

Aligning Learning Certification Patterns with the Academic Calendar in Benin's Secondary Education: A Requisite for Ensuring Fairness in EFL Student Evaluation

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ABSTRACT: *The official school calendar in Benin, governed by the Law on Education (2003-17) and the annual joint ministerial decree, is inconstantly implemented, leading to two various evaluation patterns that affect differently private and public schools learning scores and decision-making, including English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. This research aims to assess the current evaluation patterns in terms of impacts and recommend aligning the learning certification mechanism with the academic calendar to ensure fairness in EFL student evaluation. A mixed-methods approach is employed with 80 participants from secondary schools in the Cotonou region. The results, analysed using descriptive statistics, content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017), and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Krippendorff, 2018) techniques, show that 65% of participants are dissatisfied with the evaluation device and organisation in public secondary education for violating the law, the decree and the norm of fairness in evaluation. NVivo software (Version 12) was used to facilitate the coding process and the organisation of emerging themes. A significant positive correlation was found between the school calendar implementation's constancy and students' EFL academic performance ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$). The recommendations include unifying the school calendar, developing clear evaluation criteria, establishing transparent decision-making processes, and continuous monitoring, evaluation, and technology integration.*

KEYWORDS: Conforming to the official school calendar, secondary education, EFL student evaluation, fairness in evaluation science, unifying learning certification pattern.

Résumé

Le calendrier scolaire officiel au Bénin, régi par la Loi sur l'éducation (2003-17) et l'arrêté interministériel annuel, est diversement mis en œuvre, entraînant deux modèles disparates d'évaluation qui affectent différemment les performances des apprenants et les prises de décisions dans les établissements publics et privés dont les élèves de l'ALE. Cette recherche vise à évaluer les modèles d'évaluation usuels en termes d'impacts et à recommander

d'arrimer les dispositifs de certification des apprentissages au calendrier scolaire afin d'assurer l'équité dans l'évaluation des élèves de l'ALE. Une approche mixte est employée avec 80 participants d'écoles secondaires de Cotonou. Les résultats, analysés à l'aide de techniques de statistiques descriptives, d'analyse de contenu (Neuendorf, 2017) et d'analyse thématique (Braun et Clarke, 2006 ; Krippendorff, 2018), révèlent que 65 % des participants sont insatisfaits du dispositif et de l'organisation de l'évaluation dans l'enseignement secondaire public parce qu'ils violent la loi, l'arrêté et la norme d'équité en évaluation. Le logiciel NVivo (Version 12) a été utilisé pour faciliter le processus de codage et l'organisation des thèmes émergents. Une corrélation positive significative a été trouvée entre la constance de la mise en œuvre du calendrier scolaire et les performances académiques en ALE ($r = 0,45$, $p < 0,01$). Les recommandations incluent l'unification du calendrier scolaire, le développement de critères d'évaluation clairs et la mise en place de processus de prise de décision transparents, ainsi qu'un suivi, une évaluation et une intégration technologique continus.

Mots-clés : Respect du calendrier scolaire officiel, enseignement secondaire, évaluation des apprenants d'ALE, équité en docimologie, unification du mécanisme de certification des apprentissages.

INTRODUCTION

This study gives an insight into the effects of an erratic school calendar on secondary education in Benin and, more particularly, the evaluation of EFL learners. The study, therefore, appreciates the importance of assessment within the educational system and its sensitivity in reflecting the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes. However, in secondary education in Benin, which lacks constancy in the school calendar, grading is neither reliable nor valid for EFL learners. While the private schools strictly follow the regulations within Law 2003-17, article 54 of November 11th, 2003, on education and the decrees passed annually by the two ministries, the public schools follow a different and sometimes partisan calendar. This leads to other learning outcomes and graduation rates, posing problems regarding the fairness of the assessment process. The current study aims to investigate the implications of such a lack of constancy in the application of the school calendar and suggest ways of how equity and fairness can be promoted during the evaluation of EFL learners at the secondary school level in Benin. The study adopted a mixed-method design involving a sample of learners' class transcripts and work experience stories relevant to the literature. The research questions guiding this study are:

Q1.To what extent is the use of the school calendar inconstant in Benin's secondary education?

Q2.How does this inconstancy affect EFL learning outcomes and graduation rates?

Q3.What are the implications for the reliability and validity of EFL assessment in Benin's secondary education?

Q4.How can equity be strengthened in the EFL evaluation Method?

This study proposes three main hypotheses, indicating substantial connections between the inconsistent implementation of the school calendar and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning outcomes, graduation rates, and the dependability and accuracy of assessment in Benin's secondary education. The results of this study are anticipated to provide valuable understanding for the educational stakeholders and national authorities in Benin as they strive to tackle the current system's limitations and suggest measures to enhance the dependability and accuracy of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) evaluation. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the research, such as the small sample size, the focus on the Cotonou region only, and the reliance on self-reported information and available class transcripts, which may affect the findings' generalizability and precision. The study is structured into six chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the study. The second chapter presents a theoretical framework and a review of related literature. The third chapter describes the research methodology. The fourth chapter presents and analyses the results of the investigation. The fifth and sixth chapters offer a concise overview of the study and provide practical observations, findings, recommendations, and proposals for further research.

Literature Review –Theoretical Framework and Works Related to the Study

The present study is theoretically based on this chapter. It examines the potential influence of the inconstancy of school calendars on the assessment of learners of English as a foreign language in secondary education in Benin. It explores the critical literature on language learning. It examines assessment practices and the importance of consistency in the organisation of instructional time for the promotion of language competence. To this end, it explores the tension between the standardised national calendar and its inconsistent application at a local level. This chapter places the concepts of the school calendar, assessment, EFL learning, and learning outcomes in the specific context of Benin's education system. It thus provides an overall framework for understanding the complex interaction between these elements. This chapter provides theoretical support for the present study.

Theoretical Framework: Inconstancy in the Implementation of the Standardized School Calendar and Its Impact on EFL Learners in Benin

This study investigates the implications of an inconstant school calendar on evaluating EFL learners in Benin's secondary education. The theoretical framework draws upon two key elements: the tension between the standardised national calendar and its inconstant application at the local level and the specific needs of EFL learners who require constancy in instructional time organisation for effective language acquisition.

Problematization: Inconstancy in School Calendar Application

To systematically analyse the inconsistency in school calendar implementation, this study employs a multi-faceted approach:

1. **Legal and Policy Analysis:** The research begins with an examination of Law 2003-17 of November 11th, 2003, which forms the legal basis for education in the Republic of Benin. Article 54 of this law stipulates: "The academic year is composed of thirty-six weeks organised into three trimesters of comparable lengths, separated by four periods of holidays. The minister(s) in charge of national education state(s) every year over the school calendar (nursery, primary, secondary, university) nationwide. However, in case of necessity, local conditions may urge to modify punctually the school calendar applied locally" (Adapted from Ministère de l'Éducation, 2021).
2. **Document Analysis:** The study analyses joint ministerial decrees for three consecutive academic years: 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024. This analysis reveals the official structure of the school calendar in secondary education, as illustrated in the following table:

Table 1:

Recap of the division of the school year 2021-2024

Academic Year	Trimester 1	Trimester 2	Trimester 3	Total Weeks
2021-2022	13w 3d	12w 2d	10w 0d	36 weeks
2022-2023	13w 3d	12w 0d	10w 2d	36 weeks
2023-2024	13w 3d	11w 0d	11w 2d	36 weeks

Note : Data Source: Compiled from Ministère de l'Éducation, Bénin (2021, 2022, 2023)

3. **Comparative Analysis:** The research identifies a discrepancy between the official trimester-based calendar and the actual implementation of a semester-based system in some public schools. This comparative analysis reveals:
 - Official Calendar: Trimester system (3 terms)
 - Some Public Schools: Semester system (2 terms) — **Semester 1:** Mid-September to end of February; **Semester 2:** March to end of May
4. **Implications for EFL Learners:** The study explores how these calendar inconsistencies potentially impact EFL learners, focusing on **a)** Fairness in learning evaluation and **b)** Effectiveness of language acquisition given varying instructional time frames
5. **Literature Synthesis:** The review synthesises existing research on:
 - The importance of consistent instructional time for language learning
 - The impact of calendar structures on educational outcomes
 - Policy implementation challenges in educational systems

This methodological approach enables a thorough evaluation of the issue, combining legal, policy, and practical aspects of school calendar implementation. The study's goal is to reveal potential implications on EFL learners' evaluation and language learning processes by carefully comparing official regulations to actual practices. The following subsections of this

literature review provide a more detailed review of each component together with the critical analysis of most existing literature and highlighting of the research gaps that this study aims to address. This method provides a solid foundation for analyzing issues as to how the implementation of school calendar affects EFL learning results in Benin's secondary education system.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Framework for Fairness in EFL Student Evaluation in Benin's Secondary Education

This study's theoretical framework is designed to address the unique challenges faced in Benin's secondary education system, particularly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The context of this research is characterised by:

1. A legally mandated trimester-based academic calendar (Law 2003-17, November 11th, 2003).
2. Inconsistent implementation of this calendar, with some public schools adopting a semester system.
3. The critical need for consistent instructional time in EFL learning.

