

# The official EFL textbook in Cameroonian technical schools and the needs of dressmaking students: an evaluation of *Interactions in English lère*

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## Abstract

The present paper examines the contents of the Premiere textbook of EFL in order to find out if it fits the needs and interests of the students of the technical fields such as bespoke tailoring and dressmaking. Over the years, the indifference of technical students towards English has been a topical issue and still raises debates nowadays. The aim of this paper is to show that the existence of a single book for all Premiere classes can account for the lack of interest in English generally observed in technical schools. Emphasis is laid on the analysis of themes, the reading passages and the selection of pictures in *Interactions in English lère*. In other words, this research attempts to show that the official textbook of English for francophone technical education is not tailored to the needs and interests of the learners. The research methodology consisted in reading and analysing the selected corpus in a bid to find out if its content pleases the intended audience made up of dressmaking students. The EFL students and teachers were also interviewed in order to probe their attitudes towards the selected English book. The paper ends with suggestions on how to improve on the English book for that specific set of students. The aim is to raise more awareness in the educational circle, create more motivation in the target learners and ameliorate their performances in English.

**Keywords:** official textbook, EFL, technical secondary schools, needs, interest, evaluation.

## O livro didático oficial da *EFL* nas escolas técnicas camaronesas e as necessidades dos alunos de costura: uma avaliação das *Interações em Inglês lère*

### Resumo

O presente artigo examina o conteúdo do livro didático *Premiere* de *EFL*, a fim de descobrir se ele atende às necessidades e interesses dos alunos das áreas técnicas, como alfaiataria sob medida e costura. Ao longo dos anos, o descaso dos alunos técnicos em relação ao inglês tem sido um assunto recorrente e ainda hoje levanta debates. O objetivo deste trabalho é mostrar que a existência de um único livro para todas as turmas do *Premiere* pode explicar o desinteresse pela língua inglesa geralmente observado nas escolas técnicas. A ênfase é colocada na análise de temas, nas passagens de leitura e na seleção de imagens em *Interactions in English lère*. Em outras palavras, esta pesquisa tenta mostrar que o livro oficial de Inglês para o ensino técnico francófono não é adaptado às necessidades e interesses dos alunos. A metodologia de pesquisa consistiu na leitura e análise do corpus selecionado, a fim de saber se seu conteúdo agrada ao público-alvo formado por estudantes de alfaiataria e costura sob medida. Os alunos e professores de *EFL* também foram entrevistados para investigar suas atitudes em relação ao livro de inglês selecionado. O artigo termina com sugestões de como melhorar o livro de Inglês para esse grupo específico de alunos. O objetivo é aumentar a conscientização no círculo educacional, criar mais motivação nos alunos-alvo e melhorar seu desempenho em inglês.

**Palavras-chave:** livro oficial, EFL, escolas secundárias técnicas, necessidades, interesse, avaliação.

### 1. Introduction

Teaching is a delicate mission which requires planning, creativity and flexibility. Foreign language teaching

seems more challenging because it is expected to lead to successful learning. However, EFL teaching has always been a hard nut to crack in technical schools where most learners tend to care more about their professional subjects. As a result, the resistance of technical students is lamented by EFL teachers daily.

Despite the prestigious status of English that is the first international language or the language of science and technology, students still show proof of negligence and even indifference toward English language. It is against this backdrop that the existence of a single textbook for all the specialities in technical schools seems to harden the task for English facilitators who are instructed to make use of the technical lexis as much as possible. In the official syllabus of Anglais for technical education, it is clearly stated that:

Teachers should endeavour to use vocabulary/lexis and register that's is specialty-specific in the field of carpentry, bricklaying, mechanics, electricity, electronics, refrigeration, welding, commerce, dress-making, plumbing, surveying, high-tech, information technology, general engineering, etc.

The above ministerial instruction conveys the educational authorities' eagerness to make the professionalisation of education a reality in Cameroon. However, it is difficult to be implemented in the EFL classroom for the textbook does not really reflect the needs of the learners. Hence, EFL as it is taught in technical schools in Cameroon today warrants more reflection. It is paradoxical to prescribe the same textbook for different specialties when we know that it is quite impossible to make tastes, likes, passions and needs uniform in schools. It would there be more fruitful to propose a book that caters for the interests of the learners of each specialty. Robertson & Acklam (2008) highlights the importance of a reader in language teaching and learning. According to these language teaching experts: "most schools provide teachers with a syllabus and materials for teaching that syllabus. This is often in the form of a course book. Course books provide a variety of language material in a structured way and can be of great benefit for the teachers and the learners."

