



Looking into the impact of Ditammari Language on Beninese Learners' EFL Oral Communication

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Abstract: The mosaic of languages spoken in Benin can impact either positively or negatively learners' EFL speaking skills in this country. The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of the multiple languages used in the country on EFL learners' oral communication. The instrumentation is composed of questionnaire to EFL teachers, university students and lecturers of English through Facebook messages, WhatsApp written and audio messages, email in addition to classroom observations as well as participants' recorded voices, and the interviews. The results have revealed that the majority of the 50 questionnaire participants (10 selected), and the 10 interview participants, have argued that learners could succeed in speaking English. As suggestions, it needs noticing that EFL teachers should care about learners' agility and quick ability to speak their mother tongues, since these qualities can give learners a lot of opportunities to express themselves well in English. EFL teachers' effective and frequent training is required accordingly.

Keywords: Beninese languages, English, oral, communication.

Examiner l'impact de la Langue Ditammari sur la Communication Orale Anglaise des Apprenants du Bénin

Résumé : La mosaïque de langues parlées au Bénin peut impacter soit positivement ou négativement les compétences de l'anglais parlé dans ce pays. L'objectif principal de cette étude est d'examiner l'influence des multiples langues utilisées dans le pays sur la communication orale des apprenants en anglais. L'instrumentation est composée du questionnaire aux enseignants de l'anglais, aux étudiants et enseignants de l'anglais d'universités à travers des messages par Facebook, des messages audios et écrits par WhatsApp, email en plus des visites de classes aussi bien que les voix enregistrées des participants et des interviews. Les résultats ont révélé que la majorité des 50 participants au questionnaire (10 sélectionnés), et les 10 participants aux interviews, ont argumenté que les apprenants pourraient réussir en anglais parlé. Comme suggestions, il est à noter que les enseignants d'anglais devraient s'occuper de l'agilité et de l'habileté des apprenants à parler leur langue maternelle d'autant plus que ces qualités sont à même de donner aux apprenants plusieurs opportunités de bien s'exprimer en Anglais. La formation effective et fréquente est requise à cet effet.

Mots clés: Bénin, langues, anglais, oral, communication.

Introduction

The sections included in this study are: background to the Study; statement of the problem; objectives of the study; research questions; research hypotheses; research scope and limitation; research significance.

0.1. *Background to the Study*

The tongue in the mouth plays several roles as far as language learning is concerned because when the individual is accustomed to articulating most difficult and complex sounds, the tongue is then prepared to rapidity and agility. These competences are required in the English language learning and acquisition, since the most frequent inability to pronounce some sounds can be alleviated. Dhillon, (2016, p. 121) has argued that it has been discovered that the learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) most of the time come across a certain number of mutual technical hitches any moment they are learning to articulate an overseas' language. Brown, (1994, p. 284) has enumerated a few reasons which justify that these complications are phonological dissimilarities between their national language, their first naturally spoken one (L1) and their second language as well as their foreign language (L2 and FL). He has suggested six elements that distress students' phonation, for instance, mother tongue, oldness, knowledge, inborn phonetic capability, distinctiveness and linguistic personality, and enthusiasm and apprehension for upright articulation aptitude. Many learners speak ditammari at Lycée de jeunes filles of Natitingou, a language spoken speedily with complicated sounds.

0.2. *Statement of the Problem*

Beninese EFL learners meet a set of difficulties while learning languages in general and the target language in particular due to the occurrence of additional sounds, and the context of the country location, a French-speaking nation. In ditammari, there is, for example, absence of the consonant sound "l"; it is then replaced by "d". So, an otammari, a speaker of this language, pronounces "adeduya" instead of **alleluia**. Besides the omitted sounds, there are too many vibrations in their pronunciations which needs very constant and perpetual efforts from speakers.

0.3. *Objectives of the Study*

The fundamental objective of the current study is to investigate the effects of the cultural mixture and the variability of languages in general and the

Ditamari in particular which can errand incompletely the rapid knowledge and achievement of English. One of the specific objectives is to determine and evaluate some sounds in this national language. Another specific objective is to apply the rapidity and agility obtained from this language to English pronunciation teaching and learning.

0.4. Research Questions

- a. How can national languages influence English as a foreign language teaching and learning?
- b. What do you think can be the effects of ditammari on English as a foreign language teaching and learning?