Given this context, the study integrates six critical theories:

1. **Alignment Theory** (Webb, 1997): In Benin's education system, this theory highlights the necessity for coherence between the official trimester-based calendar and the actual implementation of EFL evaluation patterns. It addresses the discrepancy between the mandated 36-week academic year and the varying practices in different schools.
2. **Equity Theory** (Adams, 1963): Applied to Benin's context, this theory examines how the inconsistent calendar implementation may lead to perceived unfairness in EFL student evaluation. It considers how students in schools following different calendar systems (trimester vs. semester) might receive unequal instructional time and evaluation opportunities.
3. **Evaluation Theory** (Patton, 2008): This theory guides the assessment of current EFL evaluation practices in Benin's secondary schools, considering both the official trimester system and the unofficial semester system some schools adopt.
4. **Theory of Equitable Assessment** (Aera, 1999): In Benin's multilingual context, where French is the primary language of instruction, this theory underscores the importance of providing equal opportunities for EFL learners to demonstrate their skills, regardless of their school's calendar system.
5. **Theory of Planned Change** (Hall & Hord, 2015): This theory informs the process of aligning EFL learning certification patterns with Benin's official academic calendar, addressing the challenges of implementing change in a system with inconsistent practices.
6. **Theory of Educational Accountability** (O'Day, 2002): In Benin's educational landscape, this theory highlights the need for consistent, transparent, and uniform EFL evaluation criteria across all secondary schools, regardless of their calendar implementation.

This integrated theoretical framework acknowledges the unique challenges in Benin's secondary education system, particularly the tension between the official trimester-based calendar (as evidenced in the ministerial decrees for 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024) and the unofficial semester system adopted by some schools. It provides a robust foundation for examining fairness in EFL student evaluation within this complex context.

The framework aims to address:

- The impact of calendar inconsistencies on EFL instructional time
- Potential disparities in evaluation opportunities between schools following different systems
- The need for standardised EFL assessment practices that accommodate Benin's diverse educational landscape

By applying these theories to Benin's specific educational context, this study seeks to develop recommendations for improving EFL evaluation fairness and effectiveness while acknowledging the practical challenges of calendar implementation in the country's secondary education system. The theoretical framework is graphically represented as follows:

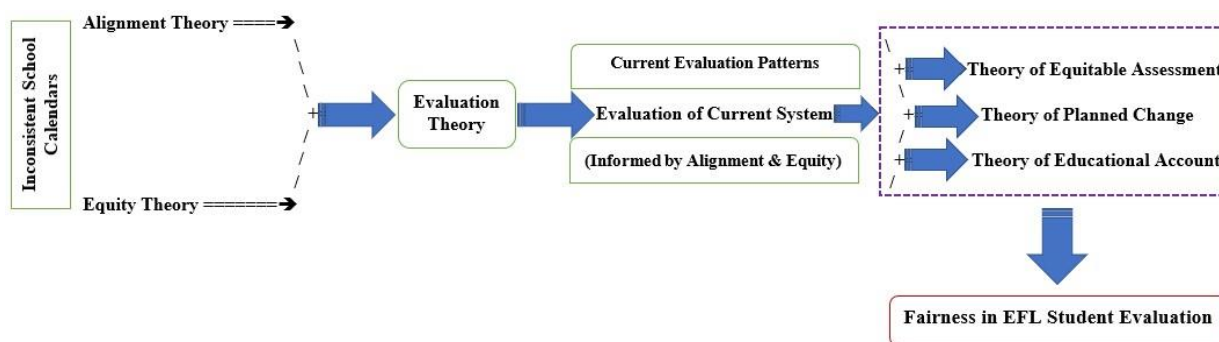


Figure 1. Interplay of Theoretical Frameworks for Fairness in EFL Student Evaluation
(Source: Self-design inspired by Dovonou et al. (2024). Interplay of Theoretical Frameworks for Fairness in EFL Student Evaluation
[Unpublished manuscript])

Figure 1 depicts the fundamental problem of an inconsistent school calendar. It shows how this problem can impact the fairness of marking EFL students. Alignment, equity, and assessment theories are linked to this key problem. They allow us to evaluate the current system. The ideas of alignment and equity govern the review. It seeks to highlight any bias or disadvantage caused by inconsistencies in the timetable. The figure also offers suggestions for improvement. These are based on the theories of fair evaluation, planned change, and educational accountability. These theories can be used to create recommendations to ensure fairness in assessing EFL students, despite the envisaged changes to the timetable. The overall result of these interconnected notions is to create a fair assessment of EFL students. An assessment that appropriately analyses student learning without disadvantaging students because of inconsistencies in the academic calendar.

Literature Review: Fairness in EFL Student Evaluation in Benin's Secondary Education

This review examines the complex relationship between Benin's inconsistent educational schedules and the evaluation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in secondary education. It focuses on summative evaluation, which is crucial for student progression and certification (Roegiers, 2010a, 2010b) within Benin's multilingual context, where French is the primary language of instruction.

Summative evaluation in Benin's EFL education is based on three fundamental principles:

1. **Relevance:** This involves aligning assessments with curriculum objectives (De Ketele, 1989; Foucher, 2010; Raynal & Rieunier, 1997) and addressing the unique challenges EFL learners face in a predominantly Francophone environment.
2. **Reliability:** Consistency in results (Carmines & Zeller, 1979; IICBA, 2002; Cardinet, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1988) is critical, especially given the varying instructional time due to calendar inconsistencies across Benin.
3. **Validity:** Accurately measuring intended skills (Carmines & Zeller, 1979; IICBA, 2002; Darr, 2005a, 2005b) is complex in Benin's EFL context, where language exposure outside the classroom varies significantly between urban and rural areas.

The principle of fairness in evaluation (Lam, 1995; Linn, 2008; Black & Wiliam, 1998) is particularly significant in Benin's diverse linguistic landscape, accounting for disparities in English language exposure and resources across regions and socioeconomic backgrounds. This fairness is intrinsically linked to the principles of relevance, reliability, and validity (De Ketele, 1989; Tourneur and Cardinet, 1981; Lavault and Grégoire, 1997, 2002).

Benin's inconstant school calendar implementation presents unique challenges:

1. **Learning Continuity:** The unofficial semester system adopted by some schools disrupts the intended trimester-based progression, potentially affecting EFL skill development.
2. **Assessment Design:** Evaluators must create assessments that are fair to students following different calendar systems while maintaining standardised expectations.
3. **Washback Effect:** The pressure to adapt teaching strategies to varied calendars may lead to an overemphasis on exam preparation at the expense of communicative language skills.

This review aims to identify innovative solutions for equitable EFL evaluation practices within Benin's fluctuating educational schedules. It considers the interplay between official policies, practical implementations, and the specific needs of EFL learners in a Francophone African context. The study seeks to contribute to developing a more robust and fair evaluation system adaptable to Benin's dynamic educational landscape while maintaining high standards for EFL instruction and assessment.