From the above assertion, it is crystal clear that textbooks can facilitate the teaching/learning process. However, Harmer (2000) emphasises that though courses books are very useful aids, they are more productive when we try and adapt the language material to suit a class or set of learners. Like the above pedagogue, we understand that if the textbook is a useful teaching/learning guide, it can also be a great factor of demotivation when it is not tailored to the likes, needs, interests and passions of the learners. Hence, it is obvious that a single textbook cannot easily be a panacea for all the students in all the specialities. We have then taken a glance to *Interactions in English Ière* to find out if it satisfies the professional needs and likes dressmaking students.

### 1.1 The problem

Even though education is geared towards professionalization, we have observed that the official EFL textbook for dressmaking students does not cater much for the needs, interests and likes of the students. As a result, it seems to reduce their motivation to learn English; Such difficulties warrant more attention in order to raise awareness.

### 1.2 The purpose of the study

The present study sets out to *Interactions in English Ière* to see if it is tailored to the needs and interests of dressmaking students. Specifically, it aims at:

- Finding out if the themes treated are related to tailoring;
- Finding out if the pictorial illustrations are about tailoring;
- Finding out if the reading texts are about tailoring;
- Finding out if the vocabulary in the book enables dressmaking students to acquire the right lexis to talk about their field and prospective profession;
- To probe the attitudes of EFL teachers and students towards the official Ière EFL textbook for technical education.

### 1.3 Research questions

The present study seeks to provide answers to the questions below:

- 1) To what extent does *Interactions in English Ière* satisfy the needs and interests of tailoring students?

- 2) Are the themes selected related to tailoring?
- 3) Are the pictures generally related to tailoring?
- 4) Do most of reading texts talk about tailoring?
- 5) Is the vocabulary in the official textbook specialty-specific?
- 6) What is the attitude of EFL teachers and dressmaking students towards the 1ère textbook?

Apart from questions, hypotheses were set:

#### 1.4 Hypotheses

1. The prescribed textbook of English is not appropriate for tailoring students.
2. The existence of a single EFL book for all the specialties accounts for the dressmaking students' indifference towards English in technical schools.
3. The themes and pictures in *Interactions in English* almost have no relation with tailoring.
4. The vocabulary taught in the selected corpus is too far from dressmaking students' likes, needs, interest and realities.

#### 1.5 Short review on past studies

For the past fifteen years, English language teaching has been a subject of scientific research. Many Cameroonian researchers have examined the teaching of English in the French speaking subsystem. Ngoulga (2006) examined the teaching of English language to francophone science students and found out that they lack motivation and perform exceptionally poorly. In his research, he demonstrated that out of the causes of poor performances in science classes is the use of inappropriate books (stay tuned 2nde and go for English) that are not designed based on the needs of science students.

In the same wise, Hagbe (2006) investigated the use of variety in terms of pedagogic strategies in English classes and found out that the lack of variety in terms of techniques, books, approaches, activities during EFL classes account for the student's indifference towards English. Kenmegne (2021) studied the teaching of English to adult beginners and proposed tips on how to improve on the content of lessons as well as teaching methods fit for adults. From the review above, we can notice that much has been done on EFL in Cameroon but very little has been said on the official textbook for dressmaking students.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Data was collected through reading. *Interactions in English 1ère* and the official Syllabus of English for technical education have been our main source of data. In addition, interviews were also addressed to EFL teachers and students in order to cull data about their attitudes and opinions on their English book. A total of 40 *1ère* students of dressmaking from a government and a private technical school in the capital of Cameroon.

