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SEÇÃO: ARTIGOS

Assessing the Readiness of Pre-service Teachers to Teach English to ESL Learners in Fijian Secondary Schools: A Study of Their Language Learning Experiences and Perceptions

Avaliando a preparação dos professores em formação para ensinar inglês a alunos de inglês como segunda língua nas escolas secundárias das Ilhas Fiji: um estudo das suas experiências e percepções de aprendizagem de línguas

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Abstract: This study aimed to assess the readiness of pre-service English teachers in a teacher training program at Fiji National University to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) to Fijian ESL learners. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from twenty-two students enrolled in a compulsory language course during their third year of undergraduate study. These findings underscore the pivotal role of English teachers in maximizing students' formal schooling and exposure to their native language (L1) to create an engaging learning environment. Additionally, this study found that enhancing pre-service teachers' cultural awareness improves their readiness to teach English to Fijian ESL students. Central to this study is the recognition of the essential elements necessary in pre-service teacher education programs. This study includes multifaceted support systems, such as emphasizing the significance of comprehensive support in pre-service teacher education programs, including mentorship programs, practical teaching opportunity experiences, feedback mechanisms, platforms for self-reflection and peer reflection opportunities, integration of technology into teaching, and the improvement of effective communication and teaching methodologies. These findings hold substantial promise in informing and potentially guide policy decisions and offer recommendations for the refinement of teacher-training programs and curriculum development in secondary school settings. This study recommends the provision of training and support through professional development seminars geared towards fostering culturally responsive and inclusive classrooms, emphasizing the importance of training and ongoing support for teachers.

Keywords: English as a Second Language (ESL), Pre-service teachers, culturally responsive and inclusive, cultural awareness, language learning experiences

Resumo: Este estudo teve como objetivo avaliar o grau de preparação dos professores de inglês em formação num programa de formação de professores da Universidade Nacional das Fiji para ensinar inglês como segunda língua (ESL) a alunos de ESL das Fiji. Este estudo de métodos mistos envolveu a recolha de dados de vinte e dois estudantes inscritos num curso de línguas obrigatório durante o terceiro ano de licenciatura. Os resultados indicam a importância de os professores de inglês maximizarem a escolaridade formal dos alunos e a sua exposição à língua materna (L1) para criarem um ambiente de aprendizagem cativante. O estudo também concluiu que o reforço da consciência cultural dos professores em formação melhorou a sua preparação para ensinar inglês a estudantes fjianos de ESL. Este estudo realça a importância de um apoio abrangente nos programas de formação de professores antes da entrada em serviço, incluindo programas de orientação, experiências práticas de ensino, mecanismos de feedback, oportunidades de autorreflexão e de reflexão entre pares, integração da tecnologia no ensino e melhoria da comunicação eficaz e das estratégias de ensino. Estas conclusões podem potencialmente orientar as decisões políticas



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e as recomendações relativas aos programas de formação de professores e ao desenvolvimento curricular no ensino secundário. Este estudo sugere que se ofereça formação e apoio através de seminários de desenvolvimento profissional para promover salas de aula inclusivas e culturalmente receptivas.

Palavras-chave: Inglês como Segunda Língua (ESL), professores em pré-serviço, culturalmente responsivo e inclusivo, consciência cultural, experiências de aprendizagem de línguas

Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) presents unique challenges to teachers owing to globalization and the increasing complexity of nations' multicultural and multilingual contexts. Effective language teaching is necessary for the success of ESL learners, and pre-service teachers are indispensable for achieving this goal. By grasping the complexities of language acquisition and employing effective teaching practices, pre-service teachers can create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that promotes the success of language learners. Through prior theoretical and practical experience, pre-service teachers can acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for success as language teachers.

One of the essential aspects of teaching a foreign language is creating an environment in which students can practice and improve their proficiency in the target language through meaningful interaction and communication. Teachers must recognize the significance of providing quality language instruction to an increasing number of ESL students worldwide. For effective English language education, a repertoire of teaching techniques with authentic and relevant resources, supported by learner-centred teaching and learning activities, is essential. Authentic teaching materials such as stories, articles, and videos can also be used to promote the development of language skills in real-world contexts. Collaborative and group activities, which are learner-centred, can foster autonomy and confidence in student communication. Therefore, pre-service teachers are crucial in accomplishing proficient language acquisition among ESL students.