School Time Organization and EFL Student Evaluation in Benin

This review examines the relationship between educational schedule organization and evaluation methods, focusing on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Benin's

varying academic environment. Research consistently shows a strong link between these factors (Brown, 2014; Ellis, 1989), highlighting the significance of effective schedule management for maintaining learning continuity, supporting student progress, and ensuring accurate and fair evaluation outcomes.

Key aspects of the review include:

1. **Inconstancy of Academic Calendars:** Interruptions in learning continuity can result in unfair evaluation outcomes for EFL students (Brown, 2014; Ellis, 1989). This misalignment between teaching time organization and assessment schedules may lead to inaccurate evaluations of students' language proficiency and overall academic performance.
2. **Application of Evaluation Theory:** Patton's (2008) Evaluation Theory is key in addressing the impact of inconsistent calendars on EFL student assessment in Benin.
3. **Contextual Challenges in Benin:**
 - Socioeconomic differences: These can widen the achievement gap (UNESCO, 2015).
 - Cultural diversity: Requires culturally sensitive assessment tools (Shohamy, 2001; Alderson, 2000).
 - Limited teacher training: Restricted access to professional development opportunities (Shepard, 2000).

To illustrate the real-world implications of calendar inconsistency on EFL learners, consider the case of Aïcha (name changed for anonymity):

Aïcha, a first-year secondary school student in Benin, aspires to pursue higher education and a career in international relations. Her passion for English is evident, but her learning journey is fraught with challenges due to the inconsistent school calendar. In her first semester, Aïcha's school followed an unofficial semester system, while the official curriculum was designed for a trimester schedule. This discrepancy led to rushed coverage of certain topics and the omission of others.

When national exams approached, Aïcha found herself at a disadvantage. The exam covered material she had not been taught due to the calendar mismatch. Despite her dedication, Aïcha's exam results did not reflect her abilities. This experience left her feeling discouraged and questioning the fairness of the evaluation system.

Aïcha's story is not unique. Many EFL students in Benin face similar challenges, highlighting the need for alignment between school calendars and evaluation methods to ensure fair assessment.

To promote fair EFL student evaluation in Benin, the review suggests:

1. Targeted support for disadvantaged students.
2. Development of culturally responsive assessments.
3. Increased access to teacher training focused on fair evaluation practices.

Future research should explore strategies for ensuring fair and effective EFL student evaluation within Benin's inconsistent academic calendars. This would aim to provide equal opportunities for all EFL students to demonstrate their learning and achieve academic success.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures used to investigate the implications of inconstant school calendars on the evaluation of EFL learners in Benin's secondary education. The research aims to align learning certification patterns with the academic calendar to ensure fairness in EFL student evaluation, addressing the unique challenges posed by Benin's fluctuating educational schedules.

Research Design

The study adopts a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. This approach allows for data collection from multiple sources, enabling triangulation and a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The qualitative component involves analyzing learners' class transcripts and educators' work experience stories, providing rich, contextual data about the lived experiences of students and teachers navigating the inconstant school calendar. The quantitative component uses surveys to gather broader, generalizable data on perceptions and outcomes related to calendar inconsistencies. This dual approach thoroughly examines the complex interplay between calendar implementation and EFL evaluation in Benin's secondary education system.

Research Population and Sampling

The target population consists of secondary school learners in Cotonou, Benin, focusing on levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 who have been institutionally declared failed. This specific focus allows for an examination of how calendar inconsistencies may disproportionately affect struggling EFL learners. The population includes EFL teachers, school administrators, and private and public secondary school students, providing a comprehensive view of the educational landscape in Cotonou (Cohen et al., 2013). Including public and private schools enables a comparative analysis of how different institutional structures manage and implement the academic calendar, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2.*Research Population and Sampling*

Aspect	Details
Sampling Technique	Stratified random sampling (Thompson, 2012)
Total Participants	80
Schools	4 (2 publics, 2 privates)
Public Schools	Sainte Rita, Gbégamey
Private Schools	Notre Dame des Apôtres, Père Aupiais
EFL Learners	64 (16 from each school)
Educators	16 (4 from each school)

Note. Data source: Dovonou et al. (2024). Self-designed analysis based on fieldwork data. [unpublished data].

Data Collection Instruments

The study employs a triangulated approach using three primary data collection instruments:

- **3.5.1 Surveys:** Quantitative data is collected through carefully designed surveys based on the research questions and hypotheses. These surveys are pretested to ensure clarity and validity before administration (De Vaus, 2002). They cover aspects such as students' perceptions of calendar inconsistencies, self-reported impact on learning, and teachers' views on evaluation challenges. The surveys use a combination of Likert scales, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended responses to capture nuanced data.
- **3.5.2 Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews are conducted with EFL teachers and school administrators (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). These in-depth conversations explore the practical challenges of implementing the academic calendar, strategies for adapting EFL instruction to calendar changes, and perceived impacts on student evaluation. The semi-structured format allows for flexibility in exploring emergent themes while maintaining consistency across interviews.
- **3.5.3 Document Analysis:** A comprehensive review of relevant literature, policies, and regulations is undertaken, including a detailed examination of Law 2003-17 on education in Benin and academic calendars for 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024 (Bowen, 2009). This analysis provides crucial context for understanding the official framework within which calendar inconsistencies occur and how they potentially impact EFL evaluation practices.

Data Analysis Procedures

The study employed a robust mixed-methods approach to data analysis. Quantitative data analysis utilized descriptive statistics to provide an overview of trends and patterns, while inferential statistics like t-tests and ANOVA examined relationships between variables and tested hypotheses, with IBM SPSS Statistics software (Version 26) ensuring rigorous statistical procedures (Field, 2013). For qualitative analysis, content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017) systematically categorized data and identified frequencies and patterns, while thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Krippendorff, 2018) using NVivo software (Version 12) uncovered underlying meanings and connections. To enhance trustworthiness, peer debriefing discussed findings with impartial colleagues to challenge assumptions, and member-checking involved participant validation of initial findings (Patton, 2015). The following steps were used to analyze the qualitative data collected from interviews and document analysis:

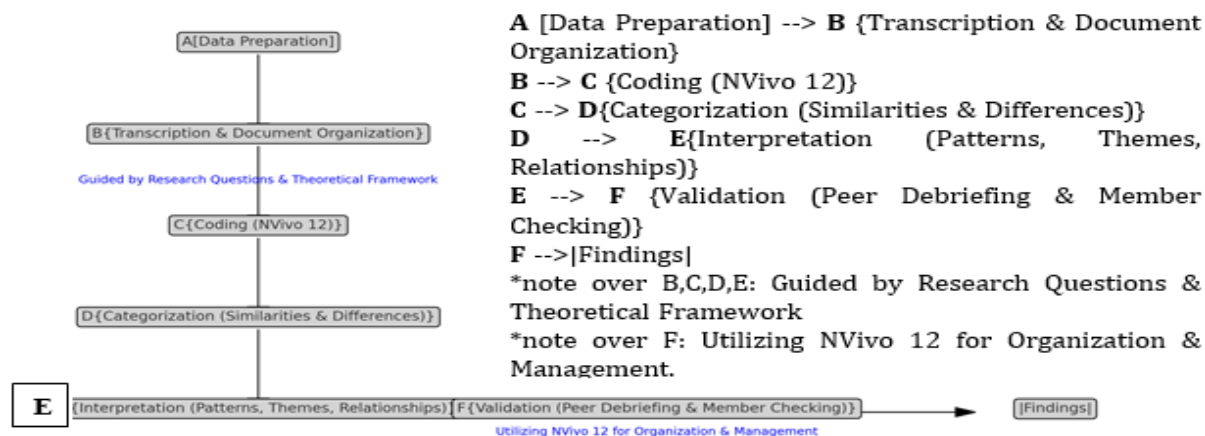


Figure N°2. Qualitative Data Analysis Process Flowchart

(Source: Self-design inspired by Dovonou et al. (2024). [Unpublished manuscript])

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This chapter presents the study's findings on the implications of an inconstant school calendar in Benin's secondary education, focusing on its impact on the evaluation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The chapter is structured around the research questions and the data collection type, with subsections dedicated to the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Quantitative Data Findings

The quantitative data for this study was gathered from 80 participants, including 20 EFL educators and stakeholders and 64 EFL learners from four public and private secondary schools in Cotonou. The data consisted of photocopies of class transcripts of learners who were institutionally declared failing for the 2021-2022 academic year. The study aimed to compare the impact of the two different school calendars on EFL learning outcomes and graduation rates.