0.5. Research Hypotheses

- National languages are conjectured to influence English as a foreign language teaching and learning
- If ditammari requires strength and vibrations, then it can trigger the agility and many qualities of articulation organs that could favour English as a foreign language teaching and learning

0.6. Research Scope and Limitation

The current study is focused on the manipulation of some syllables of ditammari words and the way they can ease the articulation of many sounds in English.

0.7. Research Significance

This study enables to contribute to the valorization of Beninese national languages, especially ditammari and the process of EFL teaching and learning success. This investigation made is expected to help EFL teachers in their classes by making several changes in their profession. In this case, learners will be encouraged to rate their languages and compare continually the vowel and consonant sounds they are accustomed to since their childhood with the ones used in English.

1. Review of Related Literature

Pronunciation is of great importance in language teaching and learning in general and in English in particular. Besides this importance, it is fundamental to know the trustworthy roles of body parts in oral communication. Dhillon, (2016, pp. 123-124) has argued that consonants are known to be a distinctive

communication sounds. In ditammari language, multiple utterances can be noticed with the use of several vowel and consonant sounds. The declaration of this author that these distinctive communication sounds are pronounced with whole or fractional termination of the air brook in the opening hollow by means of some language body parts is meaningful and relevant. This demonstration can reveal the multidimensional functions that language body parts assume in the course of oral communication. The tongue and other parts of the body are highly solicited in different articulations. The absence or the decay of some of these parts has dangerous impacts on the adequate use of languages. This author says as well that the structures of consonants can be strong-minded by three main facets which are: place of vocalisation, method of pronunciation and shaking of the verbal twines. It is to understand that each sound has its way of pronunciation and the speaker is compelled to respect the place of articulation. In addition, the vibrations required for each sound are to be respected in order to give different consonants and vowels their characteristics.

Moreover, in the same direction, it is said that the role and the place of articulation in the language teaching setting have continually raised a great number of serious discussions related to the teaching of English as a foreign language. These discussions are mainly about the importance or uselessness of the teaching and learning of pronunciation in language classes. Debaters also include concerns about the main aspects that impact either negatively or positively the pronunciation of students. They include intelligibility difficulties without forgetting the ones of identical articulation like native speakers' one and many other topics that draw the attention of truth-seekers and specialists (Babkina, 2018, p. 17). Debates are necessary in every domain to share points of view on a given idea. Arguments on the necessity of pronunciation teaching and learning in language classes are to be positive. It is obvious that many sounds look funny and odd in English utterances and the teacher can turn his or her classroom into a big market and a place of a mess if he or she does not pay attention to cope with this accordingly. However, this teaching can be interesting and the vivacity of the classroom will be triggered with adequate uses of strategies and procedures in language classes.

According to the results of Babkina's (2018, p. 13) questionnaire, the second language sounds are badly pronounced due to many parameters such as the absence of "these English sounds in the sound system of Sudanese Arabic language, the difference between the sounds' system of Arabic (general) and Sudanese Arabic, inconsistency of some English consonant and vowel sounds, variation of speech organ positions or breath control." Comparatively to this Arabic language, many speakers of national languages in Benin will surely get

almost the same difficulties with the use of English. In the languages of this country, there is absence of consonant sounds such as the ones obtained while pronouncing the words: 'that', 'thousand', and many others as well as the absence of the consonant "l" in ditammari language.