Several studies have investigated teachers' perceptions and their ability to teach ESL

students effectively (Brandt et al., 2023; De Oliveira & Shoffner, 2016; Larsen, 2016; Li et al., 2017; Premier & Miller, 2010; Schroeder et al., 2020). These studies consistently found that pre-service teachers must have a comprehensive understanding of the language acquisition of ESL students, meet their students' specific needs and preferences, and be competent in adapting their learning styles. Although these studies have primarily concentrated on readiness and experience with language acquisition, there is a dearth of empirical data regarding the specific requirements of pre-service teachers who teach Fijian ESL students. Hence, this study aimed to determine if pre-service teachers in Fijian secondary schools were adequately prepared to teach English to ESL students. Additionally, this study sought to identify the challenges encountered by pre-service teachers, investigate their perceptions and experiences, and suggest more effective approaches to teacher training to enhance the quality of English language teaching in Fijian secondary schools.

Literature Review

Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) presents distinct challenges for English teachers because of the increasing complexity of globalization and the multilingual nature of societies. To effectively address the needs of ESL learners, it is crucial to assess pre-service teachers' readiness and to understand their language learning experiences and perceptions.

Limited fluency and competence in English are significant challenges that require teachers to adapt their teaching strategies and provide additional support to help students overcome language barriers. Teaching grammar can be particularly challenging because of the complexity and rule-based nature of English grammar concepts, such as verb tension, sentence structure, parts of speech, and syntax (Akinbode, 2008; Coffin et al., 2013; Kumayas & Lengkoan, 2023; Larsen-Freeman, 1995). ESL teachers often struggle to understand concepts accurately to solve individual problems and common

errors. In addition, Gebhard (2006) stated that teachers' classroom practices are shaped by their knowledge, language experiences, and personal beliefs related to the subject of teaching. Teaching strategies such as storytelling, discussions and oral presentations can help students engage and improve their language skills (Elley et al., 1996; Hafiz & Tudor, 1990; Huang & Naerssen, 1987).

Yin (2019) explored pre-service teachers' perceptions of their experiences in university teacher-training courses during the practicum and found that university courses should be planned to align with actual classroom practice. Chang et al. (2008) posited that pre-service teachers need more opportunities to improve their micro-teaching during the methodology course at the university and that field experiences with real students are provided. According to Darling-Hammond (2008), field experiences allow pre-service teachers to engage with the practice of being a teacher and interact with the more 'technical' aspects of teaching.

Ollerhead (2016) explored the development of insights, conceptualization practices, and reflections of a small group of teacher education students in relation to language and literacy pedagogy. He suggested that literacy pedagogies should be a crucial element of pre-service teachers' professional development to be more responsive to the needs of all students in schools. In addition, Kourieos (2014) highlighted the primacy of subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, showing evidence that both are necessary to avoid fragmented language teaching.

It is also crucial that pre-service teacher development programs are well prepared to cater to changing circumstances, such as the integration and use of technology in teaching ESL. Studies have highlighted the potential benefits of technology in language learning, such as speeding up language learning, encouraging research and communication, improving writing and speaking skills, expanding vocabulary, and supporting the development of teaching and learning resources (Haswani, 2014; Hubbard, 2013; Kessler & Hubbard,

2017; Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020; Lai Wah & Hashim, 2020; Shih, 2010; Smeda, 2014; Yunus, 2007). Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) found that teachers' feelings of readiness were significantly related to their confidence in their ability to teach effectively. They also found that teachers did not feel that their teacher education programs adequately prepared them for specific tasks, such as using technology and teaching English.

ICT is crucial for helping teachers and students cope with new challenges that await them in the future. As a result, there is an urgent need for teachers who are capable and comfortable with advanced technologies to meet students' learning needs. Park and Son (2022) postulated that digital technology plays a crucial role in modern foreign languages and that pre-service teachers must be well prepared for that. Malaysia (2011) stated that pre-service teachers possess positive attitudes, moderate competency levels, and are adequately prepared to integrate ICT into their classrooms. However, they suggest that more ICT-related training or courses should be conducted for pre-service teachers.

