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■ FACTORS INFLUENCING METHOD CHOICES OF EFL TEACHERS IN MAURITANIA: A REFLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Ovaj rad bavi se faktorima koji utiču na izbor nastavnih metoda stranih nastavnika EFL-a u Mauritaniji. U fokusu ove studije su nastavnicima engleskog jezika čiji je maternji ili drugi jezik engleski i koji su predavali ili trenutno predaju EFL u Mauritaniji. Glavni ciljevi ovog rada su da se identifikuju faktori koji utiču na izbor nastavnih metoda kod nastavnika, kao i da se ispita uticaj njihove obuke (kako početne obuke tako i kasnijeg stručnog usavršavanja), refleksije nastavnika, zemlje porekla i kvalifikacije nastavnika. Podaci su prikupljeni korišćenjem upitnika i intervjuva, koji su potom analizirani kvalitativnom metodom sa fokusom na tematsku analizu interpretacije podataka. Rezultati su otkrili da više faktora značajno utiče na izbor nastavnih metoda. Ovi faktori se mogu klasifikovati u sledeće kategorije: (1) faktori koji se odnose na učenike, (2) okruženje u učionici, (3) faktori koji se odnose na čas, (5) faktori koji se odnose na nastavnika i njegovu refleksivnu nastavu i (6)) drugi faktori, koji uključuju (a) kulturu (b) jezičku raznolikost, (c) uslove rada i (d) očekivanja administracije.

Ključne reči: nastavna praksa, identitet nastavnika, kulturna ograničenja, inicijalna obuka i stručno usavršavanje, obrazovanje nastavnika, metodologija nastave.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning are intertwined, as they are two sides of the same coin with an unbreakable affinity. While learning entails receiving knowledge, teaching serves as the process by which knowledge is transmitted. In other words, the application of teaching methods, such as techniques, strategies, procedures, and approaches, is always triggered by various factors. Therefore, it is vital for foreign and non-foreign educators across different countries to identify these factors in order to enhance students' learning and unleash their performance.

This paper investigates the factors influencing the choice of teaching methods of foreign English teachers teaching EFL in Mauritania. It is hypothesized that the choice

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of teaching method is influenced by factors such as pre-service and in-service teaching, teacher reflection, country of origin, and teacher qualifications.

The first part of the paper is dedicated to the theoretical foundations of teacher reflection and factors influencing the choice of teaching methods. It mainly depicts teaching practice in relation to pre-service and in-service teacher training and the factors that might influence teachers' choice of teaching methods.

The main part of this paper deals with the methodology, where the method, research questions and hypotheses, sample of the study, and instruments are stated, the main findings of the study are discussed, and the main inferences are drawn. The conclusion summarizes the main findings, states the limitations of this study and suggests an area for further research.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Teaching English as a foreign language in Mauritania remains challenging because the country has limited facilities and resources and lacks adequate teaching strategies, making it difficult for teachers to implement the most interactive and innovative teaching methods (Eli 2021). (Eli 2021: 102) stated, "in a country like Mauritania, a lot of efforts need to be done in terms of the implementation of innovative and interactive teaching methods". Although there are various teaching strategies and methods teachers can deploy, the choice of the teaching method, particularly for foreign teachers teaching EFL in Mauritania, depends on different factors.

In the last decade, teacher reflection has become an essential area of research in EFL teacher education. In particular, research in this field is often influenced by teachers' prior schooling, their knowledge, experience, and teaching practice, as well as their reflections on their pre-service and in-service training (Dewey 1938; Schön 1983, 1987). Theorists Dewey (1938) and Schön (1983, 1987) have significantly impacted and laid the groundwork for teacher reflection in teacher education by considering the teacher's experience and knowledge as an integral part of the reflective process. Through introspection and analysis of past experiences, individuals can better understand their thoughts, emotions, and actions.

3. THE SCOPE AND DEFINITION OF REFLECTION

According to Moayeri/Rahimiy (2019: 129), "the concept of teacher reflection is defined as "teachers' beliefs about their teaching practice". The reflective practice aims to help teachers see how their beliefs influence their pedagogical choices through analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of the teaching process. Rajput *et al.* (2021: 18) defined teacher reflection as "reflection on one's own experiences and assumptions, as part of the course and classroom enquiry; critical observation and reflective analysis of the practices of teaching, are some of the key components of professional growth of a teacher and are crucial for being an effective teacher".

The fundamental theories of reflection and reflective practice originated from the work of Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983; 1987). In fact, Schön based his work on Dewey's theories, and he is most generally known for his theory of reflecting in and reflecting on one's practice. According to Garrido (2023), Schön's theory of reflection comprises processes: reflection in action and reflection on action:

Reflection in action is understood as what the teacher does in the situation at the moment they are teaching, when they decide to do one action or another, when they think about previous situations, from their professional training, as well as their experiences with students, this mainly occurs when a new circumstance or surprising situation arises. On the other hand, reflection on action is the one that is carried out afterwards, which occurs after the class has been given, therefore its context is posterior to the action. (Garrido 2023: 31)

In line with Schön's quotation, Purdue University (2020), identified three types of reflection: in-the-moment reflection for immediate action, after-the-moment reflection for future action, and outside reflection. In-the-moment reflection involves taking notes during classroom activities to help adjust teaching styles and engage or assist students. After-the-moment reflection allows teachers to enhance classroom activities or learning materials by reviewing notes. Outside reflection involves exchanging reflective experiences among teachers from different countries through professional learning networks.

4. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF TEACHING METHODS

A. TEACHING REFLECTION

Reflective teaching or reflective practice has been one of the influential factors in choosing the method of teaching (Dewey 1938). Research on the nature of reflection often focuses on teacher identity, experience, teaching methods, and the construction of pedagogical content knowledge (Hashweh 2005). However, Moon (2000: 31) suggested that "where and when reflection actually occurs and when it leads to learning, and what is the relation between reflection and learning are still, though, largely unanswered important questions".

