and empathy. This focus on emotional growth not only enhances individual well-being but also contributes to a more supportive learning environment. In professional contexts, reflective practices are increasingly recognized as vital for career development. David (2019) emphasizes the significance of reflection in fostering a growth-oriented mindset among professionals. By engaging in reflective activities, individuals can identify gaps in their knowledge and skills, setting actionable goals for improvement. This proactive approach to professional development aligns with the demands of an evolving job market, where lifelong learning is essential for career advancement. The integration of technology into reflective practices has also transformed the way individuals engage with their learning processes. As discussed by Christine A. (2022), online platforms and applications facilitate collaborative reflection, allowing individuals to share insights and receive feedback from peers. This interconnectedness enriches the reflective experience, promoting a sense of community and shared learning. Technology also provides diverse modalities for reflection, accommodating different learning styles and preferences.

2.8. Games and Simulations

Games and simulations have gained recognition as innovative educational strategies that enhance engagement and experiential learning. These interactive methods create immersive environments where learners can experiment and make decisions in real-time (Richard R., 2020). This experiential approach not only captivates students' attention but also fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills, essential in today's complex world. By simulating real-

life scenarios, games provide a safe space for learners to practice skills and explore consequences. Research supports the effectiveness of games and simulations in various educational settings. According to DeSantis (2021), the incorporation of game elements into learning environments can significantly increase motivation and engagement. This heightened interest leads to improved retention of knowledge and a more positive attitude toward learning. By integrating competitive elements, rewards, and challenges, educators can create dynamic classrooms where students are eager to participate and collaborate.

Furthermore, the role of games and simulations in promoting social skills and teamwork is increasingly emphasized. Johnson (2019) highlights how multiplayer games encourage communication and cooperation among participants. These interactions mirror real-world team dynamics, helping learners develop essential interpersonal skills. By navigating challenges together, students not only enhance their academic abilities but also build lasting relationships, fostering a sense of community in the classroom. In higher education, the use of simulations is particularly effective in preparing students for professional challenges. As outlined by Parker (2022), programs that incorporate simulations provide students with hands-on experience in their respective fields. For instance, medical and engineering students benefit from realistic simulations that mimic complex scenarios, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. This approach enhances confidence and competence, equipping graduates with the skills necessary for success in their careers.

2.9. Scaffolded Instruction

Scaffolded instruction is an educational approach designed to support student learning by providing temporary assistance tailored to each learner's needs. This method allows educators to gradually remove support as EFL students develop independence and mastery of concepts. Effective scaffolding involves breaking learning into manageable parts and providing guidance at each step. More recent studies reinforce this idea. John and Helen (2017) emphasizes the importance of formative feedback and targeted support. This ongoing feedback loop helps students understand their progress and areas for improvement. Recent literature highlights the effectiveness of scaffolded instruction in diverse learning environments. For instance, Amanda G. (2020) explores various scaffolded techniques, including graphic organizers and collaborative learning structures. These tools not only support comprehension but also encourage EFL students to engage with the material actively. By creating a structured environment, teachers can help students build confidence and competence, particularly in challenging subjects like mathematics and science.

Scaffolding is particularly beneficial in inclusive classrooms, where students may have varying levels of readiness. Rhonda (2019) discusses how scaffolded instruction allows educators to address individual learning needs effectively. By customizing the level of support based on student capabilities, teachers can foster an inclusive atmosphere that promotes equity in learning. This adaptability is crucial for helping all students reach their potential, regardless of their starting point. Furthermore, the integration of technology has transformed how scaffolding is implemented in the classroom. Laura (2022) highlights how educational technologies, such as interactive platforms and adaptive learning software, provide real-time support to students. These tools can track individual progress and adjust the level of difficulty accordingly, ensuring that each student receives appropriate challenges. This technological

integration not only enhances the scaffolding process but also engages students in ways that traditional methods may not. Research indicates that scaffolded instruction can significantly enhance student achievement. A meta-analysis by Hattie (2020) found that when teachers implement scaffolding strategies effectively, students demonstrate higher levels of engagement and improved academic performance. This evidence underscores the value of scaffolding as an essential practice in contemporary education, reinforcing its role in helping students navigate complex concepts and develop critical thinking skills.

