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## **Expanding Circle: The Case of Nigerien EFL Teachers' English, Training and Career Satisfaction**

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### **Abstract**

Teaching English as foreign language (EFL) has grown around the world. However, certain regions have experienced little empirical research into the practices and results of these EFL programs. This study looks at English as foreign language teachers in Niger, an Expanding Circle country, to understand their training, instruction, and attitudes. The study surveyed 609 teachers about their level of comfort with English, preservice teacher training, use of English in the classroom, and career satisfaction. Descriptive and correlational statistics shed light into the profession of Nigerien EFL teachers. One in five Nigerien teachers had no preservice teacher training and the more comfortable they were with English, the more satisfied they were with their career. The results also suggest an interesting relationship between teachers' comfort level in English and the nature of their teacher training, which might need further investigation. The research presented in this paper provides information to policy makers, teacher trainers, and researchers in Expanding Circle locations.

**Keywords:** English as a foreign language, teachers, teacher training, Niger

## Introduction

Understanding educational equity across diverse countries requires broadening the scope of our research to settings that have gone unexplored. While extensive research has been conducted on the teaching of English in developed countries, developing countries—particularly countries located in West Africa—have not had the opportunity for research on English language instruction. The purpose of this study is to look at English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Niger, an *Expanding Circle* country (Kachru, 1990), and the relationship between their expressed comfort level with the English language and their instructional decisions, training, and career satisfaction.

## Review of Literature

It is estimated that there are more than 1.5 billion speakers of English worldwide (St. George International, *The Language Specialist*, n.d.), and a majority of teachers of English are in fact non-native English speakers (Braine, 2010). Kachru (1990) conceptualizes countries as falling in a concentric circles model where he describes Inner Circle countries (where English is the native language), Outer Circle (for example India, where English is a second language), and Expanding Circle countries (for example China, where English is a foreign language). Teachers in each circle have their own set of opportunities and challenges, but the EFL teachers from the Expanding Circle seem to be the teachers with the least training and who need the most help with English (Braine, 2010).

Niger represents a good example of Kachru's concentric circles model because it is a country where English is taught as a foreign language by mostly local teachers who also learned English as a foreign language. Alatis (2005) talked about the three circles Kachru described as follows, "Kachru developed his theory of the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle, roughly equivalent to ENL [English as a national language], EFL [English as a foreign language], and ESL [English as a second language]" (Alatis, 2005, p. 82).

Other perspectives examine the use of English in the world as new varieties of Englishes such as learner Englishes (for example, English spoken in Russia) and indigenized Englishes (for example, English spoken in India) (Davydova, 2012). The differences and similarities between learner and indigenized Englishes stem from the context where they are spoken and the first language (L1) of the speakers (Davydova, 2012). In addition, the differences between what constitutes English in an Outer Circle country and an Expanding Circle country may be up to interpretation. For example, Gerritsen and colleagues (2016) acknowledge that previous studies have characterized the Netherlands as an Outer Circle country; however, they show evidence that the country is actually an Expanding Circle country even though substantial portions of the population speak English well. Niger, on the other hand, presents a clear case of an Expanding Circle (Kachru, 1990) country because English is taught only as a foreign language and is not widely spoken by the population.

In the context of English as a global language, speakers of English from the Inner Circle countries do not represent the norm for what English actually sounds or looks like. Teachers of

English should expose students to the variety of world Englishes (Xiaoqiong & Xianxing, 2011). Recent literature on English language proficiency described the Dynamic Approach to Language Proficiency (DALP), a language proficiency model that suggests that proficiency is a dynamic concept. According to Mahoob and Dutcher (2014), “DALP is a model of proficiency that is not based upon native speaker status but rather on one’s ability to adapt to and negotiate different contexts” (p. 117). DALP includes knowledge about the language and knowledge about the context. Both language and context, seen on a continuum, contribute to the ability of speakers to communicate in a given situation (Mahboob & Dutcher, 2014). Therefore, examining the comfort levels of English of EFL teachers that are not native English speakers represents an important component of understanding their language knowledge and proficiency. It may explain how they see themselves as teachers of English in their context and what instructional decisions they feel comfortable taking.

Researchers in many contexts around the world have found that EFL teacher training does not always adequately prepare local EFL teachers for the English language classroom (see, for example, Al Barwani, Al-Mekhlafi, & Nagaratnam, 2013 in Oman; Al Hazmi, 2003 in Saudi Arabia; He & Lin, 2013 in China; Nakata, 2010 in Japan; Roux & Valladares, 2014 in Mexico; Syed, 2003 in the Gulf States; Yook & Lee, 2016 in Korea). Thus, there is a need to implement new strategies for teacher education. The first step in this process is to better understand the connection between teacher training and instructional outcomes. This study seeks to examine this connection among EFL teachers in Niger.

In the EFL context, the amount of input learners receive is often at times limited to the EFL teacher and comprehensible input in the language to be learned is important for second language learning (Renandya, 2013). Thus, it is assumed that EFL teachers will have high language proficiency levels, which does not seem to be the case all the time (Freeman et al., 2015). However, teaching English successfully assumes knowing the language and also knowing how to teach it (Freeman et al., 2015). Freeman et al. (2015) talk about the English-for-teaching which is “both the medium and the object of instruction” (p. 132). And EFL teachers’ English language proficiency plays a role in student engagement, but it is not the only factor that engages students: other factors such as teachers’ personality and teaching strategies are important (Tsang, 2017).

### **Language Comfort, Confidence, Practices and Career Satisfaction in EFL Teaching**

Studies that investigated EFL teachers’ self-reported English language comfort and the relationship between their language comfort levels and classroom practices and confidence in teaching English were conducted in some countries of the Expanding Circle such as Venezuela (Chacón, 2005), Korea (Choi & Lee, 2016; Lee, 2009), Turkey (Yilmaz, 2011), Iran (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008), and an unnamed Middle Eastern country in Asia (Ghasemboland & Binti Hashim, 2013). All these studies seem to indicate that EFL teachers’ perceived level of English language comfort is positively correlated with their sense of self-efficacy. In other words, the more proficient the teachers report being with their language skills, the more efficacious they report being in the classroom. This connection becomes even more important due to the research linking self-efficacy to quality of teaching (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2010). While there is strong empirical research in other regions, no

studies have been found that involve EFL teachers in West Africa. As Niger shares many similarities with other Sub-Saharan African countries (i.e. similar developmental levels, high language and cultural diversity, severe environmental challenges), this study can serve as an indication of EFL issues in these similarly situated nations.