In her paper about reflective teaching, Gimenez (1992) emphasized the importance of reflective learning in the field of ELT. She highlighted that researchers suggested that pre-service and in-service courses adopt reflective approaches. Teachers are encouraged to think about their work, adopt reflective approaches, and articulate their beliefs about language learning more explicitly at the institutional and societal levels. This requires them to understand the learning process and have knowledge generated from personal experience and external research. Gimenez's findings indicated that some practical examples of teacher reflection are drawn from pre-service teacher education using journal writing to promote reflective practice.

In line with Gimenez's findings, Kim (2018) noted that pre-service teachers reflect on their teaching through journal writing in an English writing course, which provides teachers with opportunities to reconsider and reflect on their own learning experiences and classroom teaching. The informal nature of journal writing facilitates with the process of reflective practice. Kim's findings show that journal writing promotes reflective practice in pre-service teaching, particularly in classroom teaching, by developing reflection content. Abednia, Hovassapian, Teimournezhad, and Ghanbari (2013), and Cholifah, Asib and Suparno (2020) showed that reflective teaching practices, such as journal writing, peer observation, coaching, student feedback, and action research, help

in-service EFL teachers to reflect on their personal and contextual factors that improve their teaching skills.

In addition, some studies have found that using diaries can help teachers evaluate their teaching methods and make better decisions by reflecting on their own teaching experiences, handling challenges, finding solutions, and making decisions (Ahmadian *et al.* 2021). In this regard, teachers' diaries have been argued to serve pedagogical purposes, instill reflective thinking, and help construct professional knowledge among language teachers (Howell-Richardson/Parkinson 1988; Gabrys-Barker 2014).

B. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF TEACHING METHODS

There are many factors which influence the choice of teaching methods. These factors include but are not limited to teachers' knowledge of language, teachers' pre-service and in-service training, teachers' beliefs, teacher identity, and the context (Dewey 1933; Schön 1983; Hashweh 2005; Kim 2018; Olayinka 2019). Olayinka (2019) brought prominent insights into the factors influencing the choice of teaching methods. According to her,

The development of scientific skills largely depends on methods of teaching used. Every science teacher is expected to have a clear understanding of the basis for his/her profession. A command of facts of science as well as the ability to encourage and inspire his/her students is vary [sic]. No single method is best for all topics and for all teachers and learners. The crucial factor is that teaching should focus more on the needs of the learners. The teacher is required to consider the subject matter, the objectives, facilities and other factors in relation to the learners [sic] needs. (Olayinka 2019: 317)

Reflection in teaching is based on experience and evaluating the best methods for implementation, identifying missing elements, and areas for improvement. In other words, teaching methods encompass all the procedures, strategies, techniques, approaches, pedagogy, and management that teachers use, particularly in the classroom, to help students learn and attain all stipulated instructional goals set for a lesson (Richards/Rodgers 2001; Olayinka 2019). The type of teaching method that is appropriate for a particular subject depends on several factors including the students' level, their prior and current knowledge, learning needs, the subject itself, available time, materials, and the learning environment (Olayinka 2019).

Olayinka's findings are in line with those of Hasdianti (2019), who conducted a study on *the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding their choice of teaching methods at the University of Muhammadiyah in Yogyakarta, Indonesia*. Hasdianti, using a qualitative descriptive research design, identified two main factors influencing the selection of teaching methods. The first factor revolves around pre-service teachers' perceptions of teaching methods used in teaching practice. This involves the interaction between the teacher and students during classroom activities. The second factor influencing the choice of teaching method includes student-related factors, learning facilities, learning goals, learning materials, time allocation, and the teacher's knowledge in the subject matter. The availability of facilities, such as a blackboard, computer, projector, tables, and chairs, significantly influences the teaching and learning process.

Additionally, Cheruiyot's (2018) study examined teacher *factors that influence the choice of teaching methods*. Cheruiyot showed that teacher training, age, experience, school location, and their relationships with students play significant roles in influencing the choice of teaching methods. The study also showed that head teachers who had in-service teacher training and seminars, were highly motivated and could use different teaching methods effectively. Meanwhile, teachers who missed out on in-service training lacked the chance to improve their teaching methods, learn new teaching techniques, and address challenges, which made it harder for them to effectively deliver the curriculum.

Teachers' reflective practice may not always support their role in the classroom when teachers are unaware of their beliefs and the power of reflective practice. Senior (2006: 247) states, "a large number of teachers do not have the inclination to sit down and reflect on the reasons that underlie their classroom decision-making." Zeichner (1996) proposed several reasons to demonstrate that teachers' reflective practices do not always align with their intended goals, including a lack of attention to the social and institutional teaching environment and a focus on personal reflection rather than group sharing. For example, Farrell and Bennis (2013) found in their case study that two EFL teachers, one experienced and one novice, were not aware of their instructional beliefs until they were asked about them during the interview.

As suggested by Kanno (2018), other factors, including the environment and sociolinguistic situation, are crucial in selecting an appropriate teaching method. In other words, teaching a particular language in a foreign country with a different culture, educational system, and curriculum significantly differs from teaching it in one's native country. The varying policies directly or indirectly influence teachers' choices of teaching method.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study examines the factors that influence the choice of teaching methods among foreign English teachers teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Mauritania. It focuses on English teachers whose native language is English, who speak English as a second language, and who have experience teaching or are currently teaching EFL in Mauritania. Thirteen teachers participated in this study, but only seven were considered valid, and six were excluded because they were originally from Mauritania. The seven teachers who participated in the study have diverse teaching backgrounds, come from different countries such as the USA, UK, Gambia, and Guinea, and possess various teaching qualifications, including TEFL and TESOL certificates, university teaching certificates, master's degrees, and higher teacher's certificates.