2.10. Encouraging a Growth Mindset

Encouraging a growth mindset is a vital educational strategy that emphasizes the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort and perseverance. According to Carol (2006), fostering a growth mindset leads to greater motivation and resilience among students. This foundational work has spurred significant research into how mindset impacts learning outcomes. Recent studies, such as those by Dweck et al. (2020), illustrate that EFL students who embrace a growth mindset are more likely to take on challenges and persist through difficulties, ultimately achieving higher levels of success. The role of educators in cultivating a growth mindset is critical. Annie and Heather (2016) provide practical strategies for teachers to foster this mindset in their classrooms. These strategies include providing constructive feedback, celebrating effort over innate talent, and modeling a positive attitude toward failure. By creating an environment where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities, educators can empower students to embrace challenges and develop resilience.

Research also highlights the importance of language in promoting a growth mindset. Carol (2019) emphasizes how the way teachers frame feedback can influence students' perceptions of their abilities. Phrases like "not yet" instead of "failure" can significantly impact EFL students' motivation and self-efficacy. This linguistic approach not only encourages persistence but also helps EFL learners understand that learning is a process that involves effort and time. Moreover, the integration of growth mindset principles into school curricula has shown promising results. Mary and Anne (2019) explore how schools that adopt a growth mindset framework experience improved student engagement and performance. This shift in perspective encourages collaboration, fosters a love for learning, and prepares students to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world. The impact of growth mindset interventions extends beyond academic settings. William (2021) discusses how fostering a growth mindset can lead to personal and professional development in various aspects of life. By embracing challenges and viewing setbacks as opportunities for growth, individuals can cultivate resilience and adaptability, skills that are increasingly essential in today's workforce.

3. Methodology of the Study

This research study utilizes the quantitative and qualitative methodological roadmap to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the 4Cs can be developed in the classroom. The subjects of this study are EFL teachers and learners. Data are gathered through surveys, questionnaires administered to a random sample of 850 secondary school EFL students, interviews with a purposive sample of 40 EFL educators, and classroom observations.

3.1. Questionnaires to EFL Learners

To explore effective strategies for enhancing the 4Cs among EFL learners in Beninese secondary schools, they shared which activities or methods they find most helpful for improving their critical thinking skills in EFL learning. Next, it would be valuable to learn how they prefer to practice their communication skills in the classroom and which specific activities help them feel more confident speaking in English. Understanding how they collaborate with classmates during English lessons and how such activities contribute to their learning could also provide insight. Furthermore, EFL students are asked to describe instances where they used their creativity to solve problems or complete tasks in English. In addition, it would be important to identify any challenges they face when trying to think critically or collaborate in English. Lastly, exploring how they believe technology, such as apps or websites, could aid in developing their 4Cs skills could offer practical ideas for integrating digital tools into the learning process.

3.2. Interview with EFL Teachers

A structured interview is designed in order to understand EFL teachers' experiences and approaches about the strategies for enhancing Beninese EFL learners' 4Cs. EFL teachers should reflect on the strategies they find most effective in fostering critical thinking skills among EFL students and explain why they believe these methods work. They are also asked to share how they integrate collaborative activities into their lessons and the impact these activities have on EFL students' overall language development. Additionally, exploring how EFL teachers encourage creativity in English learning and assess EFL students' creative abilities would be useful. EFL teachers are demanded to list the challenges they face when trying to incorporate the 4Cs into their lessons and the ways they address these challenges to ensure effective learning. Finally, understanding how they use technology or digital tools to enhance the development of the 4Cs could offer practical examples.

4. Results of the Study

4.1. Answers from EFL Learners

Table 1: EFL Learners' Point of View on Activities that enhance 4Cs.

The most important activities in enhancing the 4Cs among Learners.	Positive Answers	Negative Answers	Total
Interactive Activities	850	00	850=100%
Project-based Learning	455	395	850=100%
The Use of Technology	850	00	850=100%
Critical Thinking Exercises	750	100	850=100%
Cultural Exchange Programs	850	00	850=100%
Creative Writing and Arts	300	550	850=100%
Reflective Practices	250	600	850=100%
Games and Simulations	650	200	850=100%
Encouraging a Growth Mindset	280	570	850=100%

Source: Field Research, 2024.