The data from the survey was analysed by means of descriptive statistics. The number of subjects who provided the same answer was counted and the frequency calculated. As far as primary data is concerned, the analysis consisted in taking stock of the themes treated, the reading passages, the pictures. Then, the percentage of the ones related to the tailoring field was calculated. Data is generally presented in tables and figures.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Themes selected in the corpus

An evaluation of *interactions in English 1ère* revealed that it is written in accordance with the national syllabus of anglais for technical education. It covers the five domains of life and talks about the themes that vary from family and social life, economic life and occupations, environment well-being and health, citizenship and human rights to media and communication. The units in the corpus under analysis are presented in (Table 1) below.

**Table 1.** Units in *Interaction in English Ière*.

N°	Page	Units in the book	Units related to tailoring	%
1		Getting on with others		
2		Clubs and extra curricular activities		
3		Discussing youth problems		
4		Setting community disputes		
5		Cameroonian culture	X	
6		Shopping wisely	X	
7		Purchasing goods	X	
8		At the market	X	
9		Finding out about careers	X	
10		Preparing for the world of work	X	
11		Visiting tours		
12		Our national resources	X	
13		Living healthy lives		
14		Transport and safety		
15		Staying safe and fit		
16		Excellence at work		
17		Democracy and tolerance		
18		Voting		
19		Gender equality		
20		Protecting equality		
21		The advantages of technology		
22		Modern technology and the youth		
23		The dangers of the internet	X	
24		Gadgets and devices	X	
25		Women and ICT		

Source: *Interactions in English Ière* (2019), Authors: Forbin, D & Belibi, J. (2019).

Table 1 shows that the themes treated in the selected corpus are interesting and diversified. However, it is seen that out of 25 units only 9 relate directly to the tailoring specialty-specific themes are a factor of boredom because the students of technical schools generally show interest in whatever turns around their area of specialisation. A look at the units selected in the book under analysis has revealed that the thematic selection does not facilitate the teaching/learning of the technical vocabulary to dressmaking students.

In addition to the evaluation of EFL teaching/learning documents, an interview was conducted: 40 students and 20 EFL teachers were interviewed in two technical schools. A question was framed to know these informants 'opinions on the official EFL textbook in their school and all the EFL teachers who took part in the study regretted the fact that *Interactions in English Ière* is a wonderful book for general education. However, for dressmaking students and other technical subjects such as electricity or mechanics, the book is almost useless because it does not include the professional lexis. Consequently, they are bound to used extra-material (industrial English) to teach the appropriate vocabulary.

When asked if they like the EFL book for *Ière* students who are mostly interested in their professional subjects, EFL teachers (100%) said that the units, the lexis and the reading passages do not reflect the needs, likes and interests of the learners. In other words, the EFL teachers sampled for this study admitted that the indifference of technical students towards English stems from their French background that does not give a chance to English. They made clear that the inappropriate textbook is also a factor of demotivation for technical students.

Like the EFL teachers, 35 EFL learners out the forty (75%) sampled for this study revealed that they do not like reading their English textbook because it talks about things they do not like. The second question was framed to find out if they are taught the vocabulary of their specialty. They all said *Interactions in English 1ère* does not help them to master the vocabulary of dressmaking. Another finding which is important is that 100% of the students said to improve on the quality of their book, more technical and professional lexis must be included. Then 50% of the students said the topics discussed in their book have no relation with their field of study. Neither do they satisfy their professional needs, likes and their passions.

From the results, it is obvious that if technical students are exposed to the right stimuli, they will be more motivated to learn English. To sum up, *Interactions in English 1ère* does not satisfy EFL students and teachers. All the teachers said that to teach the vocabulary, which is specific to the domain, they always make use of an extra book, and the official textbook is only restricted to grammar and homework. This means that the official textbook used in all the specialties in technical schools poses a problem to EFL students who feel bored when the vocabulary is not directly linked to realities; the reading texts were also evaluated.

### 3.2 Reading texts in interactions in English

Like, themes, the reading passages proposed in the book under analysis were examined and we found out that though they are diversified and reflect the syllabus, they have no link with the tailoring field and cannot meet the expectations of the 1ère dressmaking students. Table 2 below presents the reading texts identified.