The study focused on qualitative data collection, using both a questionnaire and an interview. Although the graphs in the study show quantitative results, the focus is on qualitative interpretation through the narrative inquiry method, where the focus is on the participants' experience. Thematic analysis was employed to extract and analyze themes from the data set. The questionnaire was distributed online through Google Forms, and the participants were provided with a link to Calendly, an automated scheduling platform where they could book the interview based on their availabilities.

5.1. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions divided into two sections. The questions were constructed based on the research hypothesis and previous studies on similar topics. This questionnaire included two types of questions: closed-ended questions and mixed-format questions. Mixed-format questions combine closed and open-ended elements, requiring respondents to select an answer from a list and provide further explanation.

The first section of the questionnaire consisted of an introductory section about the participants' backgrounds and teaching experiences in Mauritania. It covered information such as the teachers' countries of origin, native language, pre-service and in-service teaching experience, teaching certificate, years of teaching experience in Mauritania, and institutions they have taught or are currently teaching at in Mauritania.

The second section focused on teaching strategies and factors influencing the choice of teaching method. It aimed to explore the impact of pre-service and in-service teacher experience, their knowledge about teaching methods used in Mauritania, their experience in adapting their teaching philosophy in a multilingual and multicultural sociolinguistic setting like Mauritania, and whether Mauritanian social interaction, culture, and working conditions influenced their choice of teaching method. This section also addressed aspects such as schools' facilities and resources, the curriculum, students' learning goals, and classroom management to determine whether they affect teachers' choice of teaching methods. It also considered potential constraints encountered when choosing and implementing teaching methods, as well as other factors influencing their choice of teaching method.

5.2. THE INTERVIEW

In the interview, the participants were asked follow-up questions about the answers provided in the survey in order to gain deeper insight into their perspectives. As the interview was optional, most of the participants believed that they had already provided enough information through the questionnaire. Hence, the interview was conducted with one participant, an American teacher. It was done online using Zoom Meeting platform. It was semi-structured interview and consisted of five questions.

The first one focused on whether teachers incorporate reflection on action, after-action reflection or reflection for future action as part of their reflexive practice. The second one investigated the cultural constraints that teachers encountered in different situations where they had to adjust their communication style to suit the cultural norms in Mauritania. While the third question explored the factors that influence teachers' choice and implementation of teaching methods in Mauritania, the fourth question attempted to uncover how pre-service and in-service teacher training helped teachers overcome all the constraints they encountered in different contexts, including Mauritania. The fifth question invited teachers to share a personal anecdote as a practical example of situations where they had to reflect on their teacher training and apply that reflection to manage those particular situations effectively.

The interview was recorded, and the consent was obtained from the respondent. In this interview, the teacher provided further explanation about the factors influencing their choice of teaching methods and shared an anecdote from their personal teaching experience. The interview was transcribed, and themes were categorized using *NVivo 11*

software. The interview analysis was conducted as a narrative systematic investigation, and the responses were classified and analyzed based on themes that it revolved around.

5.3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

The first question is: What factors influence the choice of teaching methods among foreign English teachers in Mauritania? This question is based on the hypothesis that there are factors that influence the choice of teaching methods among foreign English teachers in Mauritania.

The second question is: Do the factors of pre-service and in-service teacher training, teacher reflection, country of origin, and teacher qualifications influence their choice of teaching method? This question is based on the hypothesis that the choice of teaching method is influenced by pre-service and in-service teaching, teacher reflection, country of origin, and teacher qualifications.

The third question is: Are there any other factors that might influence the choice of teaching method in the Mauritanian context? This question is based on the hypothesis that some other factors influence teachers' choice of teaching methods in the Mauritanian context.

5.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Based on the research questions and hypotheses, the main objectives of this research are:

- 1 To identify the factors that influence the choice of teaching methods among foreign English teachers in Mauritania.
- 2 To investigate how pre-service and in-service teacher training, teacher reflection, country of origin, and teacher qualifications influence their choice of teaching method.
- 3 To provide insights into other potential factors that may influence the choice of teaching method in the Mauritanian context.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

Questionnaire

Section1: Demographic information about the participants

1. Country of origin:

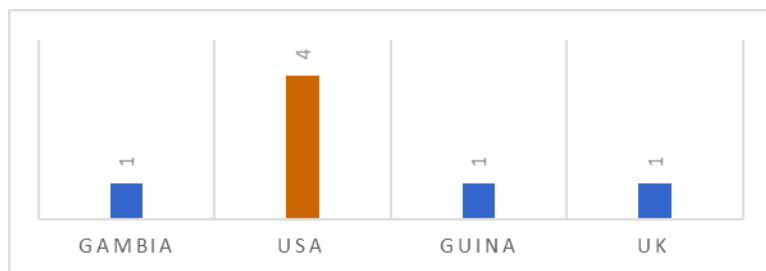


Figure 1. Country of origin

The participants of this study are from different countries, as shown in the Figure 1 above, with the majority from the USA. This may be due to the fact that teachers usually come from the USA. They teach at the HUB Center, the University of Nouakchott, Lebanese University, and other institutions.

2. Native language

This item aims to gather information about the participants' native language. All participants in this study speak English, either as a first or second language. Those who speak English as their second language come from various African countries. In particular, these participants speak Wolof in Gambia and Woulf in Guinea.

3. Where have you gained your pre-service and in-service teaching experience?

The respondents demonstrated that they have gained pre-service and in-service teaching experience in different countries. In particular, participants from the USA have gained their teaching experience through pre-service and in-service teacher training. While the first participant gained their experience through teaching at centers and schools in Argentina, Japan, the Czech Republic, and Tunisia before they came to Mauritania, the second participant illustrated that they had their training in the U.S., Haiti, Liberia, Senegal, Rwanda, Vietnam, China, El Salvador, Saint Vincent, and the Grenadines.