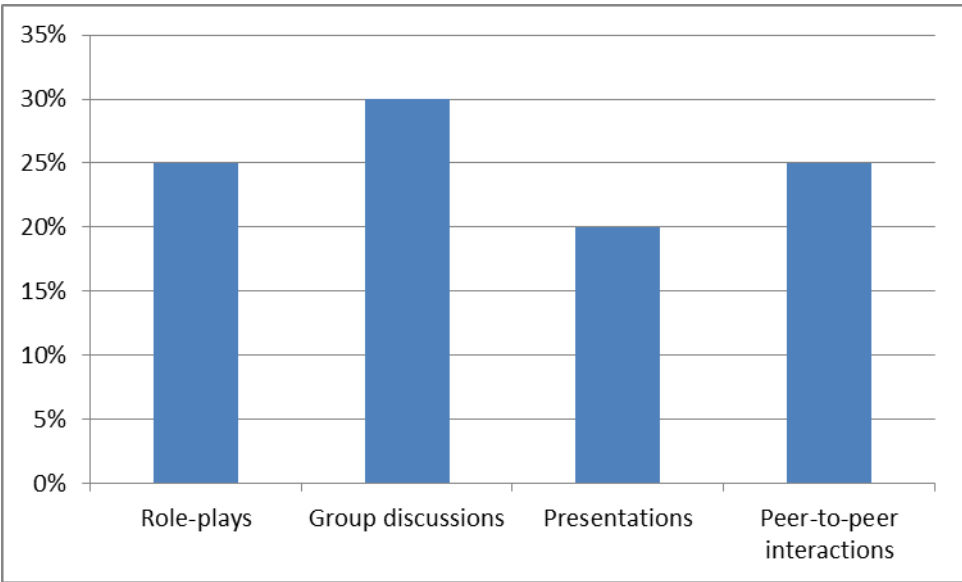


Figure 1: EFL learners' Preferences in Communication Skills. (Source: Field Study, 2024.)

The analysis of this figure shows that 25% of EFL learners prefer role-plays activities, 30% of them prefer group discussions, 20% prefer presentations and 25% prefer peer-to-peer interactions.

Table 2: Learners' Confidence in Speaking Activities.

Activities in which EFL learners feel confident while speaking.	Games and Simulations	Cultural Exchanges	Peer-to-peer Interactions	Others
Answers	420	205	125	00

Source: Field Study, 2024.

By analysing this Likert scale, it is noticed that 420 EFL learners feel confident in activities like games and Simulations, 205 of them enjoy cultural exchanges whereas the remaining 125 feel more confident in peer-to-peer interactions.

Table 3: EFL learners' point of view on their collaboration and creativity.

Statement	Positive Answers	Negative Answers	Total
EFL learners collaborate with their classmates in all activities.	510	320	850=100%
Collaborative activities have positive impact on EFL learners' learning.	850	00	850=100%
EFL learners use their creativity in all activities.	650	200	850=100%

Source: Grounded research, 2024.

In this table, most of EFL learners (510) do not collaborate with their classmates in the activities. Moreover, they all (850) give positive answers about the impact of collaborative activities on learning. Last, most of EFL learners use their creativity in all the activities.

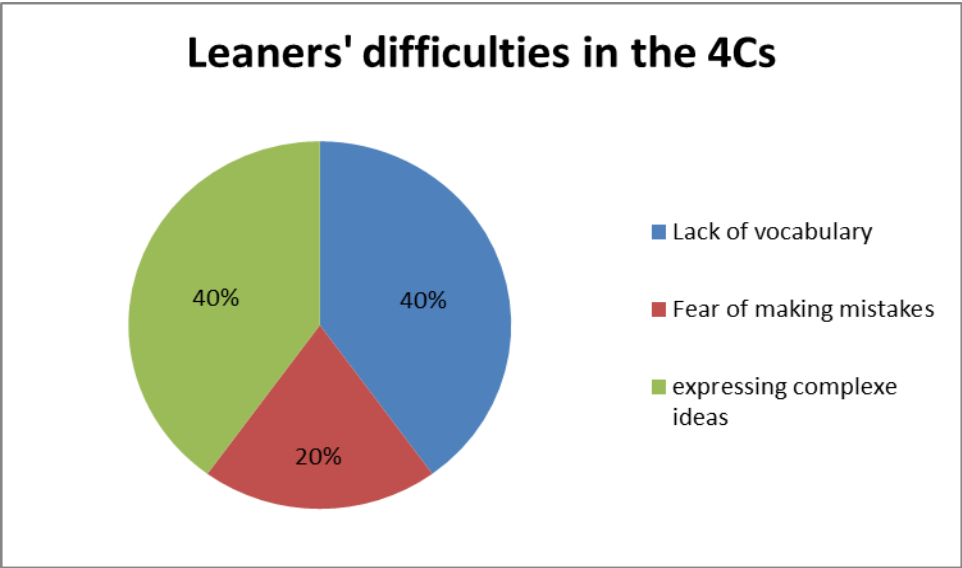


Figure 2: EFL learners’ challenges in the 4Cs (Source: Field Study, 2024.)