**Table 2.** Reading texts in *Interactions in English 1ère*.

Pages	Reading texts identified	Texts related to tailoring	Percentage
P17	Cameroon's diverse religions		
P25	School rules		
P26	Clubs		
P31	Speech by the PTA association		
P35	Abstinence		
P44	Solving conflict		
P44	Peaceful conflict resolution		
P44	How to run a conflict		
P54	Cameroonian culture		
P55	Interview with Stanley Enow		
P61	Chart of Stanley Enow		
P69	Family of five accidentally personnel		
P76	Conversation on good purchase		
P79	The bank brochure		
P84	Advert in a newspaper		
P88	Marie's baking business		
P98	Fashion designer	*****	
P98	Independent vendor		
P99	Advert on bbys ice		
P99	Advert on painter and roof repairs		
P100	Vacancies for hotel		
p107	Job advertisement		
P108	- Annual stock bake		
	- Notice to customers		

Pages	Reading texts identified	Texts related to tailoring	Percentage
P118	A letter describing a visit in Limbé		
P126	Report about Solving		
P129	Cameroon's national resources		
p136	How to hold a debate		
P137	Dialogue on HIV		
P139	Don't smoke		
P141	ABC		
P144	Advert: wash your hands		
P149	Disaster management		
P153	Newspaper bait on serious accident		
P156	Conversation eating after a match		
P158	Poem on aids; no thanks		
P160	Sport: a wonderful medicine		
P168	Work and risk, what for?		
P169	Notes about voiced and unvoiced		
P170	UN documents on human rights		
P171	Know your workplace rights and responsibilities		
P180	Citizens and civic responsibility		
P181	Respect for cultural diversity		
P184	Building strong relationships		
P184	A teenage civil		
P187	Discussion among neighbours		
P190	Elections in Cameroon		
P191	Messages from political parties		
P199	Discrimination		
P199	Women do more unpaid work		
P200	A speech by Frederik Douglas		
P207	Worker's songs		
P208	Aïssa Douamara's biography		
P213	Aïssa' activism against women violence		
P219	Arguments on the pros and cons of traditional media		
P220	The use of ICT in sports		
P230	Interview a singer		
P238	Netetiquette		
P240	Article about phone addiction		
P246	Email to a friend who is a phone addict		
P249	Conversation between a vendor a customer		
P251	Educational games that are good for developing minds		
P258	Article about Estelle Yomba, a Cameroonian born ICT guru		
P263	Notes on how to summarise a text		
P266	A famous inventor Einstein		

Source: *Interactions in English Ière* (2019), Authors: Forbin, D., & Belibi, J. (2019).

The evaluation of *Interactions in English Ière* reveals that there are 65 reading texts in the corpus chosen. These texts cover the five domains of life defined in the official syllabus of Anglais for technical education. The reading passages match with the five modules: family and social life, the first module opens the door of socialisation to the French-speaking learners. The second module has to do with economic life, occupations and prepares learners for the future in terms of careers or economic activities. As far as module 3 is concerned, it deals with environment, well-being and health.

Its focus is safety, natural resources and illnesses. Module 4 talks about citizenship and human rights. It addresses ethical and political issues such as good governance, gender-equality, elections and vote. Module 5 is about media and communication and suits the demands of the present fast-changing digitalised world where modern technology is indispensable. It is obvious that *Interactions in English Ière* is attractive. However, the topics and reading passages rarely tie with the tailoring field. If the chosen corpus rigorously respects the official syllabus as well as the CBA, the themes and reading texts do not cater for the needs and interests of tailoring student. This is obvious because out of 65 texts, only five (Cameroonian culture, fashion designer, Cameroon's natural resources, know your workplace rights and work work work what for) are relevant to the tailoring domain.

This means that about 07, 69% of the reading passages remind the dressmaking students of their passion. This obviously explains the dressmaking lack of interest in their textbook and in English as a subject. Moreover, during the survey, out the 40 dressmaking students who were asked if they find their book interesting, 35 answered that they find their English book boring because it does not talk about their specialty. This means that the quality of the book is one of the causes of dressmaking students' indifference towards English. Only five students said the book is interesting even if it does not talk about their specialty. According to 87, 5% of the students who took part in the survey, the book is boring.

