

EXAMINING BENINESE EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' MOTIVATION TO LEARN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

It has been noted there is a dearth of data on foreign language learning motivation as far as pre-service teachers are concerned. Therefore, this study examines the motivation of Beninese EFL pre-service teachers with regards to the learning of the English language at the Teacher Training School of Porto-Novo. A free-response questionnaire was administered to 120 participants from first and second year of the programme. The framework developed by Ritchie & Spencer (1994) had been used to analyze responses. The analysis of the data indicated that second year participants were more motivated to learn the English language as they are the ones who made more effort to improve their capacities in listening, reading, speaking and writing skills. First year participants need instruction on ways to enhance their proficiency in the target language. English instructors are recommended to instruct them by using different strategies such as self-encouragement, anxiety reduction and monitoring emotions.

KEYWORDS: Benin, EFL Pre-Service Teachers of English, Motivation, Instructors & Teacher Training School

INTRODUCTION

Problem and Purpose

Like elsewhere worldwide, in Benin, there is a strong enthusiasm regarding learning of modern foreign languages such as English. In secondary schools, hundreds of learners choose it as their first foreign language to be learnt. The same motivation to learn English is still manifested at classical higher educational institutions as well as in professional schools such as the Teacher Training School of Porto-Novo.

In fact, motivation is a widely researched subject since it is considered as a key influencer in foreign language learning (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Kuukasjärvi, 2006; Liu, 2007, Yedomon et. al. 2016). The literature shows that motivation is significant in the sum of learners' effort in the learning process of a foreign language (Benson, 2001; Brown, 2000; Noels et al., 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Pintrich and Schunk (2002: 5) portray motivation as the process whereby a goal-directed activity is started and sustained. Therefore, it is clear that a motivated learner has better chances of success in the language learning process.

However, the anxiety inherent to the language learning process prevents learners to be strongly motivated. The adverse effects of anxiety are well-researched. Findings from several studies indicate the negative correlation between L2 anxiety and motivation to learn English (Liu & Huang, 2011; Yang, Liu & Wu, 2010, Perumal, 2008; Saikko, 2007). Clément, Dörnyei and Noels (1994) discovered that the motivated language learners of a given foreign language tend to be usually less anxious since they have better previous experiences which enable them to assess their personal proficiency

more highly. All these considerations help them to find less difficulty in carrying out learning tasks. These results are similar to those of Noels, Clément and Pelletier (1999) who concluded that the less motivated learners tend to make limited efforts. And result inferred from this finding shows a higher degree of difficulties in the tasks assigned. As non-native speakers of English, Beninese pre-service teachers are subject to the same situations. While, there is sufficient literature available on students' motivation, there is a dearth of data on the motivational bases of pre-service teachers. That is why this study seeks to examine Beninese EFL pre-service teachers' motivation to learn English. Such investigation from capital and its findings will highlight some of the limits of their curricula due to which proper actions can be taken to redress the situation. As such, the results of the present study will help teacher educators and institutions to equip their trainees with adequate training.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

120 pre-service teachers enrolled in a BAPES (Brevet d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement Secondaire) program at the Teacher Training School of Porto-Novo in Benin have been selected randomly as participants of this study. Among the 120, 60 were in first year and 60 were in second year of the program. Though non-native speakers of English, these participants are, however considered in forming an homogeneous group as they have learnt English for a minimum of seven years before their enrolment to this program. The training they will undergo is expected to equip them with all necessary knowledge and competence to teach English in secondary schools nationwide.

The data necessary for the study has been collected by means of a questionnaire. Indeed, a free-response questionnaire was designed and administered to the participants to collect their opinions on their language learning process and procedures. Participants were invited to provide details on (i) their frequency of use of the reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills and (ii) their own strategies and measures taken to develop their capacities in each skill. The average duration for completing the questionnaire was around thirty minutes. Participants' responses were then coded and following the framework was developed with Ritchie & Spencer's (1994) framework.

FINDINGS

Table 1: Pre-Service Teachers' Responses

N°	Questionnaire Content and Options	Participants' answers	
		2 nd year participants (n=60)	1 st year participants (n=60)
1	1.1 Frequency of speaking in English		
	<i>Most of the time or all the time</i>	51 (85%)	3 (5%)
	<i>Occasionally</i>	6 (10%)	15 (25%)
	<i>Seldom</i>	3 (5%)	42 (70%)
	1.2 Personal measures to develop their Speaking Abilities		
	<i>Communication with friends or family members in English</i>	27 (45%)	12 (20%)
	<i>Listening to music in English/ Watching movies in English</i>	9 (15%)	3 (5%)
	<i>Read more books/refer to dictionary</i>	18 (30%)	3 (5%)
	<i>No idea about how to improve speaking</i>	0	3 (5%)
2	<i>No attempts</i>	6 (10%)	39 (65%)
	2.1. Frequency of writing in English		
	<i>Frequently</i>	54 (90%)	21 (35%)
	<i>Occasionally</i>	6 (10%)	9 (15%)
	<i>Seldom</i>	0	30 (50%)

