

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Problem

In the era of globalization, English has solidified its role as a global language, essential across multiple sectors such as education, business, and technology (Crystal, 2003). Its status as a *lingua franca* facilitates international communication and access to global opportunities. Consequently, proficiency in English is increasingly crucial for students aspiring to excel in global contexts, whether they seek higher education abroad, career advancements, or integration into international communities (Graddol, 2006). For high school students in French-speaking countries, mastering English is particularly significant. International schools in these countries offer English-language curricula to prepare students for a world where English proficiency is a key asset. The ability to speak English fluently is vital for academic success and professional development, allowing students to participate effectively in international discourse and opportunities (Barrett & Liu, 2016).

Despite the importance of English-speaking skills, students in French-speaking countries often face unique challenges. Differences in linguistic structures and limited exposure to English outside the classroom can obstruct their speaking proficiency. Therefore, it is crucial to explore effective strategies and methods for improving this skill within the context of international schools. Based on these statements, I planned to conduct research aiming to investigate and identify factors affecting students' English-speaking ability in *Complexe Polytechnique et Universitaire de Bangui* (CPUB), located in the Central African Republic, one of the French-speaking countries. This research is conducted by examining current teaching practices, challenges, and opportunities to provide actionable insights that can help educators support students in developing their English communication skills to meet global demands.

The schools who provide English lesson play a crucial role in advancing English language skills in non-English-speaking countries, such as those where French is the primary language. These institutions provide an English-medium environment, where the language is used extensively in teaching various subjects. These schools often adopt bilingual or English-based curricula, which are specifically designed to incorporate English into a wide range of subjects. This approach helps students build their English language skills through consistent exposure and practice. By engaging with English across different disciplines, students not only improve their language abilities but also gain exposure to diverse cultural perspectives and international standards (Brutt-Griffler, 2017). This comprehensive educational model prepares students to face global challenges and seize opportunities in a multicultural world.

Students in French-speaking countries encounter several linguistic challenges when learning English. One prominent difficulty is the phonetic differences between French and English. English features approximately 20 vowel sounds, compared to only 16 in French, which can complicate pronunciation and listening skills for French-speaking learners. Studies have shown that over 60% of French students struggle with English vowel sounds due to these phonetic discrepancies (Renaldi, Stefani, & Gulö, 2016). Additionally, the syntactic structures of the two languages differ significantly. For example, English word order and tense usage often confuse French speakers, leading to frequent grammatical errors and reduced fluency (Grosjean, 2010). Another major challenge is the limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Surveys indicate that nearly 70% of French-speaking students report rarely using English outside of school settings, which delays their ability to develop practical language skills and diminishes their confidence in real-world situations (Søndergaard, 2001). This lack of immersion creates a gap between classroom learning and everyday language use. The availability of qualified English teachers and effective teaching materials is inconsistent.

Speaking proficiency in English is a critical component of language learning, often considered more essential than reading or writing skills. This is because speaking facilitates direct communication, negotiation, and social interaction, which are vital in both personal and professional contexts. According to García and Wei (2015), effective speaking skills enable individuals to engage in real-time dialogue and express themselves clearly and persuasively. This direct interaction is crucial in various scenarios, from academic discussions to business negotiations and social engagements. The ability to speak English fluently significantly impacts students' confidence and academic performance. Research indicates that students with strong speaking skills are more likely to participate actively in class, which can enhance their overall learning experience.

Ineffective teaching methods also contribute to the difficulty in developing speaking skills. Traditional language teaching approaches that focus heavily on grammar and vocabulary, rather than on practical speaking exercises, can limit students' ability to use English effectively in conversation. Modern pedagogical strategies emphasize communicative competence, but many educational settings still rely on outdated methods that do not adequately address speaking skills (Ellis, 2008). For native French speakers, additional challenges arise, particularly in pronunciation and intonation. English phonetics differ significantly from French, leading to difficulties in producing and recognizing English sounds. Abdalgane and Idris (2020) note that French speakers often struggle with English vowel sounds and the rhythm of the language, which can affect their overall pronunciation and clarity.