There are studies that investigated EFL teacher career satisfaction (Zare, 2007); EFL teacher motivation and career satisfaction (Karavas, 2010; Noori, Fatemi, & Najjari, 2014); EFL teacher motivation and work-related aspects (Öztürk, 2015; Tsutsumi, 2013); and EFL teacher identity formation (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Johnston, 1997). However, no literature on EFL teachers' level of English proficiency and career satisfaction has been found. As can be noted below, research on EFL teacher career satisfaction is spread around some of the Expanding Circle countries, but no research on teachers from West Africa has been found.

Chacón (2005) surveyed 100 middle school EFL teachers from Venezuela about their level of English language proficiency, classroom instruction and management, and self-efficacy. The teachers reported being less proficient in oral English and cultural knowledge and the results showed a positive correlation between reported level of English language proficiency and self-efficacy: the higher the level of English language proficiency, the higher the self-efficacy. Choi and Lee (2016) show a more complicated and nuanced relationship between English language proficiency, self-efficacy, and use of English in the classroom: “the positive interaction between perceived English proficiency and self-efficacy hinted at their synergizing relationship; for instance, an increase in English proficiency magnified self-efficacy’s impact on English use, which in turn may magnify English proficiency’s impact” (Choi & Lee, 2016, p. 60). Yilmaz (2011) looked at 54 EFL primary and high school teachers from Turkey who completed a questionnaire about their perceived comfort with English language and self-efficacy. They found that “teachers rated themselves as more proficient in reading and speaking than in writing or listening” (Yilmaz, 2011, p. 97). The results showed a positive correlation between perceived language proficiency levels and teacher self-efficacy. Esmali and Fatahi (2008) surveyed 40 high school EFL teachers from Iran. From all the four language skills, Eslami and Fatahi (2008) found the Iranian EFL teachers perceived themselves more proficient in reading and speaking than in listening and writing, which is what Yilmaz (2011) also found with EFL teachers in Turkey. Eslami and Fatahi (2008) found positive correlations between teachers’ reported levels of English language proficiency and their sense of self-efficacy. Ghasemboland and Binti Hashim (2013) surveyed 187 EFL teachers from English language centers in an unnamed Middle Eastern country in Asia on their English language proficiency levels and self-efficacy. In terms of English language proficiency levels, Ghasemboland and Binti Hashim (2013) found, “for the participants of this study the order of language skills from the strongest to the weakest is writing, reading, speaking, and listening respectively” (p. 894), which is not necessarily the case as with the studies mentioned above. The study concludes that there are high positive correlations between perceived level of English language proficiency and teachers’ self-efficacy.

### **Career Satisfaction**

Another important component of teachers’ professional life is their satisfaction with their career. Teacher job satisfaction is related to persistence in the profession (Kelly & Northrop, 2015; *TESL-EJ 22.2, August 2018* Wiens, Andrei, Anassour & Smith 4

Shaw & Newton, 2014). Researchers have linked teacher satisfaction to local, school context (Dinham & Scott, 2000); institutional climate (Razavipour & Yousefi, 2017); and a sense of self-efficacy in the classroom (Chaaban & Du, 2017). It may also contribute to how teachers work with their students (Veldman, van Tartwijk, Brekelmans, & Wubbels, 2013). Sisask and colleagues (2014) showed that teachers with high satisfaction levels were more self-efficacious in their ability to work with students with mental disabilities. Zare (2007) surveyed a small number of Iranian secondary EFL teachers (n=19) about their career satisfaction. The analysis indicates the presence of several factors that influence teachers' career satisfaction. For example, relationships with parents and students and students' academic success are sources of career satisfaction, while policies and opportunities for advancement contribute to a lack of career satisfaction. Noori et al. (2014) surveyed 250 Iranian EFL teachers from Mashhad language institutions about their motivation and job satisfaction. The results showed a positive correlation between teacher motivation and career satisfaction. The authors (Noori et al., 2014) demonstrated that the EFL teachers had a high level of commitment to teaching and that teaching raised their self-esteem.

Tsutsumi (2013) looked at a small group of EFL university teachers from Japan (n=16) and concluded that the participants had intrinsic motivation related to their careers that stem from, "their personal growth as a teacher and as a human through daily practice of teaching, receiving appreciation from students, and observing students' growth" (Tsutsumi, 2013, p. 29). In terms of difficulties, the participants mentioned, "lack of motivation from some students, little advancement in skill from some students, students' passive attitudes, the inability to get students to speak up, and difficulties getting students to take responsibility for their learning" (Tsutsumi, 2013, p. 30).

Chaaban and Du (2017) first surveyed 74 EFL teachers from Qatar about the most challenging aspects of their job. The teachers identified workload and support from the administration as the most challenging aspects. Based on these results, Chaaban and Du (2017) then interviewed 10 EFL elementary school teachers about factors that affect their career satisfaction. Interview data findings suggest that novice teachers (teachers with 3 years or less teaching experienced) identified different factors affecting their career satisfaction than their more experienced peers. For example, novice teachers valued peer support and peer acceptance as important to their career satisfaction, while more experienced teachers valued appreciation and all teachers seem to link their self-efficacy to their career satisfaction (Chaaban & Du, 2017).

Öztürk (2015) looked at EFL teacher motivation; 20 Turkish university EFL teachers were interviewed and their teacher reflections collected. The findings suggest that "all teachers believed that teacher motivation is a crucial and essential factor which may even influence the sustainability and effectiveness of teaching process" (p. 1443). The teachers identified three main categories of factors that influence their motivation: their students, administrative issues, and workplace conditions (Öztürk, 2015).

Duff and Uchida (1997) conducted an ethnographic study of four adult EFL classes in Japan. The purpose of the study was to look at EFL teacher identity and pedagogies in the context of Japan. The participants were two Japanese EFL teachers and two American EFL teachers.