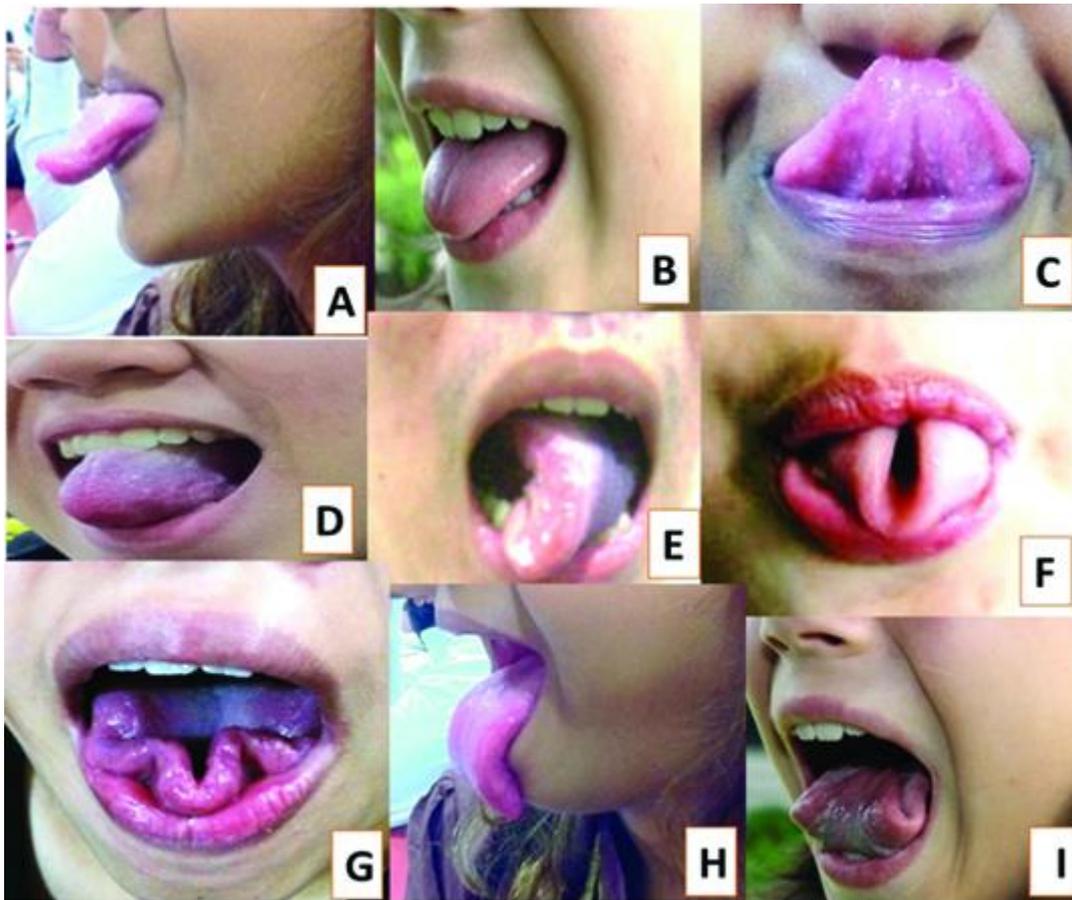


Figure 1: Tongue Movements

Photographs showing various tongue movements performed by students: a) Protrusion; b) Flattening; c) Touching nose with tongue; d) Thickening; e) Twisting; f) Rolling; g) Clover leaf shape; h) Touching chin with tongue; i) Folding. **Source:** Ashwini, (2016 p. 5)

Comments on the figure: It is noticed that articulation of different sounds does not require the following exaggerations by learners while pronouncing English words. In the learning process, EFL teachers are faced with learners' several ways

of pronouncing. These tongue movements, not suitable for the sounds uttered in this language, need to be continually rectified.

- a) Protrusion: This is an exaggeration and even a way to change the nature of the sound. This tongue movement will give no correct sound in English.
- b) Flattening: This movement will not give a neat and appropriate sound in English.
- c) Touching nose with tongue: This is not easy to perform and gives no appropriate sound in English.
- d) Thickening: The tongue is a little more slipped out and will not give the required sound.
- e) Twisting: This movement performed by learners is hard and useless for language learning and they will find it very complicated to pronounce English sounds if they are not shown the correct movements of the tongue.
- f) Rolling: This movement of tongue is rather used for blowing and a birdlike sound is produced which is not used in a speech.
- g) Clover leaf shape does not give speech sounds.
- h) Touching chin with tongue is not used in languages, but used for joking or playing.
- i) Folding: This movement is not suitable for producing speech sounds.

Ashwini, (2016 p. 3) has explained:

“Tongue is mainly used for taste, chewing and in speech. In the present study, we focused on the secondary function of the tongue as to how the tongue is used in phonetic pronunciation and dialectology and how these factors affect various tongue movements. Most of the studies carried out on tongue movements focus mainly on the role of tongue in speech as this plays a dominant role in human interactions. ...movements of the tongue and jaw in speech (which he terms ‘cyclicities’) have been evolved from their movements in infantile babbling. But, till date there are no studies done in this regard to test it experimentally. A number of studies have reported that tongue movements are produced by a small number of independent components which alters the shape of the tongue during speech. The tongue patterns exhibited during speech has been said to reflect both: the strategies of the speaker and constraints that are imposed by virtue of the physical properties of the tongue. In this piece of research, we wanted to test our hypothesis that “there is a clear correlation between the languages spoken by an individual and his ability to perform various tongue movements”

Ashwini, (2016 p. 3)

The author cited above is right to say that the role of tongue is most of the time to taste, to chew in addition to speech sound production role. When it is used in articulation and linguistics, it really has an impact on diverse tongue movements. Tongue and other parts of the body are very necessary in human

interactions in such a way that relationships are established through oral communication. The author has added that movements of the tongue and jaw in speech look funny but fundamental for language utilisation. As the shape of the tongue is sometimes altered during speech due to disabled cases, the disabled learners are seriously affected and no corrections can come true. Knowing through this opinion that an obvious connection between a given person's mother tongue and his or her as well as his or her capability to do innumerable tongue actions.