In this figure, it is shown that 40% of EFL students lack vocabulary, 20% fear making mistakes, and 40% encounter difficulties in expressing complex ideas.

Table 4: Learners' point of view on the use of technology in the 4Cs.

Statement	Positive Answers	Negative Answers	Total
The use of technology can greatly improve the 4Cs among EFL learners	850	00	850=100%

Source: grounded research, 2024.

In the analysis of this table, all the EFL learners (850) give positive answer on the role of technology in improving the 4Cs.

4.2. Teachers' Answers

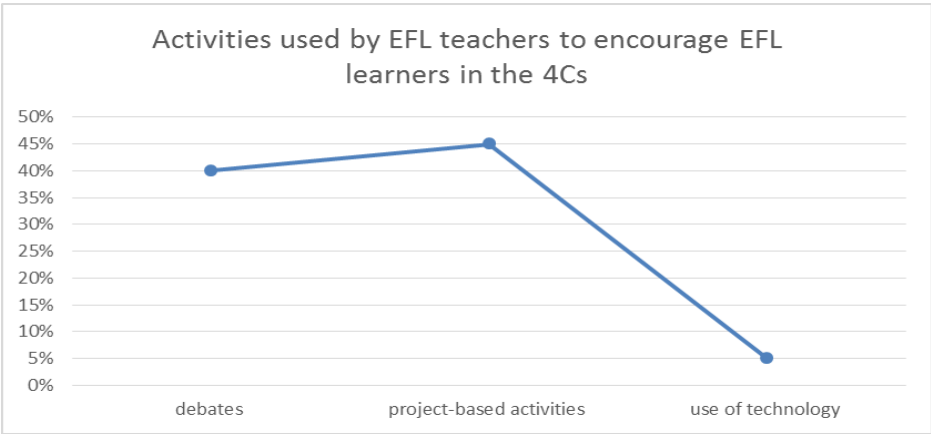


Figure 3: Motivational activities that EFL teachers use (Source: grounded research, 2024.)
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It is noticed in this figure that 40% of EFL teachers engage debates to foster the 4Cs of their learners in advanced classes, 45% of them use project-based activities to enhance their learners' 4Cs and just 5% of them use technology to help their learners in the 4Cs.

Table 5: EFL teachers' point of view.

Statement	Positive Answers	Negative Answers	Total
Collaborative activities, such as group discussions, peer reviews, and project-based, are central to enhancing the 4Cs.	850	00	850=100%
EFL teachers give students opportunities to express themselves through various mediums, such as storytelling, role-playing, or creating multimedia presentations.	850	00	850=100%
One of the main challenges EFL teachers face is the students' varying levels of language proficiency.	850	00	850=100%
EFL teachers use digital tools like online discussion boards, language learning apps, and multimedia resources to support the EFL learners' 4Cs.	43	807	850=100%

Source: Field Study, 2024

Throughout the analysis of this table, it is firstly noticed that all of the EFL teachers agree that discussions, peer review and project-based activities are essential for the enhancement of EFL learners' 4Cs. Next, all of them (850=100%) confirm that they give opportunities to EFL learners to express themselves in various ways. In addition, they all (850=100%) said that their primary challenge is the variety of EFL learners' levels of English proficiency. Last, the majority of them (807) do not use digital tools to support their learners in the 4Cs.

5. Discussion

Enhancing the 4Cs—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Beninese secondary schools is an essential focus for improving both language proficiency and overall educational outcomes. A thorough exploration of strategies and student preferences in this context can offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of various teaching methods and activities. this discussion focuses on EFL teachers and students' perception on activities for improving critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity, the challenges they face, and their viewpoints on integrating technology into their learning process. Thus, in the first table, all of EFL students (100%) mention activities like debates, cultural exchanges, and the use of technology as the most helpful for developing critical thinking skills. For example, when engaging in debates, students are required to consider multiple viewpoints, structure their arguments, and defend their positions in English. Such activities encourage deeper cognitive processing, making it easier for students to think critically in both their native and target languages. Additionally, critical thinking is often integrated into tasks that require students to assess different perspectives on societal issues or analyze literature.