The third American participant pointed out that they gained their teaching experience through teaching in secondary schools in Olympia, particularly their pre-service and in-service teaching in Washington, New York City, Chicago, Prince George's County, Montgomery, and Maryland. The fourth one has gained teaching experience at Liberty University and Kellogg Management Institute. They also gained teaching experience in Mauritania at the intensive English Center, American English & Tutoring Services, and American English Center. While the participants from Guinea and Gambia had their teaching experience in Gambia and Sierra Leone before they came to Mauritania, the participant from the United Kingdom had their teaching experience exclusively in the United Kingdom before they came to Mauritania.

This indicates that the majority of teachers had their teaching experience in countries other than Mauritania, such as Argentina, the USA, China, and the Czech Republic. They would likely adapt easily to the cultural norms of a foreign country like Mauritania. Teachers who also had similar experiences in countries like Tunisia, Rwanda, and Senegal are likely well-equipped to navigate the challenges of teaching in similar contexts.

4. Teaching Certificate

This data shows that most participants have TEFL and TESOL certifications, alongside a University Teaching Certificate, master's degree, and a higher teacher's certificate. However, one participant does not have any of these mentioned certificates, but holds a university degree. The answer highlights that these diverse qualifications are essential for teaching English in a foreign country. TESOL and TEFL certifications specifically prepare teachers to handle the challenges of teaching English to non-native speakers, focusing on various teaching strategies as they are provided with specialized training in teaching English to native speakers of other languages. This training often focuses

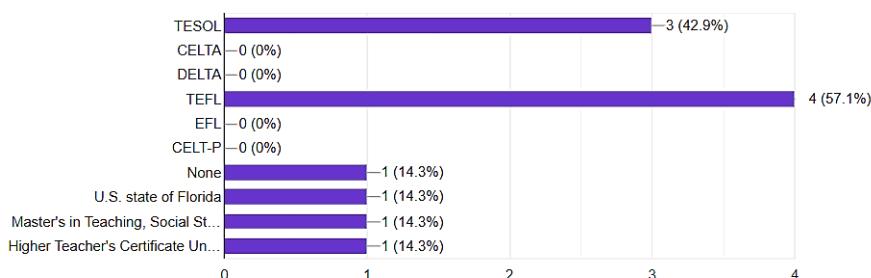


Figure 2. Teaching Certificate

on practical teaching skills, classroom management, and effective language instruction strategies. A university degree and higher teaching certificates also provide a solid academic foundation, subject knowledge, and the capability to develop pedagogical skills necessary for effective teaching. These qualifications aim to help teachers teach in diverse settings, such as Mauritania, enabling them to reflect on their teaching practice and implement teaching methods.

5. Teaching experience in Mauritania

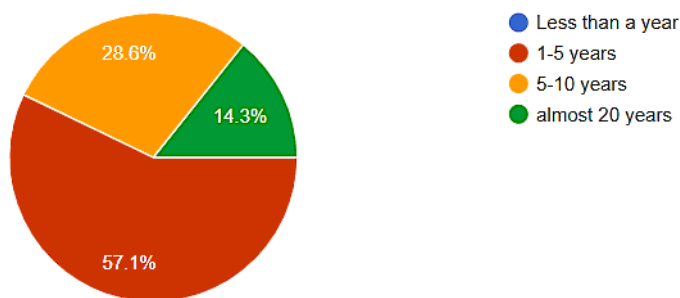


Figure 3. Teaching experience in Mauritania

All teachers involved in this study have different teaching experiences ranging from 1–5 years, 5–10 years, and nearly 20 years of teaching in Mauritania. This diversity has enabled to immerse themselves in Mauritanian culture and gain insights into various school curricula and students' learning objectives. This teaching experience demonstrates teachers' ability to develop a deep understanding of diverse educational contexts and curricula, adjusting their methods to meet the specific needs of their students in the Mauritanian context.

6. Institutions you have taught or are teaching at

The data indicates that teachers have worked in various schools and universities in Mauritania, including Sahara English (an American school), American Corner Centre, Intensive English Centre, Nouakchott University Al Aasriya, and an ENS (Teachers Training College). Where these foreign teachers taught in Mauritania is crucial for considering a specific teaching environment when adjusting teaching styles and methods. For instance,

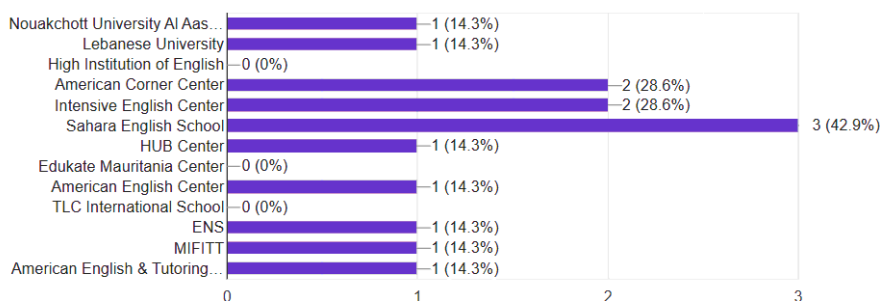


Figure 4. Place of employment

adapting teaching methods to meet the needs of learners at a university or school differs from teaching pre-service and in-service teachers at ENS in Mauritania.

Section 2: Teaching Strategies and Adaptations

In the previous section, we explored teachers' prior experience in countries other than Mauritania, their teaching qualifications, teaching experience, and the institutions where they taught within the Mauritanian context. This section aims to gain insights into their teaching reflection and the factors influencing their choice of teaching methods, particularly when adapting their strategies to align with the curriculum of a specific institution and meet their students' needs.