2. Methodology of the Study

This research methodology implies: research design, subject of research, objects of research, technique of collecting data, and technique of data analysis.

2.1. Research Design

The current study is both qualitative and quantitative since a qualitative research is first the process, sense, and consideration, the way a given individual considers or judges an opinion personally based on other researchers' viewpoints. Qualitative scholars give a clear and fair account of the findings, trust the data the respondents have provided, the analyses and interpretations made on these data. This study is a descriptive qualitative one, since it has enabled to appreciate the way learners pronounce naturally and the necessity of promoting national languages in terms of their prominence in EFL teaching and learning. This study has helped describe learners' difficulties in articulating English words as far as vowels, diphthongs, and consonants are concerned.

2.2. Subjects of Research

The subjects of the current study include EFL teachers and learners, university students and lecturers of English from whom the data have been collected.

2.3. Objects of Research

The objects of this study imply difficulties EFL learners have in grasping the teaching of this language pronunciation provided to them, since it has additional sounds that do not occur in their national languages and even in their second language, that is, for example, French in the context of Benin.

2.4. Technique of Collecting Data

The different data have been collected through phone calls, SMS, WhatsApp, and email without forgetting the 5 classroom observations. Out of the 50 questionnaire respondents, 10 have been randomly selected and interviews have been conducted with 10 respondents. In addition, audio method has been used for data collection. Words and phrases have been prepared taking into account several English sounds and stresses used for testing learners' English pronunciation. Next, learners are asked to articulate these words in unison, in groups, in pairs, and individually. These students' voices have been recorded respecting the organization: in unison, in groups, in pairs, and individually.

2.5. *Technique of Data Analysis*

The data have been analysed after listening to the recorded sounds many times. Through the use of International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols, learners' pronunciation has been transcribed. Learners' difficulties in pronunciation have been identified and relevant deductions made.

3. **Data Analysis and Research Findings**

The data analysis and the research findings of the current study have been presented as follows.

3.1. *Data Presentation and Analysis*

The data collected are classroom observations' results, questionnaire responses, interviews' responses, and learners' recorded voices. These data have been presented and analysed in the following ways.

- Classroom Observations Results

The data collected are 5 classroom observations' results. Learners have been observed and some learners identified considering their mother tongues: Many ditammari speakers have succeeded in pronouncing a great number of complicated sounds. Most of these learners are so concentrated that it can be easily deduced that they were used to pronouncing complex and complicated sounds formerly even from their birth. These learners seem to be more motivated than many other national languages' speakers in the classrooms. However, some of them were making confusions between the sounds "l" and "d" and teachers succeeded in rectifying them easily. Other difficulties they are confronted to,

were mainly about the pronunciation of: th, f, v, gn, y, etc. since they could not make clear distinctions between these sounds.

- Questionnaire Results

The 10 selected questionnaire responses are presented as follows. The questionnaire sheets have first and foremost permitted to discover whether learners usually pronounce English sounds well. The second item has asked if national languages influence EFL teaching and learning. The third item is to know whether the respondents think that ditammari can impact positively EFL teaching. Next, the participants have been expected to say whether ditammari can impact negatively EFL pronunciation teaching. Finally, the respondents have to express their opinion about ditammari speakers' English pronunciation easy correction.

Table 1: Questionnaire Results (10 respondents = 100 %)

Statements	Yes-%	No-%	10=100%
Learners usually pronounce English sounds well.	05-50%	05-50%	10-100%
National languages influence EFL teaching and learning.	10-100%	00-00%	10-100%
Ditammari impacts positively EFL teaching.	05-50%	05-50%	10-100%
Ditammari impacts negatively EFL pronunciation teaching.	05-50%	05-50%	10-100%
Ditammari speakers' English pronunciation is easily corrected.	03-30%	07-70%	10-100%

Source: investigation field

Table 1 shows that 50% of the selected participants think that learners usually pronounce English sounds well. All of them-100% have said that national languages influence EFL teaching and learning. Half of them-50% argue that ditammari impacts positively EFL teaching. 50% of them also demonstrate that

ditammari impacts negatively EFL pronunciation teaching. 30% of the respondents have recognised ditammari speakers' English pronunciation easy correction whereas 70% of them have rejected this opinion.