*The teachers' perceptions of their sociocultural identities were found to be deeply rooted in their personal histories, based on past educational, professional, and (cross-) cultural experiences. They were also subject to constant negotiation due to changing contextual elements, such as the classroom/institutional culture, instructional materials, and reactions from students and colleagues (Duff & Uchida, 1997, p. 460).*

These findings suggest sociocultural identity and identity formation are complex and factors such as who the teachers are (language and culture), their personal and professional backgrounds, and current teaching context and materials can influence their teaching of language and culture.

In the context of lack of studies on EFL teachers' perceived level of language proficiency and career satisfaction and of generally small samples, our study adds to the body of knowledge about EFL teachers in Niger. This study examined a larger sample of teachers throughout the West African country where teachers were asked to provide information about their comfort in English, teaching practices, and career satisfaction.

### **Conceptual Framework**

When analyzing the knowledge and skills teachers of English need to possess, Pasternak and Bailey (2004) mentioned:

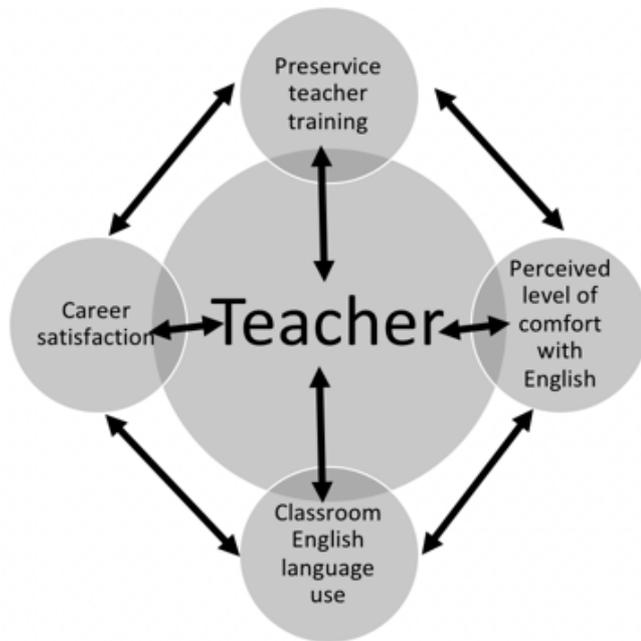
*For EFL and ESL teachers and teacher trainers, declarative and procedural knowledge entail at least three key areas: (1) knowing about and how to use the target language, (2) knowing about and how to teach in culturally appropriate ways, and (3) knowing about and how to behave appropriately in the target culture (Pasternak & Bailey, 2004, p. 158).*

For the purpose of our study, we focused on the first area, "knowing about and how to use the target language". Specifically, we examine how teachers' reported comfort level in English may impact other aspects of their teacher-selves.

Pasternak and Bailey (2004) noted that native speakers who do not have the professional knowledge and skills to teach the language, may not know how to teach the language. Also, when it comes to language comfort as well as the knowledge and skills in teaching the language, questions such as the goal of learning the language need to be asked (Pasternak & Bailey, 2004). The purpose for learning and/or knowing the language is what the DALP model suggests as an important element of what language proficiency constitutes (Mahboob & Dutcher, 2014). In other words, depending on what you plan to use the language for, that determines the language proficiency and language elements you need to know.

Career satisfaction is an important aspect of EFL teachers and research suggests there are a multitude of factors that influence EFL career satisfaction such as institutional climate (Razavipour & Yousefi, 2017) as well as local and school context (Dinham & Scott, 2000). There might be a complicated, context-related nuance between career satisfaction and other aspects of the profession. Specifically, preservice teacher training reported comfort with

English and English use in the classroom, which the research we found does not seem to pinpoint.



**Figure 1.** *Conceptual Framework*

We conceptualize this study to explain the relationship between teachers' reported English language comfort, their preservice teacher training, classroom English use, and their career satisfaction. The conceptual framework is visually represented in Figure 1. At the center we placed the teachers, who they are and the context in which they are located (in this case the West African country of Niger). Taking into account Pasternak & Bailey's (2004) conceptualization of what knowledge and skills teachers of English should have (knowledge of the language and pedagogy), we envision that preservice teacher training as one of the spaces and times to reach those goals, but as the visual suggests, it is not limited to that. We suggest that preservice training, perceived level of comfort with English, classroom English language use and possibly career satisfaction are all interrelated and related factors to each other. For example, it might be possible that teachers' perceived comfort level in English may stem from the preservice training but could also come from the practice of using English in the classroom on a regular basis. Or, the perceived level of English proficiency and possibly teachers' comfort with pedagogy are related to the teachers' level of English use in the classroom and career satisfaction: a teacher who thinks his/her English language proficiency level is adequate is more likely to use English in the classroom and feel adequate and relevant to the profession.

The visual and the multiple arrows in Figure 1 are intended to represent a complex picture of EFL teachers, whose preservice training, perceived level of comfort with language, classroom English use, and career satisfaction are factors that influence each other and who the teacher is

in the context of Nigerien schools. All four factors (preservice training, perceived level of comfort with language, classroom English use, and career satisfaction) can influence and are possibly interrelated in complex ways.

### **Educational Research in Niger**

There has been scant research conducted on education in Niger. Research focusing on efforts to increase access to education for Nigerien children and particularly girls (Wynd, 1999) or on education as a development program example (Greany, 2008; Honda & Kato, 2013) does exist. Bourdon, Frolich, and Michaelowa (2006) examined data on elementary teachers in Niger hired either as a traditional professional compared to a short-term contractor paid about half of what the professional teachers are paid. They found that there was no difference in the educational outcomes for students between these groups (Bourdon et al., 2006).

Meanwhile, research on EFL instruction in Niger is even more limited. One study by Halilou (1993), was a doctoral dissertation where he examined curriculum materials available to EFL teachers. More recently, Jang, Cho, and Wiens (2017) examined the self-efficacy beliefs and teacher-student interactions of Nigerien EFL teachers using data collected through the same data-gathering effort described in this study. They found that the EFL teachers had the highest self-efficacy in student engagement and their highest quality interactions were in the classroom organization domain. This study builds on the work done by Halilou as well as Jang and colleagues to continue to explore the nature of Nigerien EFL teachers' comfort level in English as it relates to their teaching and career satisfaction. Given what we know about the context of Niger, we hypothesize low levels of comfort among EFL teachers that manifests itself in low job satisfaction which impacts instructional practices.