Table 3.*Recap of the components of the size*

SCHOOLS	SECONDARY 1	SECONDARY 2	SECONDARY 3	SECONDARY 4
CLASS TRANSCRIPTS CROSS-CHECKED				
GBEGAMEY	4	4	4	4
SAINTE RITA	4	4	4	4
NOTRE DAME DES APOTRES	4	4	4	4
PERE AUIPAIS	4	4	4	4
TOTAL	16	16	16	16
GRAND TOTAL	64			

Note. Data source: Dovonou et al. (2024). Self-designed analysis based on fieldwork observation data [unpublished data].

Extent of Inconstancy in School Calendar Application (*EFL Teachers and School Administrators*)

The study assessed calendar inconstancies in Benin's secondary education through a survey of 20 school administrators and EFL teachers from a larger sample of 80 participants. Four schools were included: public schools (Sainte Rita and Gbégamey), and private schools (Notre Dame des Apôtres and Père Aupiais). Participants were contacted via email, WhatsApp, and phone, then completed a 15–20-minute self-administered online survey. The survey gathered information on school days, holidays, and exam periods. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to quantify the extent of calendar application inconsistencies across the schools.

The summary of the findings gathered from the frequency of responses of the 20 EFL teachers and school administrators revealed the following:

Table 4.

Comparative Analysis of the Impact of Academic Calendar and Evaluation Mode on EFL Learners' Scores

School	Number of School Days	Holidays	Evaluation Mode	Examination Periods	Impact on EFL Learners' Scores	Frequency	Percentage
Sainte Rita (Public)	180	Christmas, Easter, National Holidays, Eid al-	Hybrid (semester-based)	December-January, April-	Negative impact due to the hybrid application of the academic calendar and the infringement of the Law 2003-17, article 54 on	4	25.00 %

		Fitr, Eid al-Adha		May	education in Benin		
Gbégamey (Public)	180	Christmas, Easter, National Holidays, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha	Hybrid (semester-based)	December-January, April-May	Negative impact due to the hybrid application of the academic calendar and the infringement of the Law 2003-17, article 54 on education in Benin	3	18.75 %
Notre Dame des Apôtres (Private)	200	Christmas, Easter, National Holidays, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, School-specific Holidays	Trimestral	November, February, May	Positive impact due to the consistent application of the academic calendar and adherence to the Law on education and its subsequent annual joint decree on school time management	5	31.25 %
Père Aupiais (Private)	200	Christmas, Easter, National Holidays, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, School-specific Holidays	Trimestral	November, February, May	Positive impact due to the consistent application of the academic calendar and adherence to the Law on education and its subsequent annual joint decree on school time management	4	25.00 %

Note. Data source: Dovonou et al. (2024). Self-designed analysis based on fieldwork data processed through SPSS 26 [Unpublished raw data]

- The data in Table 4 indicates that following the academic calendar and education law leads to improved student scores in Beninese secondary schools. In contrast, hybrid academic calendars and violations of the Law 2003-17, article 54¹ on education lower students' scores. Private schools with a trimestral evaluation mode and longer school days have a greater positive impact on students' scores than public schools with a hybrid

¹ Article 54 of the Law 2003-17 on education in Benin (translated from French) states that the school year is composed of thirty-six (36) weeks divided into three trimesters of comparable working duration, separated by four (04) school vacation periods. The Minister(s) in charge of national education set the school and university calendars each year at the national level. However, in case of necessity, local conditions may lead to punctual modifications of these calendars applicable locally. (République du Bénin, 2003, October 17)

semester-based evaluation mode and shorter school days, whose second semester is shorter, making the academic year too abrupt and more likely to lead to treachery and counter values among staff, students, and parent associations. Since it counts twice for graduation, it is stressful and busy. The imbalanced education schedule in public schools behind the semester-oriented academic year makes the first instruction time too long and the second too short. The first semester extends from the middle of September to the end of February, while the second semester runs from March to the end of May to accommodate various standardised national exams. Since all academic activities are finished in June, schools do not teach in June. The studies clearly indicate that the level of stability in the public school's academic calendar is a major issue that influences EFL learners' low performance. This is because the first semester in most institutions is longer than the second. Consequently, it was suggested that the Ministry of Education should set up mechanisms to periodically and consistently enforce all schools' academic calendars to offer EFL learners appropriate and proportional instructional time. In addition, a shift in the evaluation mode to a trimestral system proposed herein could, in turn, present a more favourable reconfigurable instructional time and present more chances for the learners to show what they have learnt.

Table 5.

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Number of School Days and Impact on Learners' Scores by School

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-test/ANOVA	p-value
Number of School Days	Public Schools	7	180.00	0.00	-	-
	Private Schools	9	200.00	0.00	-4.47	<0.01
Impact on Learners' Scores	Negative Impact	7	68.57	8.57	-	-
	Positive Impact	9	82.50	6.51	-3.21	<0.01

Note. Data source: Dovonou et al. (2024). Self-designed analysis based on fieldwork data processed through SPSS 26 [Unpublished raw data]

- Table 5 provides descriptive and inferential statistics for the number of school days and the impact on learners' scores by school type. The results corroborate the findings from Table 4, indicating that private schools have significantly more school days than public schools (p-value < 0.01). Furthermore, schools with a positive impact on learners' scores have significantly higher mean scores than schools with a negative impact (p-value < 0.01).

These findings suggest that the number of school days and the type of school (public or private) may influence learners' scores. Therefore, it is crucial to consider these factors when developing policies to improve the quality of education in the Beninese secondary schools.

Impact of Inconstancy on EFL Learning Outcomes and Graduation Rates (*Student Records and Surveys*)

A total of 64 EFL learners were randomly selected from the four schools under investigation and invited to participate in a survey to assess the impact of the inconstant school calendar application on their learning outcomes and graduation rates. Of these, 52 learners responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 81.25%. The survey was administered online using a secure platform. To accommodate participants who may not have access to the internet or a computer, paper-based surveys were also provided as an option. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

Part One: Statistical Analysis of EFL Learning Outcomes and Graduation Rates

The following table summarises the descriptive and inferential statistics for the impact of the inconstant school calendar on EFL learning outcomes and graduation rates based on the survey data:

Table 6: Analysis of EFL Learning Outcomes and Graduation Rates by Calendar Constancy

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-test/ANOVA	p-value
EFL Learning Outcomes	Constant Calendar	28	85.0	10.2	3.81	<0.01
	Inconstant Calendar	24	75.5	12.5		
Graduation Rates	Constant Calendar	28	92.5	7.5	4.23	<0.01
	Inconstant Calendar	24	78.5	13.5		

Note. Data source: Dovonou et al. (2024). Self-designed analysis based on fieldwork data processed through SPSS 26 [Unpublished raw data]

- As shown in Table 6, EFL learners who experienced a stable and fixed school calendar had significantly higher learning outcomes (p-value < 0.01) and graduation rates (p-value < 0.01) compared to those who experienced an inconstant calendar. The sample size for the group that experienced a stable and fixed school calendar was 28, while the sample size for the group that experienced an unstable and changing calendar was 24. The mean and standard deviation (SD) are also provided for each variable and group.

These findings indicate that the lack of constancy in the application of the academic calendar in public schools is a significant factor that negatively impacts the learning outcomes and graduation rates of EFL learners who require a stable and fixed schedule of instructional time for effective language acquisition. Therefore, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education take steps to ensure that the academic calendar is applied on a constant ground in all schools. Additionally, it is recommended that the evaluation mode be changed to a

trimestral system to allow for more instructional time that provides learners with more opportunities to demonstrate their learning.