One factor that significantly affects students' understanding and interpretation of English is cultural differences. Nayasi et al. (2022) stated that teaching English to Fijian ESL students requires sensitivity to cultural background and culturally relevant content. To meet the diverse needs of ESL students, teachers need adequate training and support to develop effective teaching strategies, cultural competence, and language learning methods (Hasana & Utama, 2020). Fu and Wang (2021) posit that pre-service teachers need an equitable environment in which they can achieve their best potential, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, they stated that teacher development programs should be enhanced so that teachers can better teach English as a second language. Pablo et al. (2016) proposed that many ESL learners are taught by underprepared teachers who do not understand diversity or English language learning teaching strategies. They suggested that teacher education programs should provide opportunities for pre-

service teachers to learn English and teach instructional strategies.

Technology integration has been one of the most significant educational changes in recent decades. Technology in education has changed how teachers teach and students learn. Lai Wah and Hashim (2021) investigated the factors that influence the intention of pre-service teachers to use technology for teaching ESL. The findings showed that technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK) significantly affected the intention to incorporate technology into teaching. However, they lamented the lack of use of technology by pre-service teachers to teach ESL.

Dixon et al. (2016) examined pre-service teachers' language learning beliefs and attitudes toward English language learners and found that they showed neutral to somewhat positive attitudes toward supporting English language learners. Pre-service teachers must observe and participate in as many school-based contexts as possible to acquire a more robust interpretive framework. This is necessary so that they can begin to develop their sense of professional identity and practical knowledge (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

Research Design and Methods

Research Design

The research design included qualitative and quantitative research methods using a mixed-method approach. Johnson and Turner (2003) highlighted that "a mixed-method study to provide insights is not possible when only qualitative or quantitative data are collected" (p. 299).

First, the research design used qualitative methodology, specifically interviews, to collect original data to evaluate teachers' readiness before service. This approach aimed to understand better pre-service teachers' perceptions and experiences of language learning. This approach helped identify prevalent patterns and shared experiences among the participants. "Qualitative research focuses on discovering and

understanding the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of participants; that is, qualitative research explores meaning, purpose, or reality" (Hiatt, 1986) (as cited in Harwell, 2011, p. 148).

Second, this study incorporated a quantitative approach using surveys to collect numerical data on the attitudes and perceptions of pre-service teachers towards teaching English to Fijian ESL learners. Trochim and Land (1982) (as cited in Harwell, 2011) described quantitative research as a "glue that holds the research project together" (p. 149). This study offers a deeper understanding of the attitudes and perceptions of pre-service teachers in teaching ESL.

Pre-service teachers enrolled in a teacher education program, specifically the Year 3 Bachelor of Secondary Education majoring in English, participated in this study. Researchers used a technique known as purposive sampling to select participants who met the predetermined criteria for the study.

The instruments and methods used for data collection included administering surveys through Google Forms and interviews. Data on language acquisition experiences and perceptions were collected through the surveys. In contrast, the interviews provided a more complete understanding of beliefs and attitudes regarding English teaching.

Due to time constraints, data were collected at various points at the end of the program's first semester of the third year.

Data Analysis

The data analysis included both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes in the data collected from the surveys and interviews. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the survey responses, which were analyzed using the Google Forms platform. NVivo software was used to analyze the qualitative data. Before using the software, the data were meticulously organized. NVivo was chosen because it is current and user-friendly. After the interview transcripts were loaded, codes were created using the software.

Practical Considerations

When considering research aimed at evaluating readiness to teach English to Fijian ESL learners in secondary schools in Fiji, it is essential to consider various practical factors. Through proactive identification of potential challenges and implementation of backup strategies, the efficiency and efficacy of this study were optimized. It was also imperative to consider ethical implications to safeguard the well-being and rights of the participants.

One possible constraint is the accessibility and receptiveness of the pre-service teachers involved in this research. To address this issue, this study provides incentives for encouraging participation. Another potential obstacle is the barrier between researchers and participants. To overcome this, we worked with participants who were known to us.

Furthermore, it is imperative to consider ethical considerations when conducting future studies. The present investigation ensured that informed consent was acquired before the data-gathering procedures began. Researchers took measures to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants throughout the research process.

Ultimately, the researchers strategized and proactively considered potential obstacles during

data collection. Unforeseen circumstances include technological malfunctions, unfavourable weather, and other unexpected events. Contingency plans were developed to mitigate potential interruptions in the research. The printed questionnaires were prepared to be dispersed in the event of technological disruption and the inability of students to participate in interviews during regular school hours. An interview question guide was given to the participants who sent their recorded or written answers or interviews electronically.