### **The Current Study**

Based on the research and considerations we have discussed so far related to EFL settings and EFL teachers for this current study we surveyed teachers in Niger for the purpose of answering the following research questions:

1. What are the reported levels of comfort with the English language, use of English language, and preservice teacher training of Nigerien EFL teachers?
2. Is there a relationship between Nigerien EFL teachers expressed comfort level of English, their reported use of English in their classes, and preservice teacher training?
3. Is there a relationship between Nigerien EFL teachers expressed comfort level of English and their career satisfaction?

### **The Niger Context**

Niger has substantial challenges in its educational system with a literacy rate of 19% and a school life expectancy of 5 years (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). Five different ethnic

groups make up nearly 98% of the Nigerien population—each with its own language. However, French is the official language, the *lingua franca*, and the language of instruction in schools. Niger has implemented English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in its middle and high school programs. It should be noted that many Nigerien EFL students do not consider French their mother language and primarily begin learning French when they begin attending school (Hovens, 2002). English, therefore, constitutes at least the third language for students in Niger.

## **EFL in Niger**

According to Halilou (1993), the teaching of EFL in Niger began as early as the 1940s when the country was still a French colony. Initially, most EFL teachers were foreigners including French nationals, United States Peace Corps volunteers, Ghanaians, and other African nationals. However, by the end of the twentieth century the foreign nationals had mostly left. The U.S. Peace Corps members that were heavily involved in EFL instruction and support were all pulled out of Niger in 2011, when the U.S. government decided to shutter the Niger program due to security concerns. Today more than 95% of EFL teachers in Niger are Nigerien nationals. Preparation for Nigerien EFL teachers is inconsistent and there are no licensure or examination requirements for teachers prior to becoming teachers. There are five routes to becoming an EFL teacher in Niger. Prospective teachers can enroll in a traditional university-based teacher training program, a university bachelors program in English, go through some training in a foreign country, enroll in a brief summer training session prior to beginning teaching, or have no training at all. The two university-based training programs in Niger are the Faculte des Lettres et Sciences Humaines (FLSH: School of Arts and Humanities) or the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS: Teacher training institute). Both of these programs are located at Abdou Moumouni University in the capital city of Niamey.

The FLSH provides undergraduate education in eight departments: Letters and communication, English, history, geography, philosophy, linguistics, psychology and sociology. Its main mission is to provide undergraduate training in the fields above and most of the graduates become middle school and high school teachers. The first degree is obtained after three years and for about five years the system has been trying to use the credit system; 180 credits for the equivalent of a bachelor degree. Most graduates of the English department become English teachers until they get a more preferred job. Until the mid-1990s, the English department was supported by the British Council and the United States Peace Corps. The British Council gave those who choose to teach a grant to spend one year in Britain. The British Council supported the department by posting up two British nationals, teaching mostly courses on teaching methodology and culture, in Niger. The Peace Corps also used to place one volunteer to teach composition and American culture. All that support stopped and the department relies now on lecturers trained in Niger or in Nigeria. First year students take fifty hours of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) with no student teaching. In the second year, they take another fifty hours of TEFL with no student teaching. In the third year, the students have about fifty hours of TEFL including practicum (from zero hours to two hours per student, depending on the lecturer). In the past, graduates of the FLSH's English program were fluent in English since most of them would spend a year in either Britain or in Nigeria. For more than ten years now,

there has been no immersion. The immersion program in Nigeria stopped about ten years ago.

The mission of the ENS is to train middle school and high school teachers, middle school and high school teacher advisors, primary school teacher advisors, primary school academic inspectors, secondary schools academic inspectors, and to conduct research in the field of education. There is an English department among many of its departments. The mission of the English department is to train middle school English teachers, high school English teachers, English teaching advisors and inspectors. To be trained as a middle school English teacher, one needs to hold a high school diploma; take and pass a national competitive exam; or be a primary school teacher that has taught for ten years and that has taken and passed a university entrance exam. The training lasts for two academic years where half of the classes taught focus on general courses in linguistics, general pedagogy, Anglophone literature and culture, listening comprehension and pronunciation. The other half of the courses focus on English teaching methodology, micro teaching, field placement, and student teaching. All these courses are not taught all the time since the department has only two permanent lecturers and a growing number of students. Student teaching should normally last two weeks and each student should teach at least five hours, but in reality, it generally does not happen this way.

## **Methods**

### **Setting, Population, and Sample**

Data for this study were taken from a larger data-gathering effort supported by a grant from the United States Department of State. The population for this study was all of the middle school and high school EFL teachers in Niger (n=1960). We received 609 surveys from teachers for a response rate of 31.1%. The sample had an average of 7.43 years of experience teaching English. Teachers reported that 89% taught in public schools while 68% of teachers indicated that they taught in rural schools. Participants were asked to identify their teacher training as either ENS (13.7%), FLSH (51.1%), trained in other country (11%), summer training (2.7%), no teacher training (20.6%), or other. Participants were able to mark more than one answer; however, for this study we selected participants that selected only one of those options (percentages presented above are for the sample used in this study only, n=519). We also did not use participants that selected “other”.

### **Procedures**

Approval to ethically collect data from EFL teachers in Niger was sought and obtained from the Niger Ministry of Education. All Nigerien EFL teachers were sent paper surveys through regional teacher supervisors. As Nigerien teachers generally do not have access to computers or the internet, online surveys were not practical. A phone number was provided for participants to call and ask questions related to the completion of the survey which many participants called with a variety of questions regarding the survey. Multiple participants called us and indicated this was the first time they had ever participated in a research study or been asked to complete a survey of this kind. Teachers were asked to complete their surveys and return them to their

regional supervisors within one week. The regional supervisors then returned the surveys *en mass* to the research team. Once the surveys were received they were given confidential identification numbers and names were removed prior to data entry.