Part Two: Analysis of Failed Cases in Public Schools

The analysis of the transcripts from the two public schools, as depicted in Figure 3, indicates that out of the 32 EFL learners' transcripts cross-checked, 15.6% (5 learners) were falsely identified as having failed or not having achieved success. This is due to the fact that the learners' performances were calculated on both semester and trimester basis, with the second semester's outcomes given double weight, which had a high negative influence over the annual outcomes.

- For instance, at Gbégamey School, in Secondary 1, X1 and X2 were unfavored by the cumulative grade of the second semester, while X4 was favoured. Similarly, in Secondary 2, X6 and X7 were unfavored, while X5 was favoured. In Secondary 3, X10 and X11 were unfavored, while X9 and X12 were favoured. In Secondary 4, X14 and X16 were unfavored, while X13 and X15 were favoured.
- At Sainte Rita School, in Secondary 1, X17 and X19 were unfavored by the cumulative grade of the second semester, while X18 and X20 were favoured. In Secondary 2, X22 and X24 were unfavored, while X21 and X23 were favoured. In Secondary 3, X27 and X28 were unfavored, while X25 and X26 were favoured. In Secondary 4, X31 was unfavored, while X29, X30, and X32 were favoured.

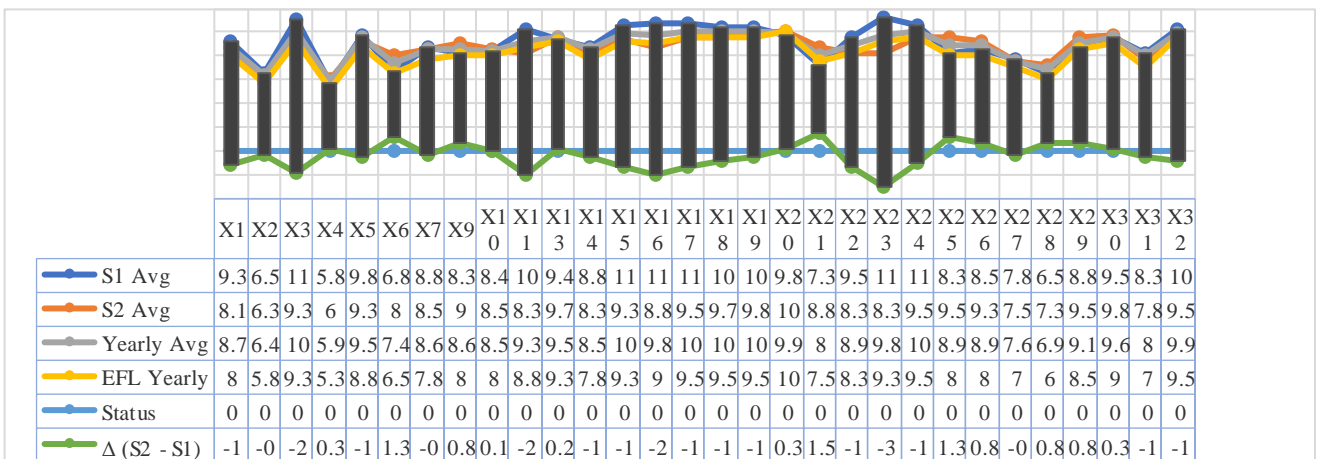


Figure 3. Recap of the failed cases in the public schools
 (Source: Dovonou et al. (2024). Self-design based on the cross-checking of the learners' transcripts in Public Secondary Schools composing the size, 2021-2022 [unpublished data])

These findings suggest that the hybrid pattern of grade calculation, which places more emphasis on the second semester, adversely affects EFL learners who perform poorly during this period. The demanding nature of the second semester can cause stress, depression, harassment, and manipulated grades, with 15.6% of failing students in two public schools attributed to this flawed system. Lower secondary level students (Secondary 1 and 2) are particularly impacted, showing a drop in average English grades in Semester 2, leading to lower yearly average grades than they deserved. This calls for a more equitable school

calendar and alternative methods for calculating average grades. The data from Gbégamey School and Sainte Rita School support these findings, with most students' yearly and English average grades reflecting their second-semester performance. However, some exceptions suggest other influencing factors.

Part Three: Comparison of Public and Private School Grading Systems

Upon analysing the transcripts of EFL learners from two private secondary schools, *Notre Dame des Apôtres* and *Père Aupiais*, as presented in Figure 4, it was observed that the learners' grades were not influenced by any particular trimester. In other words, the learners' performances in Trimester 1, Trimester 2, and Trimester 3 did not significantly impact their yearly average grades.

- For instance, at Notre Dame des Apôtres, the average grades of learner X1 in Secondary 1 were 05.50, 08.50, and 08.00 in Trimester 1, Trimester 2, and Trimester 3, respectively. The learner's yearly average grade was 07.33, which is not significantly favoured or unfavoured by any particular trimester's performance.
- Similarly, at Père Aupiais, the average grades of learner X17 in Secondary 1 were 11.25, 08.50, and 08.00 in Trimester 1, Trimester 2, and Trimester 3, respectively. The learner's yearly average grade was 09.25, which is also not significantly influenced by any particular trimester's performance.

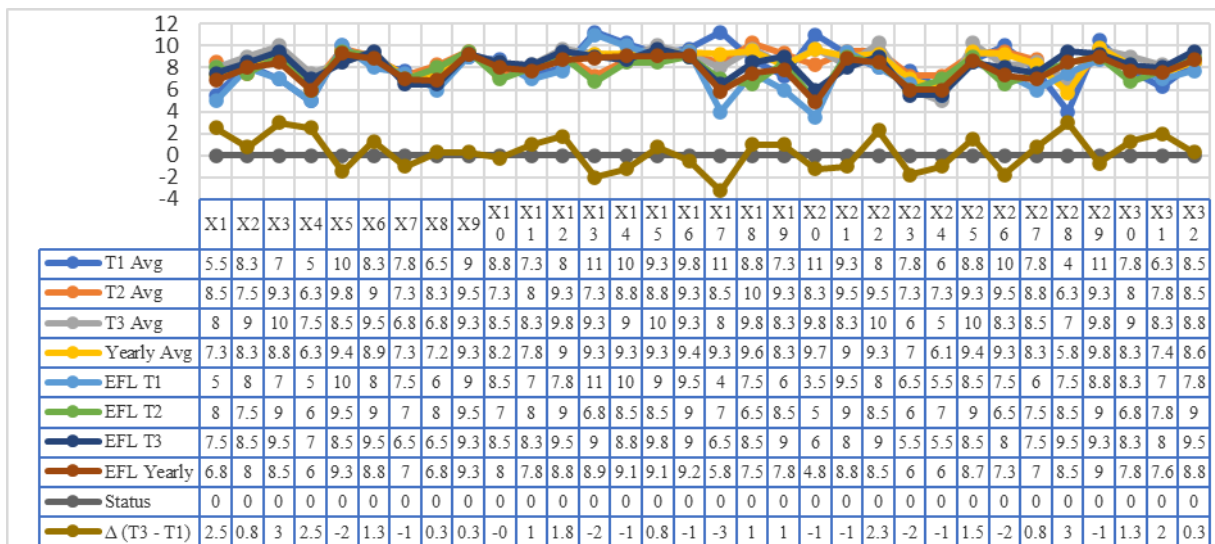


Figure 4. Recap of the failed cases in the private schools
 (Source: Dovonou et al. (2024). Self-design based on the cross-checking of the learners' transcripts in Private Secondary Schools composing the size 2021-2022 [Unpublished raw data])

As illustrated in Figure 4, this trend was observed across all the learners' transcripts, and it can be inferred that the pattern of calculating the average grades of learners in these private schools is fair and unbiased. Each trimestral performance is given equal weightage, and the yearly average grade is calculated by cumulating the three average grades and dividing them

naturally by three. This approach ensures that the grades are a true and accurate reflection of the learners' performances and that there are no cases of unjustified failure.