In terms of communication, in figure 1, EFL students in Beninese secondary schools prefer activities that provide opportunities for real-world language use. Role-plays and group discussions are particularly favored, as they allow learners to practice English in a context that

simulates authentic communication. Role-playing activities, for instance, enable students to immerse themselves in different scenarios, such as ordering food in a restaurant or negotiating a business deal, which enhances their verbal fluency and vocabulary. Group discussions, on the other hand, help students practice speaking in a less formal, yet focused, environment. Collaboration in English lessons is another key element in enhancing the 4Cs. In Beninese secondary schools, 60% of EFL learners frequently collaborate through pair work or group projects. These collaborative activities are valuable for improving both communication and critical thinking skills. This starkly means that by working together, students exchange ideas, provide peer feedback, and negotiate meaning, which aids their comprehension and language proficiency. Collaborative learning activities such as peer reviews and group presentations contributed to a deeper understanding of English grammar, vocabulary, and speaking skills. Additionally, EFL students noted that these activities helped them build social bonds, which improved their overall engagement and motivation to learn English.

Creativity plays a significant role in EFL learning, as it encourages students to think outside the box and apply language skills in novel ways. Students in Beninese secondary schools (650=76.47%) use their creativity in activities and described instances where they used creativity to complete tasks, such as creating short stories, designing posters, or composing songs in English. This means that these creative tasks not only motivate EFL students to use English in imaginative ways but also help them retain language structures and vocabulary. For instance, a student might create a comic strip to summarize a story, combining writing and drawing skills, which reinforces both language and creativity. Most of EFL teachers reported that creative tasks helped them solve language-related challenges, such as finding new ways to express ideas when faced with vocabulary limitations. Next, despite the effectiveness of these activities, students face several challenges when it comes to critical thinking and collaboration. A common obstacle reported by Beninese EFL learners (40%) is the lack of sufficient vocabulary to articulate complex ideas. Without the necessary language tools, students often struggle to express their thoughts clearly during debates or discussions, which hinders the development of their critical thinking skills. Furthermore, some students (20%) report feeling uncomfortable collaborating in English due to a fear of making mistakes. This fear often results in reduced participation in group activities, limiting the opportunities for peer interaction.

To overcome these challenges, many students suggest that teachers should provide more language scaffolding, such as vocabulary lists or sentence starters, to help students express themselves more effectively. Additionally, creating a classroom environment that encourages risk-taking and emphasizes that mistakes are a natural part of learning can help reduce anxiety and promote more active participation. Peer feedback also plays a crucial role in overcoming these barriers. When students receive constructive feedback from their classmates, they become more confident in their language abilities, which facilitate both critical thinking and collaboration. As technology becomes increasingly integrated into the educational process, students in Beninese secondary schools have shared their views on how digital tools could aid in developing their 4Cs skills. All of them (100%) highlighted the potential of language learning apps, such as Duolingo and Babbel, to improve their vocabulary and speaking skills. These apps offer interactive exercises and personalized feedback, making learning more engaging and effective. Additionally, EFL students see online forums and social media

platforms as valuable tools for practicing communication, as they allow them to interact with other English learners or native speakers outside the classroom.

Students also mentioned websites such as TED-Ed and Khan Academy as excellent resources for improving critical thinking. These platforms provide videos and discussions on various topics, encouraging students to analyze information and form their own opinions. They reported that watching TED Talks, for instance, helped them understand complex issues in English, which in turn improved their ability to discuss these topics critically in class. Furthermore, online quizzes and interactive activities on educational websites allow students to test their understanding and engage in self-directed learning, which fosters independent thinking. When it comes to collaboration and communication, some EFL students turn to video conferencing platforms like Zoom or Google Meet for group work. These platforms allow students to collaborate remotely, share documents, and discuss ideas in real time. EFL learners reported that these tools were especially useful during the COVID-19 pandemic when in-person classes were disrupted. Group projects conducted via these platforms helped maintain a sense of connection and enabled them to continue practicing English. Additionally, social media groups or messaging apps like WhatsApp facilitate informal communication in English, offering EFL students a platform to practice language skills with peers outside the classroom.