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) theory, developed by Dell Hymes (1972), emphasizes the importance of communicative competence in language learning, which includes the ability to use language effectively in diverse social contexts. Hymes expanded the concept of linguistic competence by incorporating sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic elements, enabling individuals not only to understand grammar but also to apply language appropriately in real-world interactions. In the context of this research, CLT serves

as a crucial foundation for enhancing English speaking skills among high school students at international schools in French-speaking countries. This approach underscores the importance of interaction and the practical use of English in everyday situations, helping students overcome linguistic and social barriers they may encounter. By employing CLT, this study aims to create a more dynamic and communicative learning environment where students can practice speaking English naturally, gaining the confidence to use the language outside the classroom, which is essential in today's globalized world.

In conjunction with CLT, the use of technology and multimedia plays a crucial role in enhancing English language learning. Language learning applications, educational videos, and social media platforms are integral to making the learning process more interactive and engaging. For instance, language apps offer students opportunities to practice speaking through interactive exercises and immediate feedback. These tools provide personalized learning experiences, allowing students to improve their pronunciation and grammar at their own pace (Ghafar, 2023). Videos can expose students to different accents, intonation patterns, and cultural contexts, which are vital for developing listening and speaking skills. Additionally, social media platforms enable students to participate in English conversations with native speakers and peers worldwide, promoting practical language use and cultural exchange (Ghafar & Raad, 2023).

The school I chose for this research is the *Complexe Polytechnique et Universitaire de Bangui* (CPUB or Polytechnique School and University of Bangui). This school is a private school located in Bangui, the capital of Central African Republic (CAR), one of the French-speaking countries. It was established in 1968 under the name *Complexe Preparatoire Internationale* (CPI or International Preparation School). Then in 2024, the school changed its name to *Complexe Polytechnique et Universitaire de Bangui* (CPUB). This school is located on *Quartier Lakouanga* or Lakouanga Neighborhood. This school was founded by the local private entity with the aim of improving education in CAR. The school is led by a Coordinator acting as a school principal and is composed of national staffs

and teachers. Most of the students are national students but there are a few foreign students from expatriates living in the country. The curriculum used is a national curriculum that refers to French and African Education. The school is consisted of a total of 35 teachers (including 04 English teachers), 10 school staffs, 429 male students, and 409 female students. The school is composed by 4 buildings with a total of 18 classrooms, 1 library, 1 principal's office, 7 administrations' offices, 1 teachers' room, 1 sport field, 1 storage room, 8 male washrooms, 8 female washrooms, 1 teacher washroom, 1 auditorium, and 1 medical room.

The school offers stages of education such as kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, and university. Learning activities take place on Monday to Friday from 07.00 to 12.00 for kindergarten, and from 07.00 to 15.00 for primary, secondary, and university. The school implements 3 trimesters, where each trimester consists of 3 months. Trimester 1 takes place during October - December, trimester 2 takes place during January - March, and trimester 3 months during April - June. The evaluations are conducted by the teachers at the end of each chapter in a subject. The same evaluations are also completed at the end of each trimester. After completing each trimester, students get a 2 weeks of study break.

At the kindergarten stage, students learn in one class consisting of 30 to 40 students. At the primary stage, there are 6 classes starting from grade 1 to 6. In secondary school, there are two levels: lower sixth grade (*Prèmier*) and upper sixth grade (*Terminale*). Students at the *Prèmier* study for 4 years, then move up to the *Terminale* for 3 years. At the end of the *Terminale*, students are required to take the Baccalaureate exam. The results of this exam can also be used to pursue university-level education.

At the secondary stage, there are 3 branches of study (*sections*) consisting of 12 students each. A *section* is a class with a particular subject as its main subject. Students are placed in different *sections* according to the subjects they are best at. This *section* is determined by the evaluation results in the first month of learning. The *sections* in this school are as follows:

Section A: Literature

Section B: Economy

Section C: Science

In addition to these 3 *sections*, the school also provides complementary subjects in the form of French, English, history, geography, natural science, and business planning. At the *Terminale*, students have additional complementary subjects of philosophy. Learning activities are delivered in French and their own national language, *Sango*. English is taught twice a week (3 hours per week) in each grade from primary to secondary school.