The EFL teachers interviewed confirmed the students' remark because all of them said *Interactions in English* is inappropriate for technical students in general, irrespective of the specialty. 100% of the EFL teachers who were interviewed said the official textbook does not help them teach the right vocabulary and they always use another book *Industrial English* to teach reading comprehension. All the teachers sampled for this study regretted the fact that the textbook is interesting for general education but almost useless for technical education students who are more interested in their professional subjects. To sum up, the findings of the present study show that if students are exposed to the right stimuli, they could be more motivated to learn English. Question 3 asked EFL learners and teachers to propose tips on how to make the English textbook more suitable for technical students; (Tables 3 and 4) below present the results.

**Table 3.** Students tips on how to make the reader more interesting for dressmaking students.

Number of students	Suggestions	Percentage
30	Add more texts on our specialty	75%
05	Include more pictures on our working tools	12.5%
05	Focuss more on our technical vocabulary	12.5%
40		

Source: *EFL students from two technical high schools in Yaounde Cameroon.*

Like students, EFL teachers made several suggestions in order to make the official textbook more interesting for technical students.

**Table 4.** EFL teachers' suggestions on how to make the book interesting for dressmaking students.

Number of students	Suggestions	Percentage
35	Books must be designed per specialty	87,7%
40	70% of the vocabulary taught in the book must be specialty specific	100%
25	More pictorial illustrations about tailoring, fashion, working tools must be included to motivate the technical students	62,5%
20	Technical students must be taught English for specific purposes and not general English	50%

Source: Interactions in English *Ière* (2019), Authors of the Forbin, D., & Belibi, J. (2019).

From the suggestions of EFL students and teachers of the two technical schools in Yaounde, it is obvious that the official textbook of Anglais for technical students is far from being adapted to the needs, likes, passions and realities of dressmaking students in particular and technical students in general. Interactive in English *Ière* has been criticised by students for not containing the specialty-specific vocabulary that can be a great source of enthusiasm and motivation for them. Both informants proposed that more texts on technical and professional issues be included in the reader to arouse more motivation. Similarly, there is a need for more pictures related to the specialty.

### 3.3 Pictorial illustration

A look at the pictures in Interactions in English *Ière* shows that the majority of illustrations does justice to the CBA approach as well as to the syllabus, but no significant attention is paid to the specialty. The table below gives a synoptic account of the pictures found in the book.

**Table 5.** the pictures found in interactions in English *Ière*.

N°	Pictures in the book	Pages	Picture related to the specialty
1	Picture of a family	14	
2	Chart on religions	15	
3	Poster for a school celebration	22	
4	Picture of people doing a club activity	23	
5	Picture of a water point	31	
6	Picture of march past	32	
7	Picture of students drinking	33	
8	Picture of the youngsters	36	
9	Picture of soldiers on the field	46	
10	Picture of magistrates	41	
11	Picture of a group solving conflict	44	
12	Picture of a statue in a museum	51	
13	Picture of a royal seat	51	
14	Picture of the national museum	52	
15	Picture of Stanley Enow	55	
16	Picture of a shop	64	
17	Picture of a town's map	65	
18	Dialogue in a clothes shop	66	*****
19	Picture of a bottle	68	



N°	Pictures in the book	Pages	Picture related to the specialty
20	Picture of a shoe	68	
21	Picture of an iron	68	
22	Picture of a laptop	69	
23	Picture of canned food	70	
24	Picture of a customer and a service provider	74	
25	Picture of a cell shop	77	
26	Picture of an ATM	79	
27	Picture of a form	83	
28	Picture of a market	85	
29	Picture of a bread	89	
30	Picture of a female mechanic	94	
31	Picture of several working tools	96	
32	Picture of a fashion designer	98	*****
33	Picture of a vendor	99	
34	Picture of a job interview	104	
35	Picture of a church	115	
36	Picture of a beach	116	
37	Picture of an airline ticket	117	
38	Picture of chimpanzee	119	
39	Picture of a transport means	120	
40	Picture of a female farmer	125	
41	Picture of a class	126	
42	Picture of a garbage	127	
43	Picture of the sea	131	
44	Picture of a patient being injected	135	
45	Picture of cigarettes	139	
46	Advert on safety measures	144	
47	Picture of a patient	145	
48	Picture of road signs	148	
49	Picture of fire	150	
50	Picture of people practicing various sports	155	
51	Picture of a tap	157	
52	Picture of a wound dressing	157	
53	Picture of a person's call	158	
54	Picture of kids doing sports	159	
55	Picture of the first aid kit	162	
56	Picture of a football match	164	
57	Picture of a flower shop	167	
58	Picture of the human head	177	
59	Picture of a colony of birds	179	
60	Picture of a voter in the voting room	186	