A blended learning approach, which combines traditional classroom activities with digital tools, is another strategy students support. This approach allows them to benefit from the advantages of both in-person interaction and digital learning. For example, teachers can assign homework tasks on educational apps, while in-class activities can focus on collaborative projects and discussions. A blended environment fosters a dynamic learning experience where students can improve their 4Cs at their own pace, while still benefiting from teacher guidance and peer interaction. EFL students argued that they felt more engaged when digital tools complemented their traditional learning experiences. In a structured interview designed to understand EFL teachers' experiences and approaches to enhancing the 4Cs among Beninese EFL learners, teachers are often asked to reflect on the strategies they find most effective in fostering these skills. EFL teachers typically view critical thinking as a vital skill that enhances students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information. In figure 3, 40% of EFL teachers use debates to foster the 4Cs of their learners in advanced classes, 45% of them use project-based activities to enhance their learners' 4Cs. Research suggests that EFL teachers in Benin, like those in many other non-English speaking countries, use a variety of techniques, such as problem-solving tasks, debates, case studies, and reflective exercises, to stimulate critical thinking. According to a 2018 study by O'Reilly, active learning strategies, including collaborative problem-solving, were identified as highly effective in promoting critical thinking. For instance, when students are asked to work on tasks that involve evaluating multiple perspectives or creating solutions to complex problems, they develop the analytical skills that are crucial for critical thinking.

The integration of collaborative activities in EFL classrooms is another important focus in enhancing the 4Cs. Teachers often use group projects, pair work, and peer review sessions to promote collaboration among students. These activities not only help students improve their language skills but also teach them how to work together effectively, solve problems as a group, and communicate ideas clearly. A study by Gokce and Oguz (2020) found that collaborative tasks, particularly those that involve sharing ideas and negotiating meaning, are

highly beneficial in improving both language proficiency and social interaction skills. In Benin, where collaborative learning is still a developing concept, teachers tend to utilize these methods to help EFL students engage in more interactive and communicative forms of learning. The impact of these activities on language development is significant, as EFL students not only practice language structures but also enhance their fluency through social interaction. Communication skills are another area where EFL teachers focus their strategies, as the ability to communicate effectively in English is crucial for the students' academic and professional success. Teachers in Benin frequently employ task-based language teaching (TBLT) and role-playing exercises to encourage active use of language in authentic contexts. According to a study by Celce-Murcia (2001), TBLT promotes language use in real-life scenarios, which enhances learners' communicative competence. These activities require students to actively engage in both speaking and listening, which leads to improvements in pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and overall fluency. In Beninese classrooms, teachers also emphasize interactive speaking exercises, where learners are encouraged to discuss issues in English, thus enhancing their verbal communication skills.

Creativity, the fourth of the 4Cs, is another key area where EFL teachers in Benin see room for improvement. Teachers often incorporate creative writing exercises, storytelling, and multimedia projects into their lessons to encourage students to think creatively and use language in imaginative ways. According to Kabilan (2017), creative activities not only improve language proficiency but also help learners express their personal ideas and experiences. In the context of Benin, teachers may use culturally relevant content, such as local stories or historical events, as a basis for creative writing activities. This encourages students to engage with the language in a way that connects to their own lives and culture. Moreover, creative activities foster a deeper understanding of language as students must explore vocabulary, syntax, and expression in novel ways, which enhances their ability to think creatively in English. The impact of these strategies on students' language development is significant. EFL teachers in Benin report that when students engage in collaborative activities, critical thinking exercises, and creative projects, they not only improve their academic performance but also develop greater confidence in using the language. This confidence is crucial, as it allows students to apply what they have learned in real-world situations, which is essential for long-term language acquisition. For example, a study by Thomas and May (2019) found that students who participated in collaborative learning activities showed higher levels of motivation and language proficiency.

Additionally, these students were more likely to continue using English outside the classroom in real-life situations, which further reinforced their language development. The ability to communicate confidently and creatively in English is a strong indicator of overall language proficiency, and this is an area where Beninese EFL students have shown marked improvement when taught with student-centered, collaborative, and creative methods. Assessing the creative abilities of EFL students presents both challenges and opportunities for teachers. All of EFL teachers (100%) give positive answers about the fact that the primary challenge they face is the EFL students' varying levels of language proficiency. In addition, creativity, being a subjective quality, is difficult to measure through traditional testing methods. Teachers often rely on project-based assessments, peer reviews, and self-reflections to evaluate students' creative work. In many cases, teachers assess the originality of ideas, the

ability to integrate new vocabulary and structures, and the overall coherence and fluency of the language used. For instance, teachers may assess a student's creative writing by considering the complexity of the ideas, the diversity of vocabulary, and the appropriate use of grammatical structures. According to a study by Runco and Acar (2012), creativity in language learning can be assessed by looking at both the process and the product, considering how students arrive at solutions or express their ideas. In classrooms, teachers might use rubrics that evaluate creativity in terms of originality, language use, and the depth of content, ensuring that assessments align with fostering the 4Cs, particularly creativity and critical thinking.