## Measures

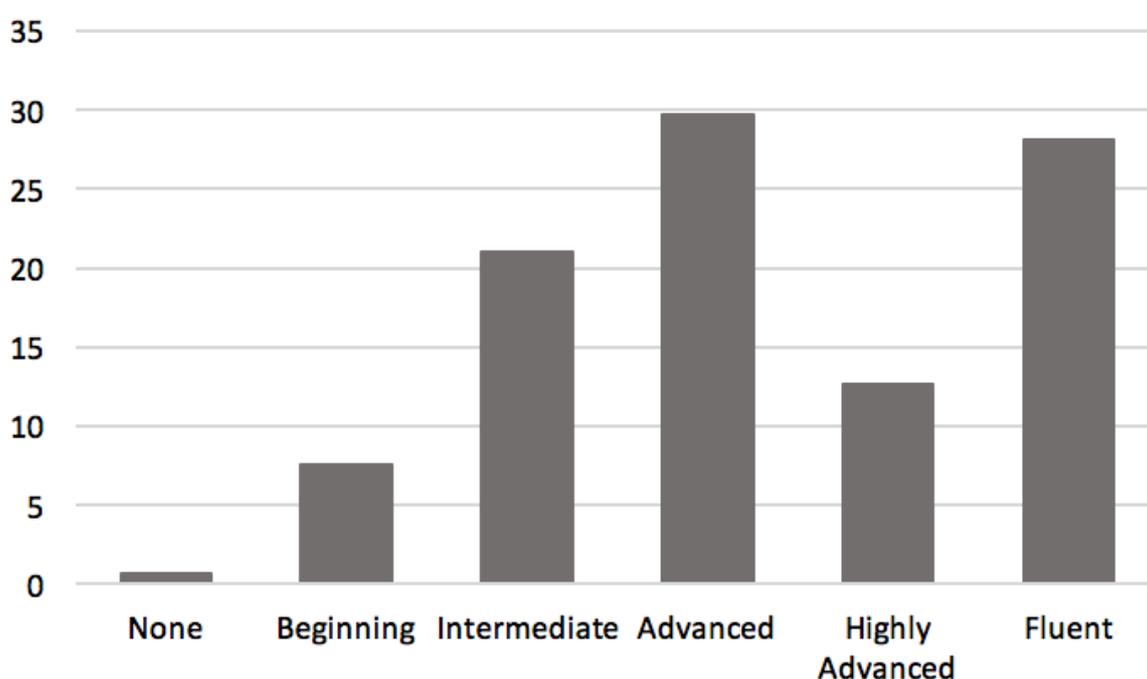
We examined questions regarding years of teaching experience, comfort in English, preservice teacher training, classroom English use, and career satisfaction (see Appendix). To indicate how long teachers have been teaching, teachers were asked to write in the number of years of teaching experience including this year. Realizing it was not practical to assess participants English language proficiency directly using an assessment, instead we chose to include a self-report question on the survey. To assess comfort in English, teachers were asked, “How comfortable are you in English? / Quel est votre niveau de maitrise de l’Anglais ?” Teachers could select “None/ Aucun”, “Beginning/ Débutant”, “Intermediate/ Intermédiaire”, “Advanced/Avancé”, “Highly advanced/Très approfondi”, or “Fluent/ Couramment” (coded 1-6 from least to most) for their comfort in English. Teachers were also asked to identify the amount of instruction they conduct in non-English languages. The teachers self-selected from the following categories: 0%, 1-25%, 25-50%, 50-75%, or 75-100%, which were re-coded 0-5 for analysis. To uncover teacher training, teachers could select from the following items: “None/*Aucune*”, “Ecole Normal Superior/*Ecole Normale Supérieure*”, “FLSH/*FLSH*”, “Summer training prior to teaching/*Formation durant l’été avant de débiter l’enseignement*”, “Teacher training program in other country/*Programme de formation pédagogique dans un autre pays*”, or “other”. Teachers were instructed to select all that apply.

Additionally, five questions were taken from The Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) Project (Watt & Richardson, 2007; Watt & Richardson, 2011) which has been validated for use in multiple countries (Watt et al., 2012) but has not been previously administered in West Africa. In this research project EFL teachers were provided questions pertaining to their satisfaction of teaching as a career. Questions include, “How satisfied are you with your choice of a teaching career?”, “How sure are you that you will persist in teaching?”, and “How much effort will you put into your teaching?”. Teachers responded to the questions on a seven-point Likert scale, 1 being “not important at all” to 7 “extremely important.”

The survey was constructed in English and translated into French as it is the lingua franca in the country and is the only language that all the EFL teachers would know. Two professional interpreters who had many years of experience with EFL education in Niger translated the survey into French separately. After translation, the two French versions were compared and differences between the two versions were reconciled by the interpreters. Finally, French-speaking members of the research team who work regularly with Nigerien EFL teachers proof-read and edited the French for clarity and cultural appropriateness. The final version of the survey included both the French and the original English and can be seen in the Appendix

## Analysis

To address our three research questions, we established a three-step analysis process using SPSS 24. In the first step, we ran descriptive statistics to ascertain general information about Nigerian EFL teachers. The second step consisted of computing a correlation coefficient to determine the relationship between comfort level in English and the use of non-English languages in class. Next, we calculated cross-tabs to examine the distribution of participants' comfort level in English and use of non-English language as it relates to preservice teacher preparation. Then we conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if there were statistical differences between preservice training groups and their comfort in English and use of non-English languages, followed by Bonferroni-adjusted post-hoc tests to examine pairwise differences. In the third step of our analysis we estimated a Pearson correlation between comfort levels in English and teachers' expressed satisfaction with teaching as a career.