Findings and Discussions

Demographics

All participants were enrolled in a 700-level language course, a compulsory Year 3 course for pre-service teachers. The demographic data of the sample relevant to the study were gender and age (Table 1). Nine males (40.9%) and 13 females (59.1%) participated in the study (N=22). The most significant age proportion was 21-30 years (72.7%), followed by 31-40 years (22.7%), and two participants were under 21 years of age (4.5%). Qualitative data were collected through personal interviews with five participants from each group.

TABLE 1 – Frequencies of Demographic Variables

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	9	40.9	40.9
	Female	13	59.1	100
	Total	22	100	
Age	Less than 21	1	4.5	4.5
	21-30	16	72.7	77.3
	31-40	5	22.7	100
	Total	22	100	

Research Questions 1 and 4 generated similar themes; therefore, their results were grouped and discussed.

a) Research Question 1: What are the language learning experiences and pers

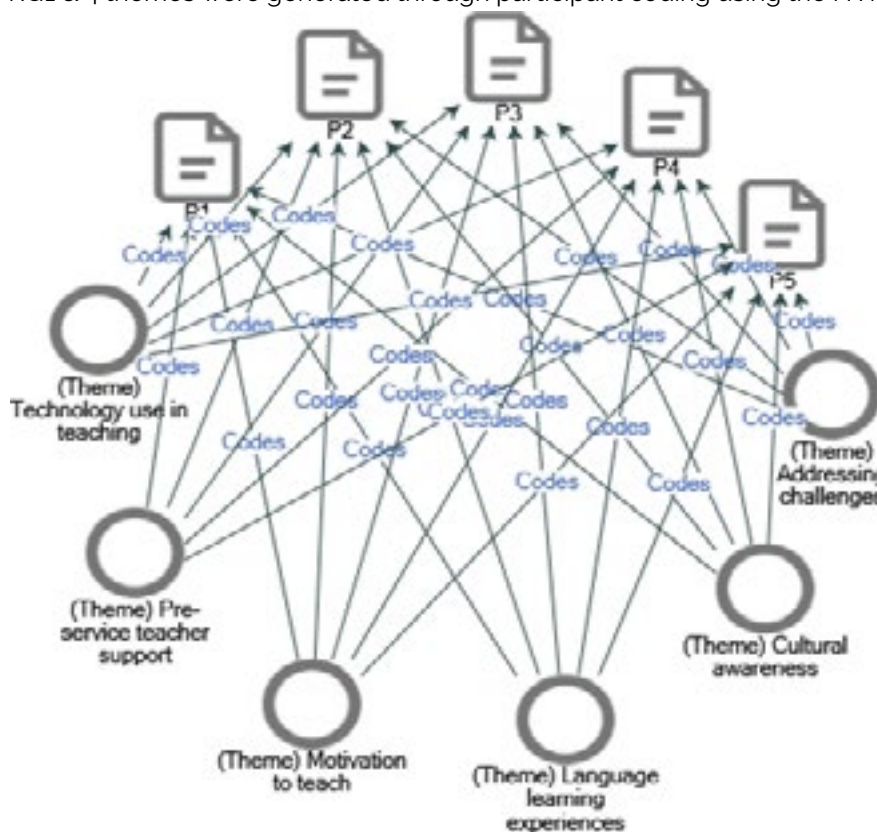
pectives of future English teachers in the teacher education program at the Fiji National University?

b) Research Question 4: What factors impact the readiness of pre-service English teachers to teach Fijian students in ESL in secondary schools in Fiji?

According to the survey questionnaires and interviews, six main themes were extracted for Research Questions 1 and 4 (Figure 1). These include (i) language learning experiences, (ii)

motivation to teach, (iii) addressing challenges, (iv) cultural awareness, (v) pre-service teacher support, and (vi) technological use in teaching.

Figure 1 – RQ1 & 4 themes were generated through participant coding using the NVivo software