1. My previous pre-service and in-service teacher experience helped me to... in Mauritania: (Please select all that apply)

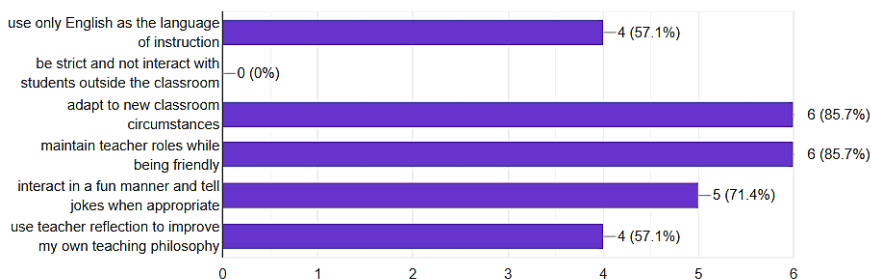


Figure 5. Benefits of pre-service and in-service teacher training

This data shows that pre-service and in-service teacher experience helps foreign teachers adopt different teaching methods in Mauritania. The majority indicated that it helped them to adapt to new classroom circumstances and maintain teacher roles while being friendly. It also enabled them to interact with students in a fun manner and tell jokes when appropriate. Other teachers pointed out that their pre-service and in-service teacher experience assisted them to use English exclusively as the language of instruction and use their teacher reflection to improve their own teaching philosophy. Overall, this shows us that pre-service and in-service teacher training and reflective practice are essential in implementing teaching methods and strategies through the teaching and learning processes.

2. Briefly describe your pre-service and in-service teaching experience.

The answers to this question show that teachers who had experience teaching at universities before coming to Mauritania are motivated to teach at different universities in Mauritania. In particular, teachers who taught trainee teachers were motivated to teach in institutions like ENS in Mauritania, the teacher training college. Their responses entail that teaching teachers who are motivated to learn is different from teaching those who are not motivated. The factors of experience and age here play a significant role. Overall, their pre-service and in-service teaching experiences help them to use various interactive activities such as fun games and role plays. They also implement teaching methods that work best and that help to deal with various disciplines.

3. What teaching methods have you employed when teaching EFL in Mauritania? (Please select all that apply)

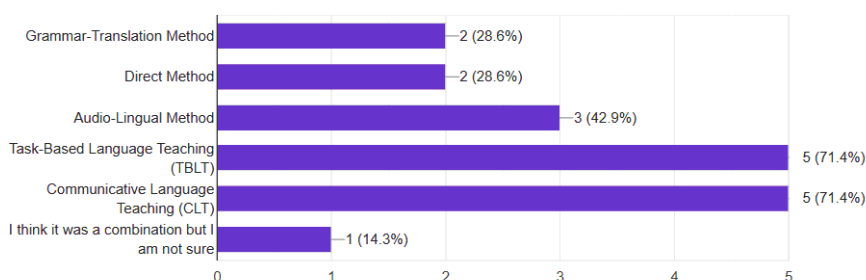


Figure 6. Teaching methods

According to the participants' answers, the most widely implemented teaching approaches in Mauritanian by EFL teachers are Task-based Language Teaching and Communicative Language Teaching. In addition, some foreign English teachers in Mauritania have also adapted Audiolingual, Grammar-Translation, and Direct Method.

4. Based on your experience, which of the methods mentioned above is the most effective in teaching English in Mauritania? Please justify your answer.

Teachers in Mauritania hold different views on the most effective approach to teaching English. Some believe that the Communicative Approach and the Grammar-Translation method are the most widely used in Mauritania. Others argue that any method can be effective, depending on its implementation. The key is establishing a connection with students and ensuring that the curriculum is meaningful and relevant to them.

5. What teaching strategies do you find the most effective when adapting to different cultural situations? (Please select all that apply)

The respondents expressed different opinions. On the one hand, they found that the most effective strategies involve culturally relevant materials and examples, encouraging students to share their cultural perspectives, adjusting communication styles to align with cultural norms, and incorporating students' native languages. On the other hand, other teachers mentioned that as students learn English, it is essential for

them to understand British and American cultural norms. These teachers do not think it is essential to consider the students' cultural situation.

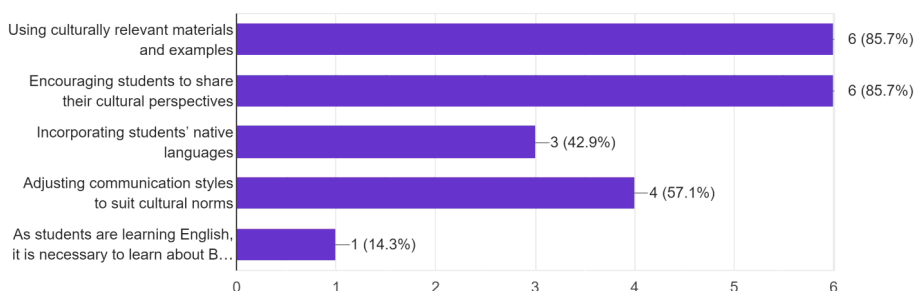


Figure 7. Effective teaching strategies for adapting to cultural situations

6. Do you find it challenging to follow your own teaching philosophy in the multilingual and multicultural sociolinguistic situation in Mauritania? Please justify your answer.

The answers to this question indicate that some participants find it challenging due to students' lack of effort, cultural norms requiring careful interaction, and difficulties in integrating curricula into multilingual and multicultural contexts due to the limited materials and resources. However, others believe these issues can be managed by adjusting teaching methods to linguistic diversity, cultural awareness, and local educational practices. These respondents believe that native English teachers are often able to successfully adapt their teaching approaches to align with the local context in multilingual and multicultural settings like Mauritania, due to their training.

7. Do the factors of Mauritanian social interaction, culture, and working conditions influence your choice of teaching method?

The participants believed that social interaction, culture, and working conditions influence their choice of teaching methods. In terms of culture, some teachers believe that avoiding specific topics like religion, politics, and gender differences can significantly impact their teaching activities in one way or another. One teacher said *"One difficulty for me was changing my interaction based on gender, such as not touching male students, which was something different for me"*. Other participants emphasized that teachers should use culturally relevant materials and adapt their content to reflect local traditions and values to engage students effectively. Working in a well-equipped school with supportive staff makes it easier to implement successful teaching methods. However, the physical conditions of classrooms, including class size and technological access, can impact the feasibility of specific teaching methods.