	2.2 Personal measures to develop their writing abilities		
	<i>Practice writing essays/emails/letters/do more exercises</i>	15 (25%)	15 (25%)
	<i>Studying several books/referring to dictionaries and/or other reference books</i>	45 (75%)	12 (20%)
	<i>No idea about how to improve speaking</i>	0	6 (10%)
	<i>No attempts</i>	0	27 (45%)
	3.1. Frequency of practicing the skill of listening in English		
	<i>Listening frequently to news and songs sung in English / Watching movies made in English</i>	57 (95%)	51 (85%)
	<i>Listening rarely to news and songs sung in English / Watching movies made in English</i>	3 (5%)	9 (15%)
	3.2 Personal measures to develop their listening abilities		
3	<i>Listening frequently to news and songs sung in English / Watching movies made in English</i>	21 (35%)	21 (35%)
	<i>Paying a close attention to the news/the lyrics/the subtitles /listening or watching more attentively</i>	12 (20%)	18 (30%)
	<i>Searching meanings from friends, teachers, family members or from the dictionary</i>	24 (40%)	12 (20%)
	<i>No attempts</i>	3 (5%)	9 (15%)
	4.1. Frequency of reading materials written in English		
	<i>Frequently</i>	57 (95%)	27 (45%)
	<i>Rarely</i>	3 (5%)	33 (55%)
	4.2. Personal measures to develop their reading abilities		
4	<i>Asking the meaning of words to friends, teachers, family members</i>	18 (30%)	18 (30%)
	<i>Finding out the meaning of words by referring to dictionaries, reference books or the internet</i>	42 (70%)	33 (55%)
	<i>No attempts</i>	0	9 (15%)
	Pre-service teachers' feelings during English classes		
5	<i>Strong interest</i>	6 (10%)	0
	<i>Happyness/confidence/comfort</i>	9 (15%)	6 (10%)
	<i>Normal</i>	30 (50%)	6 (10%)
	<i>Bored</i>	15 (25%)	15 (25%)
	<i>Confused/miserable</i>	0	6 (10%)
	<i>Nervous/shy</i>	0	18 (30%)
	<i>Very anxious</i>	0	9 (15%)

DISCUSSIONS

This study aims to gather details about Beninese EFL preservice teachers' efforts to develop their overall language capacities in English. The data summarized in Table 1 above showed the different reactions obtained from the two groups of teacher participants. From the table, it is evident that second year participants were more meticulous in working to improve their English language proficiency than first year participants.

There are notable differences in several regards. One aspect is related to the frequency of English speaking of second year participants and that of first year participants. Indeed, 15% of the first year participants communicated frequently in English whereas the percentage is 25% for second participants. While 25% of the first year participants reported doing so on occasions, 15% of second year teachers converse in English frequently. Second year participant teachers also appear to have displayed more efforts to improve in their oral skills and capacities by using strategies and

techniques such as loud reading, everyday communication with friends, family and others, watching movies in English or listening to songs sung in English, attending to explicit classes where the language is used or verifying the meaning of words and expressions in dictionaries and other reference books in English as well as carrying out cognitive activities in English. However, the majority (30%) of first year participants has indicated their use of the English language on daily basis to carry out communication and inherent tasks only in class.

The same trend emerges regarding preservice teachers' the frequency of writing in English. Indeed, 30% of second year participants indicated that they wrote in English most of the time while only 5% of their first counterparts did the same thing. Most of the first year preservice teachers reported that they write in English occasionally. Following these responses, second year participants seem to be making more efforts to improve their capacities in the writing skills through various activities (practicing writing, checking the meaning of things, words or expressions or checking with more referent persons or books, carrying out extra readings, and communicating more frequently in English. However, first year participants did seem not to be making such amount of efforts. That may explain why 20% of them said they try their best to read more books written in English or watch more movies in English. In the same vein, another 20% presented routine tasks such as assignments and homeworks as appropriate illustrations of their efforts to improve their writing skills.

As far as listening skills is concerned, it appears that the total number of second year participant teachers and 40% of first year teachers made use of this skill on a frequent basis. Both categories of participants have indicated various efforts (in the form of radio broadcasts in English, movies in English, news in English, reading different materials written in English) as strategies or techniques used to improve themselves in this skill.

As far as the reading skills are concerned, the difference was also marked between the two categories of participant teachers. Actually, 30% of second year teachers have indicated that they read materials written in English frequently. In the meantime, only 15% of first year participants did so. When they are compared to first year teachers, second year teacher participants are making more sustained effort to understand the materials they read. In addition, second year pre-service teachers were more attentive in their efforts to develop their reading skills in that 25% of them said they checked the meaning of new words in the dictionary while 30% of first year preservice teachers reported that, when they meet new words or are confronted with difficult words, they tried their best to guess the meaning of the words, be it difficult or new.

These results are similar to those from the literature in relation to motivation and language learning (Clement et al., 1994; Liu, 2007, Kakpo et.al., 2015; Kouton et al., 2015) and those related to the unfavorable influence of anxiety on language learners' efforts (Horwitz et al., 1986; Noels et al., 1999). Students' motivation and inherent learning habits are affected by learners' feelings of anxiety concerning the subject matter being learnt (Brown, Robson & Rosenkjar, 2001; Gardner et al., 2004, Gnonlonfoun, 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

The results show that Beninese second year preservice EFL learners are keen on working hard to develop their overall proficiency in English language. It is therefore opportune to recommend that English instructors at the teacher training school help pre-service teachers to learn English, through interesting, exciting and fun activities so as to provide them with a convenient environment for learning. The findings also suggest that first year preservice EFL teachers need to be taught strategies and techniques that are useful to help them to improve their proficiency in English. English instructors are

invited to do so to contribute to these learners' self-encouragement, anxiety reduction, and monitoring emotions. Such strategies help in the creation of a conducive environment in the classroom that encourage risk-proficiency, alleviate language anxiety and facilitate learning. Future studies using mixed methodologies are needed to get further information about the different aspects of this issue.

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