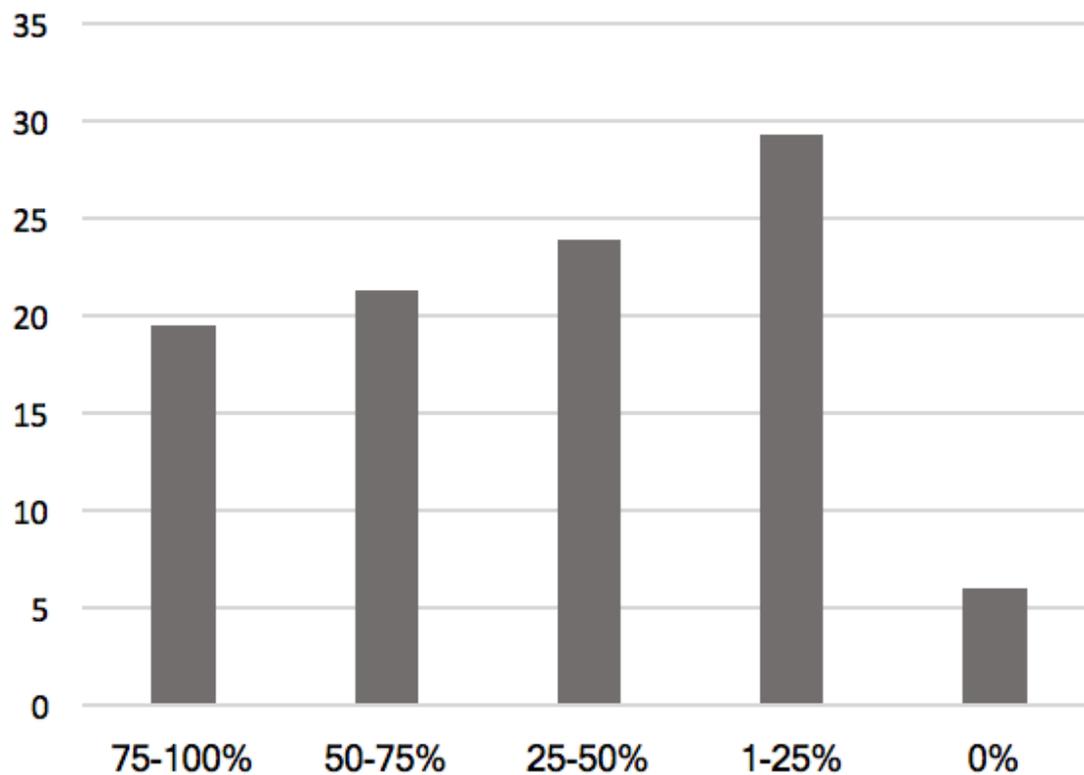


**Figure 2.** *Nigerien EFL Teachers Comfort in English-Percentage*

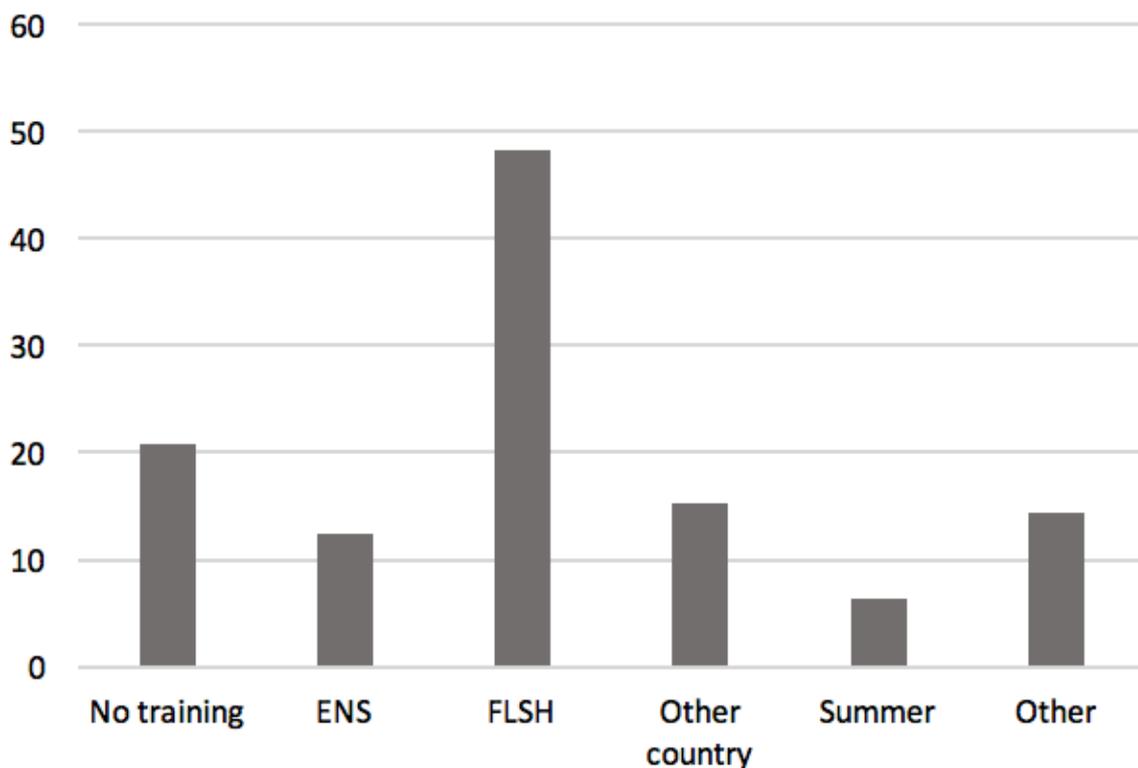
## Results

Our first research question sought to determine the reported levels of comfort with the English language, use of English language, and teacher training of Nigerian EFL teachers. We conducted a descriptive analysis. In all, 590 participants responded to the question inquiring about their comfort level with English. Responses are shown in Figure 2 and include .7% selected none, 7.6% responded with beginning, 21% selected intermediate, 29.7% indicated advanced comfort, 12.7% selected highly advanced, and 28.1% indicated fluent English level. Teachers responded to the question, “What percentage of your class is conducted in a language other than English?” by selecting either 0,1-25, 25-50, 50-75, 75-100. As illustrated in Figure

3, respondents selected 6% for 0, 29.3% for 1-25, 23.9% for 25-50, 21.3% for 50-75, and 19.5% for 75-100. We also asked teachers to indicate their preservice teacher training. Teachers were asked to select all that apply, so some teachers selected more than one option. In total, 20.7% of teachers selected that they had no training at all, 12.4% completed the ENS, 48.3% attended the FLSH, 6.4% had training in the summer prior to teaching, 15.3% had teacher training in another country, and 14.4% of teachers selected that they had some other form of teacher training as shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 3.** *Percent of Class Time Spent in non-English*



**Figure 4.** *Preservice Teacher Training*

Our second research question asks if there is a relationship between Nigerian EFL teachers' expressed comfort level of English, their use of English in their classes, and teacher training. We conducted a correlation coefficient analysis between teachers' comfort level in English and the percentage of time spent in a language other than English. There were no significant correlations between comfort level in English and instructional practices. Next, we examined cross-tabs of comfort in English and the use of non-English languages in relation to preservice teacher training. Results can be seen in Tables 1 and 2. The largest group in Table 1 is the EFL teachers that went through the FLSH program and selected that they have advanced command of the English language. Meanwhile in Table 2, the largest cell is the FLSH-trained teachers that use non-English languages in their classes less than 25% of the time.