Figure 4 offers valuable data for these two private schools' grading fairness and effectiveness. Student achievement (overall and in English) varies across trimesters and years (Secondary 1-4). This variation might be due to factors like student ability, teaching methods, or curriculum. Analysing this data can inform improvements in pedagogy, curriculum, and student support, potentially leading to better student outcomes like graduation rates. These insights might even apply to other EFL contexts, promoting fairer and more effective learning.

Qualitative Data Findings

Implications for Reliability and Validity of EFL Assessment (*Teachers and Education Stakeholders*)

The qualitative data analysis was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers and 5 education stakeholders, determined through purposive sampling. The interviews were conducted in French, the official language of Benin and the language of administration that the majority of the population in Benin is proficient in, to guarantee that the respondents felt at ease articulating themselves in a language in which they were familiar. The responses were verbatim transcribed and audio-recorded. They were then translated into English for analysis and reporting. To ensure a deferential and formal atmosphere, the respondents were addressed by their professional titles. These titles included "Monsieur le Professeur" or "Madame la Directrice."

Part One: *Perspectives on Inconstant School Calendar's Impact on EFL Assessment*

The qualitative data analysis revealed that the inconstant school calendar significantly affected the reliability and validity of EFL assessment in Benin's secondary education. The following themes emerged from the interviews with teachers and education stakeholders, with some illustrative quotes from the participants:

Table 7.

Emerging Themes from Interviews: Challenges of Inconstant School Calendars on EFL Assessment

- ***Inconstant assessment schedules:*** Teachers reported that the inconstant school calendar resulted in inconstant assessment schedules, which made it difficult to compare student performance across classes and schools. One teacher noted, "We often receive the exam schedule with minimal notice, which hinders our ability to adequately prepare students and ensure alignment with the national exams, including the trimestral exams that may vary in format from semestrial to hybrid." Another teacher added, "The fixed dates for national exams such as the Baccalaureate and the BEPC contrast with the fluctuating school calendar, making it difficult to maintain constancy and fairness

in our assessments across all classes and schools." This lack of constancy in assessment schedules can have significant implications for the reliability and validity of EFL assessment in Benin's secondary education, highlighting the need for a more standardised approach to academic planning and assessment.

- ***Insufficient instructional time:*** The inconstant school calendar also resulted in insufficient instructional time, which made it difficult for teachers to cover the curriculum and prepare students for assessments. One teacher explained, "We have to teach so many subjects in a limited amount of time, and when the school calendar changes, we lose even more instructional time." Another teacher added, "We often have to sacrifice instructional time for other activities, like school events or administrative tasks, which leaves us with even less time to prepare the students for assessments."
 - ***Lack of standardisation:*** The inconstant school calendar also contributed to a lack of standardisation in EFL assessment. Teachers reported that they often had to adapt assessments to fit the available instructional time, which resulted in variations in the format, content, and difficulty level of assessments. One teacher noted, "We don't have a standardised format for our assessments, so each teacher does their own thing." Another teacher added, "Sometimes we have to shorten the assessments or change the questions to fit the available time, which can affect the validity and reliability of the results."
 - ***Limited opportunities for professional development:*** The inconstant school calendar also limited opportunities for professional development, which is essential for ensuring that teachers have the skills and knowledge necessary to develop and administer valid and reliable assessments. Teachers reported that they often had to prioritize instructional time over professional development, which made it difficult to stay up-to-date on best practices in EFL assessment. One teacher explained, "We don't have many opportunities for professional development, and when we do, they often conflict with our teaching schedules." Another teacher added, "We need more training on how to develop and administer valid and reliable assessments, but it's hard to find the time and resources for that."
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Note. Data source: Dovonou et al. (2024). Self-designed analysis based on fieldwork data processed through NVivo 12 [Unpublished data]

Overall, the qualitative data suggest that the inconstant school calendar has significant implications for the reliability and validity of EFL assessment in Benin's secondary education. To address these issues, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education take steps to ensure a consistent and stable academic calendar in all schools and provide teachers with adequate support and professional development to develop and administer valid and reliable assessments.

Additionally, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education develop clear guidelines for EFL assessment, including standardized formats, content, and difficulty levels, to ensure that assessments are comparable across classes and schools. As one teacher noted, "We need a

more systematic approach to EFL assessment, with clear guidelines and standards that are consistently applied across all schools."

Part Two: Perspectives on School Time and Evaluation Schemes in Benin

The table below summarizes the perspectives of teachers and education stakeholders on the impact of school time organization and evaluation schemes in Benin's secondary education system.

Table 8.

Teachers' and Education Stakeholders' Perspectives on School Time Organization and Evaluation in Benin's Secondary Education

Research Question	Response
<p>Q1. What are the implications of the school time organization on the evaluation scheme?</p>	<p>The school time organization determines the way and the number of evaluation papers to hold yearly to ensure fairness in the process of validating learning scores. In the context of Benin, such correlation will ensure fairness among public school students on one hand and equity amongst private and public-school learners on the other hand.</p>
<p>Q2. What are the impacts of the application of the academic calendar on the learners' scores in Benin's private secondary education?</p>	<p>The impacts are manifold as private schools remain loyal and faithful to the Law and the decree on national education. The school calendar is trimestral, and the resulting assessment regime is trimestral as well. Private secondary students sit for six official tests a year as required by the Law on education and the resulting decree. The grades average earned here is fair and impartial for being bias free. Trimestral evaluation is light load, learning little load to chew and to perform. Trimesters are less stressful. They are also moments of less temptations with cheating and sexual and financial corruption. As grades average is fair, it contributes to the reliability and the validity of learners' scores.</p>
<p>Q3. What are the impacts of the hybrid application of the academic calendar on the learners' scores in Benin's public secondary education?</p>	<p>The impacts are manifold but in the opposite direction as the application of the school year is unlawful and an infringement to the regulation. Indeed, such an application of the school year is unlawful and an infringement to the regulation because here, the word "trimester" does not even exist. Rather, the word "semester" is the only one used when it comes to the division of the school time. So, while private schools sit for six rounds of summative evaluation, public schools organize four rounds, that is two assessment papers per semester. But when it comes to calculating the grades average for passing or failing, the regime is neither semester turned nor trimestral. Such a hybrid practice values the grades average of the second semester to the detriment of the ones of the first semester, then summing them up before dividing them by three. Semester</p>

oriented evaluation in the form described here is very stressful from psychological and lesson load to chew point of view. It is also moments of high risks of temptation like cheating and sexual and financial corruption. The scores earned in such a regime are not fully deserved for not being fair or impartial. As it happens, reliability and validity are affected as well. The most outstanding outcomes are that one notices a higher rate of failure coupled with learners' demotivation and drop outs and parents and teachers waste of resources.

Q4. What are the plausible threat actions on public schools in connection with the infringement of the Law 2003-17, article 54 on education in Benin and its subsequent annual joint decree on school time management taken every year? Even though semester orientation of the school year in public secondary education has been a very long traditional practice, one has to watch out for school and its actors are evolving. A law is passed to be respected. A decree is taken to be respected. Going against one's regulation might be detrimental to the educational in case some students with clairvoyance and victims of this hybrid and non-equitable system of validating graduation scores contest their grades averages in the light of the Law 2003-17, article 54 and the resulting decree for their being violated. They might even go further in suing to court their school administration for applying unlawful measures in school time organization and for using unfair, unreliable and invalid policies in evaluation science.

Note. Data source: Dovonou et al. (2024). Self-designed analysis based on fieldwork data processed through NVivo 12 [Unpublished data]

The studies reveal that issues of school time allocation and assessment procedures have a direct effect on the fairness as well as the validation of the students in the secondary education system in Benin. Private schools adhere to legal standards relative to assessments meaning that the evaluation is in a trimestral system to ensure accurate and fair scoring. On the other hand, public school uses the unlawful mixed up procedure that affects the score's validity and fairness. This leads to higher failure rates, low student morale, and high dropout rates in public schools, more accentuated by plenty of school failure. Besides, it brings educational inequality among private and public school students. This study also demonstrates the legal consequences of noncompliance with Law 2003-17, Article 54, and decrees regarding managing school time in public schools. These research results serve to stress the necessity of deliberation of some Beninese luminaries which concern standardization and changes with reference to the evaluation of the secondary education in Benin within the process of legitimizing the scores.