N°	Pictures in the book	Pages	Picture related to the specialty
61	Picture of a village family	189	
62	Picture of a T-shirt	191	*****
63	Picture of Alice Kom	196	
64	Picture of poor treatment at home and in school	197	
65	Picture of a sign board on human rights	206	
66	Picture of Aissa, the prize winner	208	
67	Picture of minorities in the society	209	
68	Picture of a boy using phones	217	
69	Picture of a TV, a radio, a phone, newspaper	218	
70	Picture of ICT devices	220	
71	Picture students in a computer room	227	
72	Picture of internet gadgets	228	
73	Picture of a class	230	
74	Picture of a laptop	236	
75	Picture of people in a pub	237	
76	Picture of a student in a library	240	
77	Picture of a keyboard	243	
78	Picture of gadgets	247	
79	Picture a bad computer	248	
80	Picture of a calculator	250	
81	Picture of mum and daughter	255	
82	Picture of girls in a cyberspace	257	

Source: *Interactions in English Ière (2019)*, authors :Forbin, D., & Belibi, J. (2019).

An analysis of pictorial illustrations in *Interactions in English Ière* reveals that there are 83 pictures. However only two pictures are directly linked to the tailoring industry (fashion designer and the clothes' shop). 02, 4% of the pictures relate to dressmaking. Despite its diversity, it is obvious that dressmaking students will be bored since the vocabulary, the themes and the pictures are disconnected from their likes, passions and interest.

#### 4. Conclusions

One of the objectives of this study was to find out if the official *Ière* textbook of anglais for technical students is tailored to the needs, interest and likes of dressmaking or bespoke tailoring students. It also aimed at probing the EFL teachers, dressmaking and Bespoke tailoring students' attitudes towards the official anglais textbook.

The research came up with the following results:

- Most of the topics addressed in interactions in English are general and do not cater for the needs and interests of the dressmaking students.
- The majority of reading passages are not about tailoring As a result, the book under analysis does not facilitate the teaching of the vocabulary which is specific to the specialty so needed by students in technical schools.
- Only two percent of pictorial illustrations in the chosen corpus are related to tailoring.
- Generally, the EFL teachers and students in the technical schools where the study took place have a very low opinion of the official textbook because it is not reflective of their field of study.
- To make the textbook for technical students, EFL teachers suggested a specialty specific book that focusses more on pictures and vocabulary that remind of each domain.

- The quality of the book is the main factor of demotivation because 100% of the teachers who took part in the present study talked about the inadequacy between the contents of the books and the professional needs of technical learners.

Finally, drawing on the secondary data collected from EFL teachers and technical students, the following suggestions have been made in order to improve on the quality of the textbook

- More themes on tailoring should be included in Interactions in English 1ère to arouse more motivation.
- Include more specialty-specific vocabulary in order to suit the needs and likes of technical students.
- Add more pictures relating to the book appropriately by adding more pictures about tailoring so that dressmaking students feel concerned with the English they are being taught.
- Topics that could be of interest to dress making students should deal with the fashion industry, success in the tailoring domain, role models and their professional and social lives, fashion design and events, the ideal workshop, tailoring materials, types of clothes and textiles, African clothes, colours and their symbol, dressing and decency, fashion and technology, marketing and e commerce in the job market, tailoring in the digital era, religion and dressing code.

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## 6. Authors' Contributions

*Edwige Damaris Hagbe*: project structure, data collection, writing, discussion of ideas, structuring for submission, grammatical and scientific corrections and publication.

## 7. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest.

## 8. Ethics Approval

Not applicable.

## 9. Appendices

1. Interview guide for EFL teachers

1) Is the official textbook appropriate?

Yes ( )      No ( )

2) Why?

3) What can be done to improve on the book?

2. Interview guide for technical students

1) Do you find your English book interesting?

Yes ( )      No ( )

2) Why

3) What can be done to improve on the book and to motivate technical student to learn English?

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