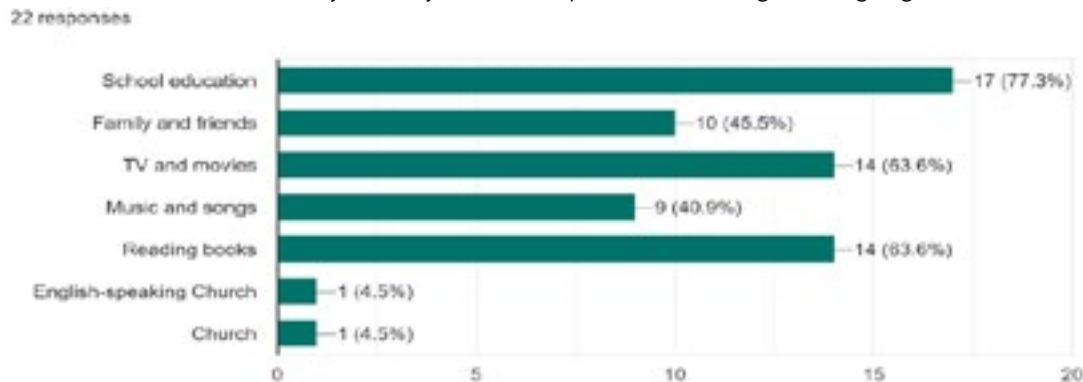
Language Learning Experiences

Participants' exposure to English before joining the teacher education institution is shown (Figure 2). Pre-service teachers reported being primarily exposed to English through formal school education (77.3%). This suggests that classroom teaching plays an important role in students' exposure to the English language. Additionally, interactions with family members and friends (45.5%) from an early age are likely to contribute to English language development through informal conversations and discussions. Media consumption, such as television shows and movies (63.6%) and music and songs (40.9%), provided further exposure to the English language, enhancing listening skills, pronunciation, vocabulary, and overall language

comprehension.

Moreover, 63.6% of the participants highlighted that reading books expanded their vocabulary, improved their grammar, and enhanced their general language proficiency. Notably, two participants (9%) mentioned their involvement in an English-speaking church at a very young age. They participated in religious activities in English, including singing hymns, reading the Bible, and writing. Their previous exposure to English was a decisive factor in their choice of teaching English.

Figure 2 – Before joining the teacher education program, in what ways have you been exposed to the English language?

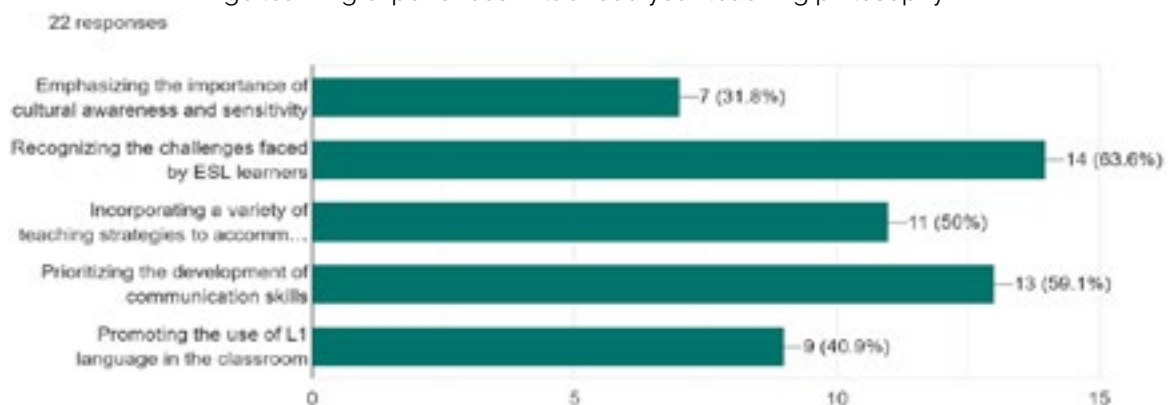


Regarding the impact of language learning experiences on the philosophy of pre-service teachers, it was emphasized that teachers should be sensitive and prioritize cultural awareness. Previous experiences of cultural sensitivity can inform teachers' teaching philosophies and promote cultural awareness (Figure 3). Participants who have faced challenges while learning English as a second language are better equipped to understand ESL learners needs and adapt their teaching approaches accordingly. Furthermore, the participants stressed the importance of utilizing students' first language (L1)

in the classroom to create a supportive learning environment and facilitate comprehension and language development. Effective communication is also a critical aspect of a teaching philosophy. Language learning experiences have exposed students to various teaching strategies based on different learning styles.

These findings shed light on the diverse sources of English language exposure for pre-service teachers, the significance of cultural awareness, and the influence of language-learning experiences on their teaching philosophy.

Figure 3 –In what ways have your language learning experiences influenced your teaching philosophy?



Motivation to Teach

Motivation to teach varies based on personal experiences and influences.