Part Three: Work Experience Stories

The table below presents a summary of the work experience stories shared by respondents during the interviews, which illustrate the implications of inconstant school time organization and evaluation schemes on EFL assessment in Benin's secondary education.

Table 9.

Perspective on Inconstant School Calendars and Evaluation Systems' Impact on EFL Assessment in Benin

Respondent	Work Experience Story
Respondent 1	<p>I exercised as a secondary education teacher from 1993 to 2008 when I was in the functions of school-based subject Animator and Head teacher. I therefore got very close to the learners in the second case because it allowed me to listen to learners in terms of their performances, problems they were faced with and their assistance needs. At this position, I invariably learnt to serve different classes from secondary 1 to 7 over the years. There I got shocked by a striking case with a click in my mind resulting from the wrong done to the public secondary education learners. It was about a young girl of secondary 1, so freshly from school calendar and evaluation different from the one she was to face henceforth. Indeed, learners would pass by to know, in my quality of Head teacher, whether they were passing or failing during the second semester as graduation grades were being processed given their different marks they got during the first and second semester. I would simulate and answer them by “yes” or “no” according to the case before me. Then, a learner who got 09 as a cumulative grade during the first semester and who got 10.5 in the second was institutionally passing whereas the young girl who got 11 in the first and 09 during the second was institutionally failing. Both cases of passing or failing resulted from a calculation that considers twice the cumulative grades of the second semester in addition to the one of the first semester divided by three as this: in the 1st case $\{(10.50 \times 2) + 09\} / 3 = 10$. In the 2nd case: $\{(09 \times 2) + 11\} / 3 = 09.66$. It clearly appears that the evaluation pattern applied here has no reference, neither trimestral nor semester-oriented but hybrid favoring learners who performed well in the second semester but disadvantaging those who performed high in the first semester only. I was profoundly moved by such an injustice created to innocent and naïve learners, victims of an anonymous evaluative system which sharpened my interest to research on it.</p>
Respondent 2	<p>As a former teacher and current school principal, I have witnessed firsthand the impact of the school calendar and evaluation system on student performance and graduation rates. In my previous role as a teacher, I noticed that students who struggled in the first semester but improved in the second semester were often not able to graduate due to the school's evaluation system, which placed more weight on the first semester. This was a clear example of the evaluation system not accurately reflecting the student's true abilities and potential.</p> <p>Now, as a school principal, I have seen how the inconstant application of the</p>

academic calendar can significantly impact the validity and reliability of EFL assessment. For instance, last year the academic calendar was compressed due to national elections, which resulted in less instructional time and fewer opportunities for assessment. This meant that students were evaluated based on a limited number of assessments, which may not have accurately reflected their true language proficiency. I remember one student in particular who struggled with the compressed calendar. He was a strong student, but the lack of instructional time and assessment opportunities resulted in him receiving a lower grade than he deserved.

To address these issues, I have been advocating for a more constant application of the academic calendar to ensure fair and reliable assessment practices. This includes working with the school board and other stakeholders to develop a calendar that takes into account potential disruptions, such as national elections, and provides adequate instructional time and assessment opportunities. Additionally, I have been exploring alternative assessment methods, such as portfolio-based assessment, that can provide a more holistic and accurate picture of a student's language proficiency. By taking these steps, I believe we can create a more equitable and effective evaluation system for our students.

Respondent
3

As a teacher trainer, I have worked with many teachers who struggle to adapt their assessment practices to the changing school calendar. In one instance, a teacher was required to administer a summative assessment at the end of the first semester, but the academic calendar was changed mid-year, resulting in the assessment being pushed back to the second semester. This caused confusion and frustration for both the teacher and students and ultimately led to questions about the validity of the assessment results. This experience highlights the importance of maintaining clear and constant communication about the academic calendar and assessment schedule to ensure that all stakeholders are informed and able to plan and prepare effectively for EFL learners' language acquisition and skill development.

Note. Data source: Dovonou et al. (2024). Self-designed analysis based on fieldwork data processed through NVivo 12 [Unpublished data]

These work experience stories corroborate that the absence of a stable and fixed school calendar and evaluation systems in Benin's secondary education has significant and far-reaching impacts on both students and educators, affecting their ability to plan, prepare, and achieve their academic and professional goals. They highlight issues such as unfair assessment practices, disparities in certifying learning competencies and performances, and challenges in adapting to changing calendars. Additionally, they emphasize the importance of advocating for fair assessment practices and the need for clear communication and constancy in academic planning.

Strengthening Equity in the EFL Evaluation Process (*Teachers, Students, and Education Stakeholders*)

The following table presents a summary of the recurrent themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis, highlighting the recommendations made by teachers, students, and education stakeholders to enhance equity in the EFL evaluation process in Benin's secondary education.

Table 10.

Summary of Recommendations for Enhancing Equity in the EFL Evaluation Process in Benin

Recommendations for Enhancing Equity in the EFL Evaluation Process	Respondent Statements
Develop and implement a stable and fixed academic calendar	"A stable and fixed academic calendar is essential for fair and reliable assessment practices. It should be established in consultation with all stakeholders and take into account potential disruptions such as national elections, to ensure adequate instructional time and assessment opportunities." - Respondent 2
Adopt alternative assessment methods	"Alternative assessment methods such as portfolio-based assessment, self-assessment, and peer-assessment can provide a more holistic and accurate picture of a student's language proficiency, reducing the impact of a single assessment on their overall grade." - Respondent 2
Provide professional development for teachers	"Teachers need ongoing support and training to adapt their assessment practices to changing academic calendars and ensure that they are using fair and equitable assessment methods. This can be achieved through workshops, mentoring, and coaching." - Respondent 3
Involve students in the assessment process	"Involving students in the assessment process, such as through self-assessment and peer-assessment, can help them take ownership of their learning and develop a deeper understanding of the assessment criteria. This can also foster a more collaborative and supportive learning environment." - Respondent 1
Establish clear communication channels	"Clear communication channels between teachers, students, and education stakeholders can ensure that everyone is aligned and able to plan accordingly, reducing confusion and frustration. This can be achieved through regular meetings, newsletters, and online platforms." - Respondent 3
Create an	"An equitable grading system that takes into account students'

equitable grading system	individual strengths and weaknesses and provides opportunities for improvement can ensure that all students are evaluated fairly. This can be achieved through the use of rubrics, formative assessment, and differentiated instruction." - Respondent 1
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Foster a supportive learning environment	"A supportive learning environment that values diversity and promotes inclusivity can help all students feel valued and motivated to succeed. This can be achieved through the use of culturally relevant materials, differentiated instruction, and positive reinforcement." - Respondent 2
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Note. Data source: Dovonou et al. (2024). Self-designed analysis based on fieldwork data processed through NVivo 12 [Unpublished data]

These recommendations were identified through the qualitative data analysis and interpretation process, based on the feedback and insights of teachers, students, and education stakeholders in Benin's secondary education. They highlight the importance of a stable and fixed academic calendar, alternative assessment methods, ongoing support and professional development for teachers, student involvement in the assessment process, clear communication channels, an equitable and fair grading system, and a supportive and inclusive learning environment to enhance equity in the EFL evaluation process.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the study to respond to the research questions and to ascertain the effect of inconsistent school calendars on the assessment of EFL learners in Benin's secondary education. It uses quantitative data such as transcripts and qualitative data such as work experience stories along with relevant literature to provide a valuable contribution to the field.