- Interviews' Results (10 respondents = 100 %)

The interviews' responses have been presented through the table below. The respondents were expected to justify whether learners' English sounds pronunciation capacity can be fostered. Next, they have to demonstrate national languages' influence on EFL teaching and learning. In addition, they are asked to say to what extent ditammari words' articulation can favour language body parts' rapidity and agility. Moreover, they are to show how ditammari can cause EFL words' mispronunciation. The third interview question was to discuss national languages, especially ditammari speakers' English pronunciation easy correction.

Table 2: Interviews Results (10 respondents = 100 %)

Statements	Yes-%	No-%	10=100%
Learners' English sounds pronunciation capacity can be fostered.	10-100%	00-00%	10-100%
National languages have influence on EFL teaching and learning.	5-50%	5-50%	10-100%
Ditammari words' articulation can favour language body parts' rapidity and agility	5-50%	5-50%	10-100%
Ditammari can cause EFL words' mispronunciation	5-50%	5-50%	10-100%
National languages, especially Ditammari speakers' English pronunciation can easily be corrected.	5-50%	5-50%	10-100%

Source: investigation field

Table 2 shows that 100% of the selected respondents have argued that learners' English sounds pronunciation capacity can be fostered. To the second question, 50% of the respondents have said that national languages have influence on EFL teaching and learning. The third question has made 50% of the participants think that ditammari words' articulation can favour language body parts' rapidity and agility. The fourth interview question has made 50% of the respondents argue that ditammari can cause EFL words' mispronunciation. Finally, 5 participants (50%) have demonstrated national languages, especially ditammari speakers' English pronunciation easy correction.

- Analysis of Learners' Voices

After listening to learners' recorded voices many times and carefully, the following sounds have been identified through their phonetic transcriptions. In the following words, different kinds of mispronunciations have been identified. "says": /seɪz/, "lake": /leɪk/ /lak/ /lek/ /lek/ /le k/ /lek/, "date": /deɪt/ /det/ /det/ /det/ /det/, "late": /leɪt/ /det/ /det/ /det/ /det/, "tray": /treɪ/ /tre/ /traɪ/ /tre/ /tre/, "has": /həz/ / həs/ /has/ /as/, "think": /θɪŋk/ /tɪŋk/ /fɪŋk/ /tɪŋk//fɪŋk/.

3.2. Research Findings

At the end of the data analysis, it can be discovered that the original contact with ditammari language from childhood has made several changes in its speakers who have confused English sounds with their mother tongues' articulations. Consequently, these learners have hardly distinguished the following sounds: /d/, /θ/, /t/, /z/, /s/, /f/, /p/, /v/, /p/, /f/, /dʒ/, /ʒ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /ə/, /ɜ:/, /eɪ/, /əʊ/, /eə/, /ɪə/, /ʊə/, /z/, /ɪd /, /ŋ/. It has also been found that in ditammari, speakers say "ayeen'ta"-meaning "Hello", "nann'naanti"-meaning "very well", "ayeen'ntretumba"-meaning "What is your name", "n'nsuanangue"-meaning "See you tomorrow", "nan n'ga piiga"-meaning "tomorrow morning", "n'po koun"-meaning "my wife", "aweeni"-meaning "It is nice, it is wonderful". From these ditammari words or phrases, the following sounds can be drawn: /a/ /y/ /e/ /t/ /n/ /an/ /tr/ /u/ /b/ /s/ /g/ /p/ /ii/ /w/.

4. Discussion

The main results from classroom observations can be mentioned as follows. Many EFL learners, especially ditammari speakers, are able to articulate difficult sounds even if they face some challenges in their pronunciation. These

qualities can foster the process of EFL teaching and learning. The results of the questionnaire are chiefly that, although learners do not always succeed in uttering all English sounds in the right way their mother tongue helps them to some extent in grasping the adequate pronunciation. National languages can have both negative and positive effects on English oral communication, provided that EFL teachers correct their learners' language conveniently. The interviews' responses can be mainly capitalised that ditammari speakers' capacity of pronouncing English sounds can be fostered when EFL teachers make use of appropriate strategies and procedures.