Participant 1 expressed a genuine interest in English during high school and shared the following:

'I like the subject of English in high school.'

'Learning English is interesting.'

'Being interested in the subject makes it easier to learn.'

This participant found learning English exciting,

and this interest greatly facilitated the learning experience. This motivation to teach others stems from positive experiences and the joy of learning English in high school.

Participant 2 attributed his motivation to his high school English teacher.

'...the teachers who taught me were good language teachers.'

Recognizing the efficacy of his language teachers suggests that the participant was motivated by their pedagogical abilities. This implies that an individual's desire to teach can be influenced by the inspirational role models of the mentors they are exposed to throughout their high school years.

Similarly, Participant 3 explained that English was her preferred subject during high school and described it as 'fun'. Participants' interest in teaching may stem from their satisfaction and joy from studying and actively participating in English. Positive experiences contribute to a desire to share the joy of learning with others as teachers.

By contrast, Participant 4 attributed her inspiration to becoming a language teacher to a specific English teacher during her final secondary school year. This suggests that the participant had a significant and influential experience with this particular teacher, which sparked her interest in pursuing a career in teaching English. The positive impact of dedicated and inspired teachers plays

a crucial role in motivating individuals to become teachers.

Participant 5 drew his motivation from his family history, particularly from his mother, who was a teacher. Participant 5 shared:

'I have learnt a lot from my mother since she was a teacher. I want to follow in her footsteps.'

His desire to follow in his mother's footsteps strongly influenced his admiration of his mother's profession. Learning from his mother likely gave him firsthand insights into the teaching profession and inspired him to become an English teacher.

The motivation to teach among the participants was attributed to personal interest in and enjoyment of the subject, positive experiences with teachers, admiration of influential teachers, and family influence. These individual motivations reflect the diverse and multifaceted nature of what drives individuals to pursue careers while teaching English and other subjects.

Addressing Challenges

The participants discussed on the significant challenges encountered while teaching English to the Fijian ESL students (Figure 4). The challenges of (a) limited English proficiency, (b) cultural differences, (c) limited resources, (d) code-switching, and (e) teacher preparation were discussed in detail.

Figure 4 – As an English teacher, what do you anticipate to be the biggest challenge in teaching English to Fijian ESL students?



Limited English Proficiency. One significant challenge is their limited fluency and proficiency

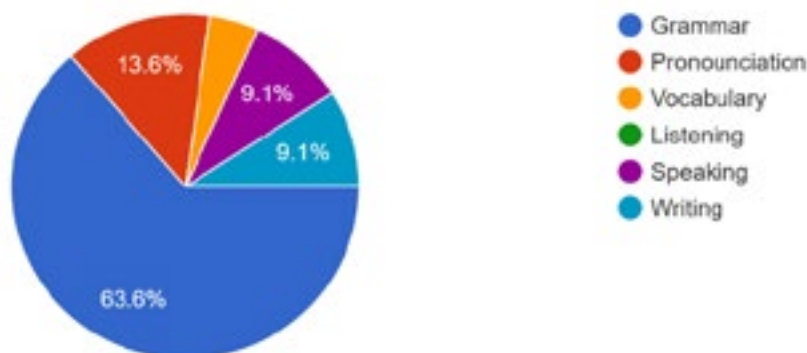
in English, which requires teachers to adapt their teaching strategies and provide additional

support to help students overcome language barriers. When participants were asked to rate the specific challenges in teaching English (see Figure 5), the analysis revealed that grammar (63.6%) posed the greatest difficulty, followed by pronunciation (13.6%), writing (9.1%), speaking (9.1%), and vocabulary (4.6%). Notably, none of the participants indicated that listening posed any challenges.

Teaching grammar can be particularly challenging because of the complexity and rule-based nature of English grammar concepts such as verb tenses, sentence structure, parts of speech, and syntax (Akinbode, 2008; Coffin et al., 2013; Kumayas & Lengkoan, 2023; Larsen-Freeman, 1995). ESL teachers often struggle to grasp concepts accurately and address individual and common errors. However, it is

worth considering Gebhard's (2006) assertion that teachers' classroom practices are shaped by their subjective teaching-related knowledge, language experience, and personal beliefs. It is crucial to employ interactive and communicative strategies to overcome these challenges. Students should engage in meaningful language usage, receive clear explanations and examples, and benefit from visual aids and real-life contexts incorporated into their activities and tasks. Additionally, incorporating technological resources can enhance the learning experience. Furthermore, English teachers should actively engage in professional development, collaborate with other English teachers, and remain updated with current teaching methodologies to support ESL students' classroom learning challenges better.

