

Exploring Beninese Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Pedagogical Preferences in Their Preparation To Teach English At The Porto- Novo Teachers Training School

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to examine Beninese pre-service EFL teachers' preferences in terms of activities used by instructors to train them in the teacher training schools. A free-response questionnaire was administered to the 120 participants who were advised to read the items carefully and respond honestly to each. Responses had been analyzed following by Ritchie & Spencer (1994). From the findings, it emerges that most of the participants investigated will strongly appreciate if they are given more opportunities to practice speaking in English and also more challenging or fun activities. Therefore, educators at teacher training schools are advised to use these kinds of activities to get their message through to the trainees.

Keywords: *Benin, teacher training, pre-service teachers of English, preferred activities.*

PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

Pedagogical preferences are about learners' preferred choice of teaching and learning activities carried out in the classroom. These preferences influence their quality and commitment to learning. Indeed, learners tend to be greatly involved if the teachers' choice in terms of activities carried out in classes matches their own wish and expectations. When the adverse situation occurs, there tends to be a high level of demotivation.

In the literature, there is evidence that the relation between anxiety and language pedagogy has been left largely unresearched although there have been some studies on the relation between student motivation and pedagogical preferences (Schmidt, Boraie & Kassabgy,

1996; Boudah, Logan and Greenwood, 2001; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Franke et.al., 2001; Garet et.al., 2001; Jacques, 2001; Richardson and Placier, 2001; Schmidt & Watanabe, 2001; Ockert, 2011). For example, Schmidt et al. (1996) reported that students who scored high on the affect dimension of motivation welcomed communicative classes, while those low on that dimension tended to reject the communicative classroom and that determined learners preferred classes in which there was a balance among different skill emphases and between teacher control and learner-centeredness. In the same line of thoughts, Schmidt and Watanabe (2001) support the above idea that a liking for challenging activities in the classroom is most affected by motivation to learn.

Although the literature shows a link between anxiety and motivation to learn, these findings cannot be considered valid for the relation between motivation and pedagogical preferences. It cannot be considered that such findings apply to Beninese pre-service EFL teachers. It is then important that further studies be carried out to determine these teachers' preferences. Therefore, the major purpose of this study is to investigate the perspectives of these prospective teachers about the types of learning activities they would like to be involved in during their training sessions at the teacher training school of Porto-Novo.

METHODOLOGY

120 pre-service teachers who are in the first semester of the first year of a BAPES (Brevet d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement Secondaire) program at a teacher training school in Benin have been selected randomly during the 2015-2016 academic years. Though non-native speakers of English, they have all studied English as a subject in school for at least seven years.

As recommended by the literature in similar cases (Lieberman and Miller, 1990; Borko and Putnam, 1996; Fullan, 2001; Kardos et al., 2001; Burnette, 2002; Cobb et.al., 2003; Demulder and Rigsby, 2003; Borko, 2004; Truscott and Truscott, 2004; Gnonlonfoun, 2014), data collection has been carried out by the means of a questionnaire. Indeed, a free-response questionnaire was designed to collect EFL pre-service teachers' opinions concerning their preferences regarding teaching and learning activities in English class. The questionnaire was administered to the participants who were advised to read the items carefully and respond honestly to each. They took an average of about thirty minutes to complete the questionnaire. Participants' responses were then coded and following the framework developed by Ritchie

& Spencer (1994). This framework involved reading and identifying recurring themes or categories and coding responses according to these.

FINDINGS

Table 1: Theme class and frequency of teachers' pedagogical preferences

Theme N°	Content	Frequency (n=120)
1	Opportunities for communicative use of the English language (through storytelling, discussions, writing songs, sharing, presentations, debates or forums) instead of language teaching and learning theories	72 (60%)
2	Provision of more interesting, exciting or fun activities (games, drama, role play, watching movies, presentations) instead of monotonous listening to the instructor teaching	108 (90%)
3	Opportunities to listen to the right pronunciation so that we can learn the correct pronunciation and new vocabulary	12 (10%)
4	Using explanation strategies/visual aids to help learners understand	20 (16, 66%)
5	Giving more writing exercises	8 (6, 66%)
6	Using only English during class	8 (6, 66%)
7	Change in attitudes and active involvement of pre-service teachers themselves	4 (3, 33%)
8	Things can keep going on as they are	8 (6, 66%)

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose assigned to this study was to investigate pre-service teachers' pedagogical preferences in learning English at a teacher training school in Benin. The findings show that a slight more than half of the pre-service teachers prefer learning activities where they have more opportunities to practice speaking in English instead of just learning theory. However, having more interesting, challenging, exciting or fun activities during an English class appeared to be most often suggested by the pre-service teacher participants. It seems that this large majority (nearly all the participants) preferred to be actively engaged in learning

activities such as games, drama, role play and presentations, and in watching movies instead of just listening to the lecturer. This may be because the atmosphere in which such games take place provide a more relaxed, less challenging and therefore less threatening learning environment. There were also some teacher participants concerned about learning the right pronunciation and increasing their vocabulary while some advocated that a variety of strategies should be used to help them understand what they were learning. They made other suggestions which included more essay-writing exercises and getting everyone to converse in English. This observation, as strange as it may sound here, is true in that some of the pre-service teachers might be passive in class, judging from the suggestion that pre-service teachers themselves should change their attitude and be more actively involved in learning activities in the English class.

These findings have shed a good light on pre-service teachers' pedagogical preferences. Indeed, it has been shown that most of these teachers will appreciate if they are given more opportunities to practise speaking in English and also more challenging or fun activities. The major pedagogical implication that can be drawn from the findings of this study is related to training in teacher training schools. Indeed, English instructors in such schools will attract learners and get them highly motivated if they take the time and efforts to find more and different ways of explaining things to them. This is important since their trainees will get a better understanding of what is taught. A wide variety of activities and tools can be used to achieve this objective. When these instructors use dual presentation methods in teaching, for instance new vocabulary, this may take care of pre-service teachers' worries about learning the correct pronunciation for new vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, it was necessary to investigate pre-service teachers' perspective on the activities used by their instructors to teach them. If these views are taken into account, trainees become definitely engaged in the learning process. It is important to note that the findings of this study are limited to the pre-service teachers involved. Further studies of both qualitative and quantitative designs are needed to get more detailed insights into the pedagogical preferences of pre-service teachers in EFL contexts like Benin.

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