As far as learners' recorded voices are concerned, the sounds obtained are: /seiz/, for the word "says" is a wrong pronunciation because the correct pronunciation of says is /sez/. The word "lake", pronounced /leIk/ is rated to be correct whereas /lak/ and /lek/ are wrong pronunciations. The right pronunciation of the word "date" is /deIt/ but many students have pronounced it wrongly in the following ways: /det/. /leIt/, a correct pronunciation of the word "late" has been distorted as follows: /det/. For the word "tray", /treI/ is a correct pronunciation, /tre/ is a wrong pronunciation as well as /traI/. As far as the word "has" is concerned, /həz/ is a correct pronunciation, but /həs/, /has/, and /as/ are noticeable mispronunciations. The right articulation of the word "think" is /θiŋk/ while /tiŋk/, /fiŋk/, and /tink/ are wrong pronunciations.

The research findings mainly show that some English sounds also occur in ditammari and among these English sounds: /w/, /d/, /θ/, /t/, /z/, /s/, /f/, /p/, /v/, /p/, /f/, /dʒ/, /ʒ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /ə/, /ɜ:/, /eɪ/, /əʊ/, /eə/, /ɪə/, /ʊə/, /z/, /ld /, /ŋ/, for example, the following ones can be found in ditammari context: /a/ /y/ /e/ /t/ /n/ /an/ /tr/ /u/ /b/ /s/ /g/ /p/ /ii/ /w/, /tʃ/. These findings testify the ability of learners to use the English language appropriately in their classes thanks to their national languages prior preparations to many English sounds.

The research questions and hypotheses have found their answers through the results above. The first research question has been framed to know the way national languages can influence English as a foreign language teaching and learning, while the second one has inquired about what can be thought about the effects of ditammari on English as a foreign language teaching and learning. Consequently, it can be argued, considering the first hypothesis that national languages and especially ditammari in this context can influence the process of English as a foreign language teaching and learning. Such influences are rated to be either positive or negative. According to the second research question in line with the second hypothesis, the speakers of ditammari express themselves

exercising power and vibrations of tongue and other language body parts, and they are originally apt for articulating many complex sounds in English and the task can be made easy to EFL teachers in their classes. But this is not always the case.

According to Henderson, & Lindberg-Kransmo, (2002, p. 8) “the nasal cavities” play excellent roles in sounds production in connection with their resonance, and other functions. This is mainly the body location where vibrations take place. The nasal cavity gives either a pleasant or an unpleasant quality to the voices of speakers and singers depending on the quality of the nasal cavity itself. It is important to deduce that EFL teachers have to check continually whether their learners are able to utter the different sounds naturally or not so as not to waste their time because some of them may never articulate all sounds perfectly.

5. Suggestions

It is worth suggesting that EFL teachers should emphasise the relationships occurring between national languages and English sounds to interest more learners in their classes. In ditammari, for instance, EFL teachers can draw their learners’ attention to the following sounds: /a/, /y/, /e/, /t/, and /n/, as in the ditammari word “ayeen’ta”; /an/, in the ditammari word “nann’naanti”, /tr/ /u/ /b/, in the ditammari word “ayeen’ntretumba”, /s/ /g/, as in the ditammari word “n’nsuanangue”, /p/ /ii/, in the ditammari word “nan n’ga piiga”; /w/, in the ditammari word “aweeni”, and /tʃ/, in the ditammari word “n’tcha”. Among the main suggestions, it is also necessary to mention that EFL teachers should take advantage from the agility to utter extraordinary sounds and they should be trained accordingly for their learners’ effective success in the English language.

Conclusion

The problem formulated in this study is the challenges that EFL teachers and lecturers face in their classes, for example, the diversity of national languages which affect EFL learners’ acquisition and learning positively or negatively. The global objective is to identify the effects of these languages on learners’ acquisition and learning of English. The methods used are questionnaire through phone calls, SMS, WhatsApp, and email as well as classroom observations without forgetting learners’ recorded voices. The most salient results are: ditammari like other Beninese national languages can impact the process of EFL teaching and learning in either positive or negative ways, so EFL teachers should take into account both aspects seriously in their classes. In the literature review, Ashwini, (2016 p. 3) has

explained the variety of the functions of tongue, a language body part and especially its importance in words' pronunciations.

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