Figure 5 – In your experience, what is the most challenging aspect of teaching an ESL class?



Cultural Differences. Cultural differences can significantly affect the student's understanding and interpretation of English. Teaching English to Fijian ESL students requires sensitivity to their cultural background, incorporating culturally relevant content (Nayasi et al., 2022), and examples to enhance comprehension and engagement.

Limited Resources. The scarcity of resources presents challenges for teaching English to Fijian ESL students. Insufficient access to textbooks, educational materials, technology, and other resources can impede effective instruction and limit opportunities for interactive language practices.

Code-switching. Code-switching, the practice

of switching between languages and dialects within a conversation (Lin, 2008), has been observed among Fijian ESL students. The natural inclination to switch between English and their native language or dialect can affect their English language development and challenge teachers to promote consistent language use.

Teacher Preparation. Teachers are crucial in addressing the challenges of teaching English to Fijian ESL students. To meet the diverse needs of ESL students, teachers require appropriate training and support to develop effective teaching strategies, cultural competence, and language acquisition methodologies (Hasanah & Utami, 2020) particularly non-English speakers, requires

proper strategies and methods. By doing so, each teacher has his/her challenges. This study intends to unveil the emerging challenges faced by English teachers from non-native English-speaking countries (non-NESCs).

These challenges underscore the importance of employing appropriate teaching strategies, creating a culturally inclusive environment, providing necessary resources, and ensuring that teachers have adequate training to address the specific needs of Fijian ESL students.

Cultural Awareness

Culture encompasses various norms, principles, and dialects. ESL students of Fijian origin from Hindu and indigenous Fijians or Rotuman backgrounds may encounter difficulties acquiring English language skills because of the influence of their native cultures. Teachers/Educators must acknowledge and respect the cultural heritage of their students while facilitating English language acquisition. Fijian society predominantly embraces collectivism, emphasizing the importance of group solidarity, collaboration, and strong social bonds. Cultural dynamics in Fiji and the Pacific regions prioritize communalism, where sharing and collective orientation impact the classroom learning approach. This affects classroom learning dynamics, as students prefer collaborative learning methods that foster peer interaction and group activities. In Fijian culture, respect and politeness hold great significance, leading students to demonstrate a higher degree of respect towards individuals in positions of authority, such as teachers. The 'culture of silence' concept manifests as a display of respect and refraining from challenging authority. However, this behaviour may sometimes be viewed negatively and misconstrued as a reluctance to answer or a lack of knowledge. Consequently, it impacts classroom dynamics, necessitating teachers to create inclusive teaching environments encouraging learners to express themselves freely.

Furthermore, the oral tradition of storytelling is deeply rooted in the Fijian culture and plays

a significant role in listening and speaking. It has been observed that Fijian students learning English as a Second Language often prefer oral communication and storytelling over written expressions (Elley et al., 1996; Hafiz & Tudor, 1990; Huang & Naerssen, 1987). Therefore, teaching strategies such as storytelling, discussions, and oral presentations can be beneficial for engaging students and enhancing their language proficiency. The presence of other languages may also influence the acquisition of Fijian ESL students because many students are already bilingual or multilingual. Educators should be aware of potential challenges related to language transfer and provide targeted instructions to address them. In addition, traditional gender roles and expectations can affect Fijian ESL students' learning experiences, underscoring the importance of creating an inclusive classroom environment that promotes gender equality. Respecting elders and individuals in position is an integral part of Fijian culture, and teachers should approach Fijian ESL students with care and value in their perspectives. Sentence structures in languages such as i-Taukei, Fiji-Hindi, and Rotuman differ from English, posing challenges for Fijian ESL students to adapt. Some Fijian English-speaking students have limited opportunities to speak English at home, which can affect their language learning and usage. Recognizing and understanding the L1 language of Fijian ESL students is crucial for leveraging their existing language skills and addressing language transfer issues. Teachers can also consider incorporating cultural languages into the curriculum to instil a sense of pride and identity in Fijian ESL students.

The participants identified several cultural factors influencing Fijian ESL students' English teaching. These include:

- Impact of cultural beliefs, mannerisms, and use L1 on English language learning.
- The students were torn between their L1 and English.