8. Do aspects such as the school's facilities and resources, the curriculum, students' learning goals, and classroom management affect your choice of teaching method?

The responses to this item highlight the significant influence of factors such as school facilities, resources, curriculum, students' learning goals, and classroom management on

the choice of teaching method. Also, respondents demonstrate that the availability of teaching materials (books, technology, lab equipment) significantly affects their lesson plans and the methods they use to deliver them. The physical setup of classrooms, including seating arrangements can determine the appropriateness of group work and the use of interactive methods. In this regard, one teacher quoted *"Yes, I have to consider what resources are available for me to use, and how helpful they would be for the classes I want to teach. Also, when choosing class subjects, I need to consider how interesting and engaging it will be for the average young adult in Mauritania. Otherwise, I'm wasting my time"*.

Overall, teachers perceive that all the aforementioned factors significantly affect their teaching methods. For example, to manage student behavior, a teacher may use activities and methods designed to keep students engaged and focused, fostering active participation and engagement.

9. What constraints do you encounter when choosing and implementing teaching methods in your classroom? (Please select all that apply)

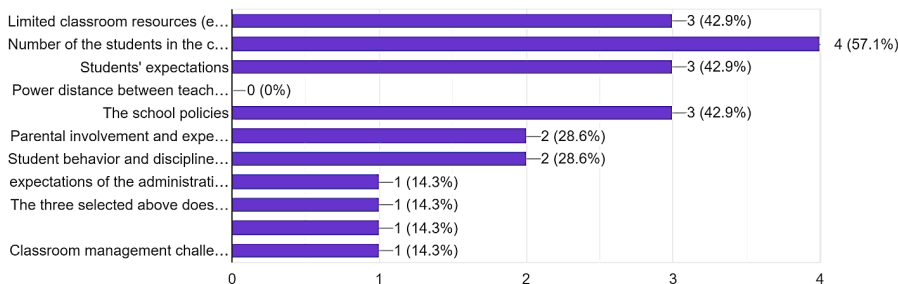


Figure 8. Constraints of the implementation of teaching methods

The responses to this question revealed that many teachers encounter constraints when selecting and applying teaching methods in their classrooms. The primary challenges include a large number of students in the classroom, limited classroom resources (e.g., textbooks, technology), classroom management, students' expectations, school policies, parental involvement, and expectations. Additionally, the respondents mentioned that unclear expectations from the administration are another major constraint they encounter.

10. Are there any other factors that influence the choice of your teaching method?

While some teachers believe that the factors discussed in the previous questions are the major influences on their choice of teaching methods, others added that factors such as the teacher's teaching philosophy, available materials, textbooks, and other resources can also determine which methods are practical.

Analysis of the interview

In addition to the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview was designed to investigate teachers' teaching experiences, thoughts on their teaching reflection, and

teaching philosophy. It also aimed to highlight different factors that influence their teaching methods. It used qualitative open-ended questions to gather insights about the social and cultural factors and pedagogical practices that might influence their teaching methods based on their pre-service and in-service training experience and their overall teaching experience in Mauritania.

Each question was discussed separately in relation to the research questions. Also, NVivo 11 software was used to identify and categorize themes within the responses.

1. What aspects of teaching do you incorporate as a part of your reflective practice to improve your teaching philosophy aside from those mentioned in the questionnaire?

The teacher stated the following *"I always take some time to reflect after each class. It's a very straightforward process. One method that I like and use often is to reflect on what happened in class. After each class, I take some time to summarize the key points, reflect on how I felt and how the class went, and then think about how I can improve for next time"*. Based on the teacher's response, the type of reflection they practice in order to improve their teaching philosophy is the after-action reflection and for future action.

2. So, in terms of adapting to different cultural situations, did you encounter any cultural constraints when it comes to adjusting your communication style to suit the cultural norms?

The response to this question shows that being friendly and open-minded, learning about students' cultures and preferences, engaging them in the learning process, constantly identifying their challenges, and providing them with solutions help the teacher to adapt to different cultural situations. However, gender differences presented a challenge for the teacher, as in many Mauritanian communities, males and females are not allowed to touch or make physical contact, except in cases of in milk kinship, also referred to as milk siblings².

In this regard the teacher stated *"I needed to communicate differently and avoid physical contact with male students. Sometimes, I had to be cautious to ensure my words were not wrongly taken. When I discuss my personal experiences or express myself, I always aim to communicate clearly without causing offense to anyone"*.

It is obvious that the teacher was unaware of the cultural norm, as they had not encountered it before coming to Mauritania. They also mentioned that students seemed embarrassed when physical contact occurred with the opposite gender.

3. Are there any other constraints that you encounter when choosing and implementing your teaching method in the classroom, basically, in the Mauritanian context? Meaning, is there anything that you can link to the same experience that you had in Haiti, Liberia, Senegal, Rwanda, the USA, and China as compared to the Mauritanian context?

The answer to this question revealed that teachers experienced different challenges in different countries compared to Mauritania. The common challenge across different

2 In Islam, children who are suckled by the same woman become, in effect, related by milk as siblings even though they may not be blood-related (Thorley 2014).

countries was understanding the diverse learning preferences of students. Specifically, in Mauritania, students tend to be more reserved than those in the United States. They often prefer to listen rather than speak, which is challenging when learning a language requires active speaking. Therefore, it was mandatory for the teacher to provide activities to engage and motivate them to use the language. In Mauritania, students' and administrations' expectations are sometimes unrealistic. Therefore, it is crucial for the teacher to understand the teaching objectives, school curriculum, and students' expectations in order to align them with their teaching practices.

4. So, how did your pre-service teacher training help you to overcome all constraints when teaching in different contexts?