Finally, despite the potential benefits of technology, teachers still face challenges when integrating digital tools into their lessons. Issues such as unreliable internet access, limited access to computers, and insufficient training in using technology effectively can hinder the implementation of technology-enhanced learning. According to a report by UNESCO (2020), many educators in low-resource settings like Benin often lack the necessary infrastructure to make full use of digital tools. To address these challenges, some EFL teachers in Benin utilize offline resources, such as printable worksheets or video recordings, which can be accessed without an internet connection. Others collaborate with local communities or non-governmental organizations to provide access to educational technologies. By adopting a flexible approach and using a combination of digital and traditional resources, teachers can still create a stimulating learning environment that promotes the 4Cs.

6. Suggestions

In Beninese secondary schools, where the primary focus may often be on grammar and vocabulary acquisition, integrating the 4Cs into EFL curricula can greatly enhance students' ability to apply language skills effectively in real-world situations. EFL teachers in Benin must, therefore, explore and adopt teaching strategies that nurture these essential 21st-century skills. Critical thinking can be fostered by designing lessons that challenge students to analyze, evaluate, and solve complex problems using the English language. For example, EFL teachers can introduce case studies or role-playing exercises where students are required to think critically about a scenario and express their opinions. These activities encourage learners to assess information, consider various perspectives, and justify their arguments in English. Teachers should provide open-ended questions that allow students to engage in deeper reflection, fostering a culture of inquiry and problem-solving that extends beyond language learning to include personal and social issues relevant to their lives in Benin.

Effective communication in English is more than just mastering vocabulary and grammar. It involves the ability to convey ideas clearly and listen actively. To enhance communication skills among EFL learners, Beninese teachers can incorporate more interactive speaking activities, such as group discussions, presentations. These activities not only provide students with the opportunity to practice speaking in diverse contexts but also help them develop listening and responding skills. By creating a supportive environment where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas, teachers can encourage active participation and reduce the anxiety often associated with speaking a foreign language. Collaboration is another crucial component of the 4Cs that can be integrated into EFL teaching through group work and

project-based learning. EFL teachers can assign tasks that require collaboration, such as creating a class magazine, preparing skits, or organizing a community event in English. These tasks encourage students to listen to each other, offer constructive feedback, and synthesize different viewpoints, thereby enhancing both their language and collaborative skills.

Creativity is key to engaging students and making language learning more enjoyable and memorable. EFL teachers can inspire creativity by encouraging students to think outside the box in their use of English. Activities such as storytelling, creating short films, designing posters, or writing original songs or poems in English give students opportunities to express themselves in unique ways. By allowing learners to take ownership of their learning and explore the language in a more creative context, teachers help them develop not just language proficiency but also imaginative and problem-solving abilities that will benefit them both in school and in future careers.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore effective strategies for enhancing the 4Cs (Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity) among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Beninese secondary schools. The findings indicated that incorporating interactive teaching methods, such as project-based learning and group discussions, significantly improved students' ability to think critically, collaborate with peers, express themselves effectively in English, and foster creativity. Additionally, the use of digital tools and real-world problem-solving activities played a crucial role in enhancing these skills. However, the study also faced several limitations. The sample size was relatively small and limited to a specific region, which may not fully represent the diversity of Beninese secondary schools.

Moreover, the short duration of the intervention may have impacted the long-term sustainability of the strategies employed. There was also variability in the teachers' levels of training and experience, which could have influenced the outcomes. Future research could expand the scope by including a larger, more diverse sample of schools across Benin and other Francophone countries to explore the effectiveness of these strategies on a broader scale. Additionally, longitudinal studies would help assess the lasting impact of these strategies on students' 4Cs development. Investigating the role of teacher professional development programs in enhancing the implementation of such strategies could also provide valuable insights for policy and practice.

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