The primary objective of this research is to identify the factors influencing English speaking proficiency among students at *Complexe Polytechnique et Universitaire de Bangui* (CPUB) in Central African Republic. By examining these factors, I would like to uncover key elements that affect students' ability to speak English effectively. Another goal is to evaluate the effectiveness of the current teaching methods used to enhance speaking skills. This involves assessing various instructional strategies to determine their impact on student performance and providing recommendations for improving these methods. Lastly, this research seeks to contribute to the development of more effective English teaching strategies within schools in French-speaking countries. By identifying challenges and evaluating existing approaches, the study aims to offer insights that can help refine educational practices and improve overall language instruction, ultimately supporting students in achieving better English-speaking skills.

I used quantitative research design to investigate factors affecting English speaking proficiency among students at this school. Quantitative research is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for the collection of numerical data that can be statistically analyzed to identify patterns and correlations. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research provides a structured approach to examine relationships between variables and can offer robust insights into educational phenomena. The data collection techniques I used include an oral test, a

questionnaire with a Likert scale, and an interview. Oral tests and a questionnaire with a Likert scale have been distributed to the students to gather quantitative data. Meanwhile, the interview were administered to evaluate students' speaking skills, providing measurable data on their language abilities.

For data analysis, I used descriptive statistics to identify significant relationship between teaching practice and students' speaking proficiency. According to Field (2013), these analytical techniques are essential for understanding how different factors influence language learning outcomes. The combination of quantitative data collection and accurate statistical analysis would provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors impacting English speaking skills and the effectiveness of current instructional methods.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

Based on the background described above, I identified two main problems to be investigated in this study. The first problem concerns the factors that affect students' English-speaking ability at *Complexe Polytechnique et Universitaire de Bangui* (CPUB). Understanding these factors is essential to identifying the challenges and barriers students face in developing effective speaking skills. The second problem focuses on the implementation of learning methods at CPUB. This aspect explores how teaching strategies are applied in the classroom and how they contribute to the development of students' English-speaking proficiency.

1.3 Limitation of the Problem

This study focused on *Complexe Polytechnique et Universitaire de Bangui* (CPUB), secondary stage, and examines the factors affecting English speaking proficiency among high school students. It includes an analysis of teaching methods and their effectiveness, with data collected through oral tests, questionnaires, and interviews. The findings are also constrained by the availability of participants and resources, which may affect the depth of the analysis.

1.4 Formulation of the Problem

Based on the research focus stated above, I described the research problem formulation as follows:

1. What are the factors affecting the English-speaking proficiency of students at *Complexe Polytechnique et Universitaire de Bangui* (CPUB)?
2. How effective are current teaching methods in improving students' English-speaking skills at *Complexe Polytechnique et Universitaire de Bangui* (CPUB)?

1.5 Objective of the Research

The objectives of this research are:

1. To identify and analyze the factors that affect the English-speaking proficiency of students at *Complexe Polytechnique et Universitaire de Bangui* (CPUB).
2. To analyze the difficulties experienced by the students during the English learning process at *Complexe Polytechnique et Universitaire de Bangui* (CPUB).
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of different teaching methods used to enhance English speaking skills and provide recommendations for improving these methods.

1.6 Benefit of the Research

The benefits of this research include:

1. Theoretical Benefits

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on language acquisition by providing empirical data on the factors influencing English speaking proficiency in a unique context. It expands theoretical frameworks related to language learning, particularly in bilingual environments, and adds to the understanding of how teaching methods impact language development.

2. Practical Benefits

The findings of this study offer actionable insights for educators and policymakers. By identifying effective teaching strategies and addressing

challenges faced by students, the research provides recommendations that can enhance English language instruction in international schools. This can lead to improved student outcomes and more effective educational practices.

1.7 Systematic Organization of Research

The systematic organization of the research consists of four chapters, as follows:

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains background of the problem, identification problem, limitation of the problem, formulation of the problem, objective of the research, benefits of the research, and systematic organization of the research.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter consists of the theoretical framework of English speaking ability and foreign language learning theories.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

This research methods includes time and location, research approach and method, research object and data, data collection technique, and data analysis technique.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' ENGLISH-SPEAKING ABILITY AT *COMPLEXE POLYTECHNIQUE ET UNIVERSITAIRE DE BANGUI* (CPUB), CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

This chapter describes the analysis of the research results that answer the formulation of the problem.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter contains conclusions and suggestions for the research. The conclusion of the analysis must answer the formulation of the problem.