The participant stated: *I continuously adjust my methods and content, listening and responding to what happens in each class. If I notice students struggling with something, I focus on addressing that issue in future lessons. I avoid repeating what they already understand and instead concentrate on overcoming unexpected challenges by bringing those issues into the classroom to help students learn what they find difficult.* The response to this item demonstrated that in each teaching context, it is crucial to observe the students – understanding their abilities, struggles, performance levels, and identifying what strategies are effective for them.

5. Do you have any anecdote, a story or anything based on your teaching experience in any context that you would like to share with us?

"I remember a time when a misunderstanding led to a significant lesson for me. One day in class, while I was explaining something to the students, I told one of the students, "No, no, no, not that.". Then, he was upset, insisting that I had said something entirely different. I argued that I had not said what he claimed, but the incident bothered me deeply. It bothered me so much. I could not shake off the feeling, and I was determined to make things right. As soon as the student entered the class the following day, I took the opportunity to apologize to him. I told him that I was sorry and that I was not the type of teacher who is always correct. I'm a human being, and I must be ready to learn from the students, recognize my mistakes, and recognize the way to connect to them in a meaningful way. This experience made me realize that teaching is not just about intellectual exchange but also about human connection. It has to be communication which includes being human, having concern, having a way to be a person to person with the students".

The anecdote above reminds us that teaching involves more than just sharing information; it is also about forming genuine human connections. Effective communication in the classroom requires teachers to embrace their humanity, demonstrate empathy, and establish professional connections with their students.

All in all, the interview showed that the power of teacher reflection in education lies in the teaching philosophy, where teachers express their values and beliefs about teaching as outlined in the following Figure 9

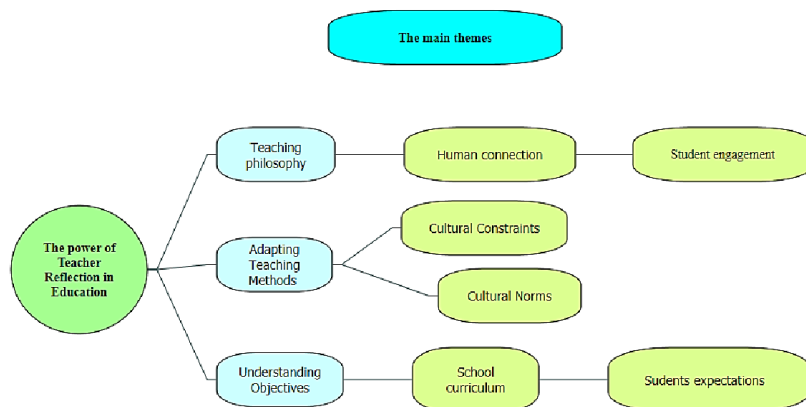


Figure 9. These themes are extracted from the interview using NVivo 11 Software

Power of education also allows teachers to adopt teaching methods, techniques, and an understanding of teaching objectives throughout their practices. However, the selection of a particular teaching method is influenced by various factors, such as teaching objectives, the school curriculum, and students' expectations.

The anecdote unveiled that human connection plays a crucial role in teaching and learning. Human connection as part and a characteristic of teaching philosophy and practice is a key to developing students' skills, cognitive abilities, and engagement. Human connection is closely related to emotional intelligence in learning, as Tomlinson/McTighe (2004: 16) stated that "They (students) come to the classroom first looking for things like affirmation, affiliation, accomplishment, and autonomy {...} they are looking for adults who accept them, value them, guide them, and represent for them what it means to be a competent and caring adult". The interview also showed that adopting or choosing a teaching method might be influenced or constrained by cultural norms depending on the context.

7. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicate that the respondents gained pre-service and in-service teaching experience in different countries before coming to Mauritania, including the USA, Argentina, Japan, the Czech Republic, Tunisia, Haiti, Liberia, Senegal, Rwanda, Vietnam, and China. This suggests that the majority of teachers had prior teaching experience in countries quite different from Mauritania, such as Argentina, the USA, China, and Czech Republic, which may make it more challenging for them to easily adjust to the cultural norms of a foreign country like Mauritania. However, teachers who had similar experiences in countries like Tunisia may have been better equipped to navigate the educational system, culture, and religion of Mauritania.

Regarding their educational background and official certification, the majority of the teachers in this study have TEFL and TESOL certifications in addition to a university teaching diploma, a master's degree, and a higher teacher's certificate.

As for the time the research was conducted, the participants had varied teaching experiences in Mauritania, ranging from 1–5 years, 5–10 years, to nearly 20 years. They have taught at various schools and universities in Mauritania particularly in Sahara English (American school), the American Corner Center, the Intensive English Center, Nouakchott University Al Aasriya, and ENS.

In line with previous studies by Gimenez (1992), Cheruiyot (2018), Hasdianti (2019), and Olayinka (2019), the findings of this study demonstrated that several factors influence the choice of teaching methods. These factors include:

7.1. FACTORS RELATED TO THE LEARNERS AND CLASSROOM

Factors related to learners are among the most critical considerations since they are the primary recipients of knowledge. The study showed that students' learning goals and classroom management significantly affect the choice of teaching method. In particular, respondents emphasized that students' general reluctance to put in the necessary effort often compels teachers to find ways to engage them more effectively. Additionally, the study deduced that students' maturity, grade level, and abilities should be considered because a single method cannot meet the needs of all students or grades. Thus, the choice of method has to cater to students' needs. This is supported by Hasdianti, who stated that "each student has a different character in which the teacher has to adjust the teaching method that will be used in teaching and learning process" (Hasdianti 2019: 15). In relation to this, the findings showed that factors related to classroom include facilities. Teachers exhibited that the availability or lack of teaching materials, such as books and technology, significantly affects their lesson planning and the choice of teaching methods. The physical setup of classrooms, including seating arrangements, can determine the appropriateness of group work and interactive methods.