**Table 1.** *Crosstabs – Comfort in English and Training*

	Comfort in English					Total
	None	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Highly advanced	
None	2	19	34	24	9	24
ENS	0	6	13	21	7	24
FLSH	2	10	41	86	47	79
Other country only	0	3	11	20	7	16
Summer only	0	1	4	4	2	3
Total	4	39	103	155	72	146

**Table 2.** *Crosstabs – Use of non-English and Training*

	0	1-25	25-50	50-75	75-100	Total
None	5	21	32	25	24	107
ENS	5	20	18	12	13	68
FLSH	17	87	54	47	44	249
Other country only	4	13	14	17	8	56
Summer only	1	2	3	3	4	13
Total	32	143	121	104	93	493

The analyses examining the preservice training group differences in comfort in English and the use of non-English languages in instruction are illustrated in Tables 3 through 7. Comfort level in English varied across the different training groups with the highest comfort level in the FLSH group ( $M=4.52$ ) and the lowest in the no training group ( $M=3.81$ ). The ANOVA showed that there were significant differences in the comfort levels in English between groups ( $F=6.158$ ,  $p<.001$ ) as illustrated in Table 4. Post-hoc Bonferroni adjusted tests determined that the significant differences between groups was accounted for by the no training group which was statistically different from the ENS group (Mean difference=.610,  $p=.019$ ), and the FLSH group (mean difference=.708,  $p<.001$ ). The other country only group also showed a substantial, although not quite statistically significant, difference with the no training group (mean difference=.573,  $p=.065$ ). Table 6 shows the mean scores by group for the amount of non-English used in instruction. ANOVA shows no significant difference between the training groups in the use of non-English language in their EFL teaching.

**Table 3.** *Dependent Variable: How Comfortable Are You in English?*

Training	Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
None	3.81	1.437	112
ENS	4.42	1.349	71
FLSH	4.52	1.216	265
Other Country	4.39	1.236	57
Summer only	4.14	1.292	14
Total	4.33	1.314	519

**Table 4.** *ANOVA Results: Teacher Training and Comfort in English*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Training	40.914	4	10.228	6.158	<.001
Error	853.745	514	1.661		
Corrected Total	894.659	518			

**Table 5.** *Post-hoc Pairwise Comparisons: Comfort in English*

Teacher Training	Teacher Training	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
none	ENS	-.610*	.196	.019
	FLSH	-.708*	.145	.000
	other country only	-.573	.210	.065
	summer only	-.330	.365	1.000
	None	.610*	.196	.019
ENS	FLSH	-.098	.172	1.000
	other country only	.037	.229	1.000
	summer only	.280	.377	1.000
	None	.708*	.145	.000
FLSH	ENS	.098	.172	1.000
	other country only	.135	.188	1.000
	summer only	.378	.353	1.000
	None	.573	.210	.065
other country only	ENS	-.037	.229	1.000
	FLSH	-.135	.188	1.000
	summer only	.243	.384	1.000
	None	.330	.365	1.000
summer only	ENS	-.280	.377	1.000
	FLSH	-.378	.353	1.000
	other country only	-.243	.384	1.000

**Table 6.** *Dependent Variable: Percentage of Your Class in Non-English*

teacher training	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
none	3.39	1.172	107
ENS	3.12	1.240	68
FLSH	3.06	1.233	249
other country only	3.21	1.171	56
summer only	3.54	1.330	13
Total	3.17	1.221	493

**Table 7.** *Dependent Variable: Percentage of Your Class in Non-English*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Training	10.581	4	2.645	1.787	.130
Error	722.445	488	1.480		
Corrected Total	733.026	492			

Our third question asked if there is a relationship between Nigerian EFL teachers' expressed comfort level of English and their career satisfaction. We examined the relationship between comfort in English and teacher career satisfaction. Three of the five pairs showed statistically significant relationships. First, "How satisfied are you with your choice of a teaching career?"

was correlated with comfort in English  $r=.15$ ,  $p<.001$ . Additionally, “How sure are you that you will persist in teaching?” ( $r=.09$ ,  $p=.04$ ) and “How much effort will you put into your teaching” ( $r=.12$ ,  $p=.01$ ).

## Discussion

This study begins to shed some light into EFL teaching and teacher training in Niger, a country with little history of educational research. Data presented in this study lead us to three key findings. First, teacher training is inconsistent and, in some cases, non-existent among EFL teachers in Niger. Second, teachers that were more comfortable in speaking English were more satisfied with their career choice. Third, Nigerien EFL teachers do not use English in their classrooms a majority of the instructional time. These findings indicate how teacher training can be constructed to support EFL teachers in Niger and other similar situations.

Descriptive data describe the difficulties of teachers in Niger. The descriptive statistics paint a picture of varied levels of comfort in English amongst EFL teachers. These differences might mean, in turn, that EFL teachers in Niger provide unequal opportunities of learning for the students, something that needs further explanation. The same picture of varied levels of English use in class and of teacher training has been reported. These “all over the map” results suggest a complicated picture of English language teaching, EFL teacher training and of who the EFL teachers in Niger are and possibly what their needs might be.

One in five Nigerien teachers had no preservice teacher training, while only 13.7% had a formal teacher education experience. These are in line with Braine’s (2010) work that documents the challenges of Expanding Circle countries to provide well-trained EFL teachers. This lack of training becomes important in Niger because the lack of teacher training is related to teachers’ comfort in English. EFL teachers with no formal training were less comfortable in speaking English than their colleagues with English degrees, teaching degrees, and training in other countries.

Additionally, teachers with higher levels of English were more satisfied in their choice of teaching career. Teacher satisfaction has been linked to factors that influence EFL career satisfaction such as institutional climate (Razavipour & Yousefi, 2017) as well as local and school context (Dinham & Scott, 2000). However, as far we are aware we are the first to link EFL teachers’ comfort levels in English with their career satisfaction. Given the association of teacher satisfaction and retention (Kelly & Northrop, 2015; Shaw & Newton, 2014) this is an important finding. For Niger, and other similar countries with limited resources and difficulty finding qualified EFL teachers, focusing on retention of teachers can be a way of alleviating teacher shortages. Through the recruitment of proficient English speakers, these countries can limit the need to hire as many new teachers in the future. Given the difficulty of finding well-qualified EFL teachers in-country for developing countries, officials may need to consider looking externally for teachers.