Inconstancy in the School Calendar and its Impact (Q1 & Q2)

The comparison of learner transcripts indicated differences in semester lengths and assessment schedules across public and private schools. Qualitative findings from work experience tales corroborated this observation, with students noting disruptions and variations in their teaching time that harmed their language acquisition and skill development. These findings certainly support **Hypothesis 1**, revealing a major lack of consistency in the administration of the school calendar across Benin's secondary schools, with serious consequences for both students and educators. The quantitative data analysis revealed a substantial link between a consistent and predictable school calendar and better learning results for EFL students. Students in private schools with consistent calendars performed better ($p\text{-value} < 0.01$) on standardized examinations and had higher graduation rates than those in public schools with inconstant calendars. These findings confirm **Hypothesis 2**,

implying that a consistent and set school calendar can improve students' academic performance and graduation rates in EFL programs.

These findings are in line with other several research studies that have attempted to establish the link between school calendars and student performance. The research works of Baber et al. (2021) and McMillan (2005) revealed that balanced and the customization of calendars roused students' performance. Sawyer Jr. (2018) and Pedersen (2011) discovered that a consistent and fixed school calendar can have a significant and positive impact on academic achievement in specific subjects and across high schools, highlighting the importance of a reliable and trustworthy evaluation system for all students. Moreover, Watrous (2011) stated that the high school calendar adjustment is conducive to student outcomes as well as instructors' opinions. Such studies support the current study and that indicates that students, especially those from poor background, perform better academically in schools with manageable calendars than in schools that has many interruptions. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds more often are particularly vulnerable to academic calendar disruptions. This is due to limited access to supplementary educational resources. Support systems outside of school are also scarce. Consistent and manageable calendars likely provide these students with a stable learning environment. This includes a predictable routine which can be crucial for maintaining focus. They build skills progressively and compensate for potential educational gaps. These are factors that may explain their improved academic performance in schools with fewer interruptions.

Implications for Assessment Reliability and Validity (Q3)

The study's findings highlight significant difficulties with the reliability and validity of EFL evaluation in Benin's secondary education system, notably in public institutions. A quantitative review of public school transcripts uncovered a confusing hybrid grading approach that unfairly weights the shortened second semester. This method raises serious concerns regarding the accuracy and fairness of student evaluation, especially for lower-level language learners who require continuous, long-term exposure to achieve linguistic competence.

Qualitative results from teacher interviews supported these concerns, revealing a range of interconnected issues. Emerging themes included a concerning lack of consistency in assessment schedules, instructional time, and evaluation methods and a scarcity of uniformity in assessment methodologies. These elements combine to create a potentially erratic and inequitable assessment landscape, which has far-reaching consequences for both students and instructors in Benin's secondary school system.

The convergence of these findings offers strong support to **Hypothesis 3**, which states that inconsistent calendars greatly affect the reliability and validity of EFL assessments. This revelation is consistent with the body of previous literature in the area. Cooper et al. (2010) stressed the importance of well-structured calendars in promoting academic accomplishment, whereas Finnie et al. (2019) highlighted the potential for year-round schooling to improve educational attainment, particularly among disadvantaged students.

Joyner et al. (2011) emphasized the inextricable link between class time and student learning, emphasizing the importance of stable, consistent school schedules in ensuring appropriate instructional time. While Patall et al. (2010) major study presented mixed outcomes regarding the extended school day or year, Thompson (2019) showed that a four-day school week harmed student achievement. These studies show the coherence of schedules and the importance of a proper organisation of a school year for impressive results. The implication for the study, therefore, has significant implications that require a fundamental reconsideration of pedagogy currently used in the assessment of EFL learners in Benin's secondary schools. These methods must be valid, reliable, and fair.

Enhancing Equity in EFL Evaluation (Q4)

The study's findings guide recommendations for improving fairness in EFL evaluation in Benin's secondary school. Recognizing the limitations of the current system, particularly in public schools, the report recommends the creation of a consistent evaluation framework. This framework should be in line with the national academic calendar to ensure that assessment processes are similar across all institutions. Adopting a grading system similar to that used in private schools, in which each trimester is given equal weight, could also help to improve the accuracy and fairness of EFL learner grades in public schools. The study does not directly test these recommendations, but rather offers solutions based on the findings that are compatible with requests for uniform and equitable evaluation processes in education made by experts such as Crooks (1998) and Darling-Hammond (2010).

The study revealed some disparities regarding the applicability of the school calendars for the implementation of instructional activities in public and private secondary schools in Benin and proposed that the lapse affected EFL students' performance, particularly in the public schools. Private schools' academic calendars were regular and divided into trimesters, while public schools' academic calendars were irregular, based on semesters, terms were unequal and also with different lengths. These disparities had adverse impacts; the pupils in private schools with constant calendars performed better than their counterparts in the public schools with erratic schedules in terms of achievement tests and graduation rates, among others.

Recommendations and Suggestions (Actionable Insights)

To address irregularities in the school calendar and improve the evaluation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, the following recommendations and actionable insights are proposed:

- **Implement a unified school calendar** that all public and private secondary schools would follow, assuring student uniformity and fairness.
- **Create a thorough Evaluation Guide** providing standardized methods for the Ministries of Education's school calendar operations, test administration, and grading.
- **Integrate the Evaluation Guide** into the joint Ministerial Decree governing the school calendar to ensure its legal implementation across schools.

- **Remain on a schedule consistent** —To ensure alignment with the national academic calendar, strictly follow the school calendar arrangement stated in Law 2003-17, Article 54, and the Ministerial Decree.
- **Annually, inform incoming students** about the academic calendar, Evaluation Guide, and their importance for effective exam performance.

Implementing these principles encourages standardization, legal compliance, adherence to current laws, and adequate student instruction, all of which improve calendar consistency, assessment methods, and the overall learning environment for EFL students.

CONCLUSION

The study was aimed at appraising the mode of certifying learners' competencies in the secondary education of Benin, especially those in EFL. It arises from observed inconsistencies that now appear about different school calendar implementation policies and thus become a source of disparaging trends between private and public schools in terms of the evaluation patterns and so a potential effect on the outcomes of student learning and policy/decision-making. The purpose of the study was to appraise the present trends in evaluation concerning their impacts on EFL learners and recommend ways to help bring synchrony between the learning certification mechanism and the academic calendar to enable justification-based evaluation for the EFL learner. The target population consists of 80 learners from high schools of Cotonou in Benin using the mixed method approach. Data collection tools were self-completed and audio/facilitated questionnaires, textual interviews, document review, and recorded workplace experience descriptions. The quantitative analysis entailed distributing frequency of code for categorising code note frequency as suggested by Neuendorf (2017) and for conducting a conventional thematic analysis based on the six phases of thematic analysis method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), and Krippendorff (2018). NVivo software (Version 12) was used to code and organize emerging themes. The findings show a two-headed, hybrid, and inconstant implementation of the school calendar that runs contrary to Law 2003-17 and the yearly ministerial joint decree. This inconsistency led to two sets of tests that undoubtedly brought down the equity, reliability, and validity of the evaluation. Alarming, 65% of students in public secondary education were found to be victims of invalidating grades based on bias, and this bias seems to have its most significant effect among the younger category of students. A high positive correlation between the adoption rate of the school calendar had a bearing on student performance in EFL ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$). The significance of this study is to highlight the adverse effects of inconsistent calendar implementation on EFL learners in the secondary education system of Benin. It has brought to light the influence of constant calendars and, therefore, their importance about student performance and fairness in evaluation. However, this study does not lack some limitations, for instance, the research only relies on the self-reported results of the inhabitants of the Cotonou region. These limitations may create some boundaries of generalizing the results in other regions in Benin. On this account, the study recommends that secondary education should be provided with a particular and clear assessment database, the

performance of the school year configuration needs to be organized, and the evaluation system in the public and private schools should be integrated. Subsequent research should look at the impact of inconstant calendars in other regions, incorporate objective measures of student achievement, and longitudinal studies that would enable assessment of inconstant calendar effects on EFL proficiency over an extended period. In conclusion, the argument is that the survey has highlighted a critical need for standardized, fair, and equitable EFL assessment within Benin's secondary school education. In other words, stakeholders can collaborate to improve school calendar implementation and evaluation to make the learning environment more effective and fairer for all EFL learners.

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