7.2. FACTORS RELATED TO THE LESSON

Teachers have demonstrated varying opinions regarding these factors. While some argued that factors related to the lesson are shaped by the (1) topic itself, (2) its length (3) its objectives, (4) and the method used for the subject, others emphasized that selecting a method requires considering the nature of the content, the relevance of the lesson to students' real-life experiences, and whatever the material is challenging. Most of the teachers in this study showed that the most effective strategies teachers found were using culturally relevant materials in Mauritania. In other words, this means using authentic culturally based materials can be useful in learning. This perspective aligns with Olayinka (2019), who believes that the choice of teaching methods is often influenced by the lesson's topic, and the curriculum's requirements.

7.3. FACTORS RELATED TO THE TEACHER AND THEIR REFLECTIVE TEACHING

The factors related to the teacher are shaped by key elements, including (1) teacher identity, (2) teacher reflection, (3) their pre-service, and (4) in-service training. This is supported by Gimenez (1992) and Kim (2018), who believe that teachers need to reflect on their own beliefs about language learning and teaching through various practical reflections. This study revealed that teacher reflection is an integral part of the teaching and learning process, as the majority of the participants use reflection on action and for future action.

Furthermore, the results of this study confirmed that pre-service and in-service teacher experience helps foreign teachers to adopt different teaching methods in Mauritania. The majority indicated that it helped them to adapt to new classroom circumstances and maintain teacher roles while being friendly. It also helped them to interact in a fun manner and tell jokes when appropriate. In particular, the results of the interview displayed that teacher reflection allows teachers to evaluate the learning process to understand their students, their level, and their abilities, and then adjust the teaching method accordingly. Factors related to teachers are also shaped by their knowledge, academic training, skills, and qualifications. These findings align with Olayinka's (2019) assertion that a teacher's expertise and preparation are critical in shaping their approach to teaching.

7.4. OTHER FACTORS RELATED TO CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC CONSTRAINTS

In addition to the previously discussed factors, the choice of teaching methods of foreign English teachers in Mauritania is also influenced by other factors, including (1) culture, (2) linguistic diversity, (3) working conditions, (4) and administrative expectations. This study found that culture significantly impacts the selection of teaching activities, particularly when addressing students' diverse linguistic backgrounds and cultural differences. For instance, students who experience power distance issues may be less inclined to participate in group discussions, role plays, and assimilation. Additionally, the results showed that gender norms require adjustments in interaction, such as avoiding physical contact with male students. Furthermore, avoiding certain topics like religion and politics are examples that might influence their teaching method, as well as the need to select culturally relevant materials and examples to make lessons pertinent and engaging for students.

In terms of linguistic diversity, in Mauritania, foreign English teachers have asserted that when adapting certain teaching methods, teachers have to consider linguistic diversity, avoiding speaking any other language than English. They acknowledged using English as a medium of instruction exclusively in the classroom to prevent ethnic conflicts and linguistic constraints. Regarding working conditions, teachers highlighted that working with professional and cooperative staff and working in a school equipped with all necessary facilities make it flexible for them to deploy their teaching methods. Some teachers stated that the administrative expectations and school curricula are not unrealistic at times. These constraints often hinder the implementation of effective teaching methods, as teachers are required to adhere to the prescribed school system.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper was designed to investigate the factors influencing the choice of teaching methods among foreign English teachers teaching EFL in Mauritania. The focus of this study were English teachers whose native or second language is English and who have taught or are currently teaching EFL in Mauritania. Data collection involved questionnaires and interviews, which were subsequently analyzed through a qualitative, employing thematic analysis for data interpretation.

The findings of this study reveal that there are factors that have a significant influence on the choice of teaching methods. These factors can be classified into the

following: (1) factors related to the students, (2) classroom environment, (3) factors related to the lesson, (5) factors related to the teacher and their reflective teaching and (6) other factors which include (a) culture (b) linguistic diversity, (c) working conditions and (d) administration's expectations.

The study faced several limitations. The major one is that the questions regarding teachers' reflections on their teaching process were left for the interview, but unfortunately, only one teacher participated. Additionally, the study could have benefited from incorporating classroom observations to gain firsthand insights into the teaching process and to refine the interview and questionnaire design accordingly. Due to time and spatial factors, it was not possible to attend the classes in person. Regardless of these limitations, the results of this study answered the research questions and validated the proposed hypotheses.

Overall, reflective teaching and experience are essential elements in shaping teachers' choice of teaching methods, highlighting the interdependence between teaching and learning. All factors that influence the choice of teaching methods contribute to making teaching and learning meaningful and practically oriented. Educators are recommended to consider all possible factors that might shape or influence their teaching process and embrace different teaching methods, consider the learners' needs and available facilities, and reflect on their pre-service and in-service training for better educational teaching practice. These teaching practices are particularly critical in the Mauritanian context, where educational reform remains a pressing issue. Further research is essential to understand how teaching practices can contribute to advancing the educational system in Mauritania.

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SUMMARY

FACTORS INFLUENCING METHOD CHOICES OF EFL TEACHERS IN MAURITANIA: A REFLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE

This paper was designed to investigate the factors influencing the choice of teaching methods of foreign EFL teachers in Mauritania. The focus of this study is on English teachers whose native language or second language is English and who have taught or are currently teaching EFL in Mauritania. The main objectives of this study are to identify the factors that influence their choice of teaching methods and to investigate the influence of their pre-service and in-service teacher training, teacher reflection, country of origin, and teacher qualifications. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews, which were analyzed using a qualitative method focusing on thematic analysis for data interpretation. The findings of this study revealed that several factors significantly influence the choice of teaching methods. These factors can be classified into the following categories: (1) factors related to the students, (2) classroom environment, (3) factors related to the lesson, (5) factors related to the teacher and their reflective teaching and, (6) other factors, which include (a) culture (b) linguistic diversity, (c) working conditions, and (d) administration's expectations.

KEYWORDS: Teaching practice, teacher identity, cultural constraints, pre-service and in-service training, teacher education, teaching methodology.

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