This survey revealed interesting patterns related to the use of the non-English languages in EFL classrooms. In our sample, nearly 41% of EFL teachers in Niger report using non-English

languages more than half of instructional time with 19.5% reporting using non-English languages more than three-quarters of the time. With the demonstrated benefits of conducting language instruction in the target language (van Patten, 2003) this is concerning. However, the use of non-English languages was not associated with any of the training groups. This result went against our hypothesis, and we can only guess at why this may be the case. It is possible that the instructional environment in schools provides a stronger influence on instructional methods than does comfort in the target language. Therefore, improvement in this area cannot be targeted at a specific group but would require professional development provided to all EFL teachers.

## **Limitations**

As is the case in all research, there are limitations that need to be addressed for this study. The key limitations we need to examine include the cross-sectional nature of the survey and the lack of contextual information.

This cross-sectional survey negates our ability to examine changes in individual teachers over time. This study examined the relationship between preservice training and teaching knowledge and practices. While there were no significant differences in non-English usage by training group, this could be an indication that professional development or other factors that teachers were exposed to after preservice training impacted teachers' practices. Future studies of similar populations should pursue longitudinal data collection to understand how teachers' satisfaction and practices change over time.

Our study also did not have the resources to explore the individual teaching situations of the teachers. It provides a snapshot of specific knowledge and practices related to training and career satisfaction, but it does not account for how the schools where teachers work on a daily basis may impact them. Since the environment of the school can impact teacher attitude and satisfaction (Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991), it would be helpful for future follow up studies to create a more complete understanding of the factors that might impact Nigerien EFL teachers. Direct classroom observation of teachers' practices would provide more information about what is happening in individual classrooms. Additionally, teacher interviews would help to describe EFL teachers' decision-making process and how it relates to their training and comfort in speaking English. Future studies should focus on the lived experience of some of the teachers in detail by asking them to share their stories about their current teaching situation and how that is related to their teacher training, comfort level in English, and career satisfaction.

## **Conclusion**

In the context of global English (Crystal, 2012), world Englishes (Jenkins, 2006), and the need and desire worldwide to learn English, this study provides a glimpse of teachers in an Expanding Circle country, their perceived comfort level with English, training, and expertise. We sought to examine Nigerien EFL teachers' comfort in English, the nature of their preservice teacher training, and some of their instructional practices. Our findings indicated that a

substantial number of EFL teachers in Niger had no preservice training at all. The EFL teachers did have varying levels of comfort in speaking English, which were associated with their preservice training. Teachers that were more comfortable in speaking English were also more satisfied with their choice of teaching as a career. However, the amount of teaching time spent in English was not associated with any training. This study supports the training of preservice EFL teachers in English prior to teaching as it may improve their career satisfaction and therefore their retention in the profession. Training in instructional practices—specifically the use of English in EFL classes—needs to be provided to all Nigerien EFL teachers. As educational policy makers decide how to disperse limited resources in Expanding Circle countries, this study provides initial guidance.

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## Appendix

### Examining English Teaching in Niger Survey

#### Questions about you and your school... *Questions sur vous et votre école...*

1. Including this year, how many years have you been a teacher?

*En tenant compte de l'année en cours, combien d'années avez-vous passé en tant qu'enseignant?*

2. Prior to becoming a teacher, what kind of teacher training did you have? Check all that apply.

*Avant de devenir enseignant, quel type de formation pédagogique avez-vous reçue? Cochez toutes les réponses qui s'appliquent à votre cas.*

\_\_\_ None/*Aucune*

\_\_\_ Ecole Normal Superior/*Ecole Normale Supérieure*

\_\_\_ FLSH/*FLSH*

\_\_\_ Summer training prior to teaching/  
*Formation durant l'été avant de débiter l'enseignement*

\_\_\_ Teacher training program in other country/  
*Programme de formation pédagogique dans un autre pays*

\_\_\_ Other, please explain  
*Veillez expliquer* \_\_\_\_\_

3. How comfortable are you in English? / *Quel est votre niveau de maîtrise de l'Anglais?*

\_\_\_ Fluent/ *Couramment*

\_\_\_ Intermediate/ *Intermédiaire*

\_\_\_ Highly advanced/ *Très approfondi*

\_\_\_ Beginning/ *Débutant*

\_\_\_ Advanced/ *Avancé*

\_\_\_ None/ *Aucun*

*Avez-vous déjà rempli ce formulaire dans une autre école? \_\_\_ oui \_\_\_ non*

#### Instructional Practices

Please tell us about how you teach by answering each question below.

*Veillez nous dire comment vous enseignez en répondant à chaque question en bas.*

1. What percentage of your class is conducted in a language other than English?

*Quel est le pourcentage d'activités d'apprentissage conduit dans une langue autre que l'Anglais?*

\_\_\_ 75-100%

\_\_\_ 25-50%

\_\_\_ 0%

\_\_\_ 50-75%

\_\_\_ 1-25%

**FIT-CHOICE Scale / Echelle de SATISFACTION-CHOIX**

Fill in the circle of the choice that best reflects your personal views.

*Pour chaque question cochez la case qui correspond à votre point de vue.*

		Not at All <i>Pas du tout</i>						Extremely <i>Extrême</i>
1	How satisfied are you with your choice of a teaching career? <i>Quel est votre niveau de satisfaction de votre choix de carrière d'enseignant?</i>	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
2	How sure are you that you will persist in teaching? <i>Quel est votre degré de certitude que vous allez continuer dans l'enseignement?</i>	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
3	How much effort will you put into your teaching? <i>Combien d'efforts investirez-vous dans votre enseignement?</i>	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
4	To what extent do you aim to undertake further professional development? <i>Dans quelle mesure envisagez-vous de poursuivre davantage de développement professionnel?</i>	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
5	To what extent do you aim to take up a leadership role in schools? <i>Dans quelle mesure envisagez-vous de prendre des responsabilités de direction dans vos écoles?</i>	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

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