- The influence of dialects on pronunciation and vocabulary.
- The importance of incorporating cultural customs and practices.
- Understanding socio-cultural factors.
- Creating a culturally inclusive learning environment.
- Differences in sentence structure between L1 and English.
- Issues of students discouraged from speaking English at home.
- Recognizing and understanding students' L1 language (i-Taukei, Fiji-Hindi, Rotuman, etc.)
- L1 was used to facilitate second language acquisition.
- Giving importance to cultural language.
- The influence of childhood socialization and sociocultural aspects of collectivism and togetherness in Fijian society.

These findings highlight the importance of considering the cultural aspects when designing teaching strategies and pedagogies to address unique needs and challenges. Incorporating these cultural factors can create a culturally responsive and inclusive learning environment, enhancing students' language learning experiences and fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures in the classroom (Nayasi et al., 2022). Embracing the distinctiveness of the school environment plays a crucial role in providing a supportive learning atmosphere that encourages daily English practice and emphasizes speaking, listening, and reading skills. A recommended approach is facilitating communication in the students' L1 language and gradually transitioning to English, as this approach builds language skills and confidence. Moreover, demonstrating genuine interest in students and their cultural backgrounds and emphasizing the value of being an ESL student can significantly improve motivation and student engagement.

Pre-service Teacher Support

Teacher support during training and teaching

practice is crucial for developing Fijian ESL students' knowledge, skills, and confidence in teaching English (Figure 6). Pre-service students greatly benefited from attending professional development workshops (72.7%) on ESL. These workshops are believed to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective teaching.

Furthermore, mentoring and coaching support (72.7%) from experienced ESL teachers provided valuable guidance and support. These mentors and coaches can help pre-service teachers navigate challenges, reflect on their teaching practices, and continuously improve.

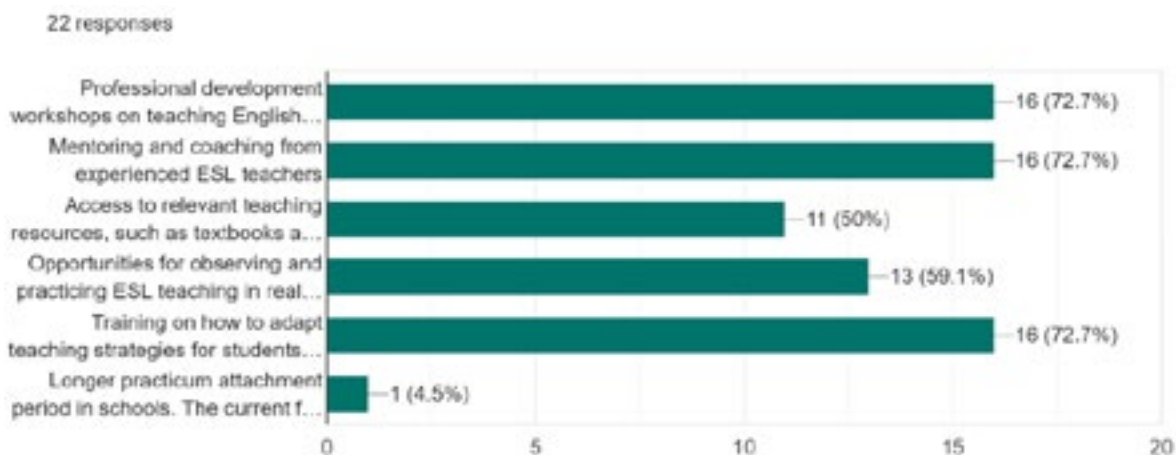
Considering the diverse language backgrounds of Fijian classrooms, pre-service teachers need to receive training in adapting their teaching strategies (72.7%) to meet students' needs. This training equips pre-service teachers with skills to create inclusive and effective learning environments.

Pre-service teachers' opportunities to observe and practice in natural classroom settings (59.1%) were ideal for observing experienced ESL teachers in action and practising their skills. By gaining hands-on experience, pre-service teachers can acquire practical knowledge and confidence.

Access to relevant teaching resources (50%) improved pre-service teachers' ability to plan practical lessons for their students.

Finally, an extended practicum attachment period (4.5%) is considered beneficial in schools. It gives pre-service teachers more time to gain practical experience, observe experienced teachers, and apply their learning to actual classroom practice. This experience also assesses whether their teacher training adequately prepares them to engage with Fijian ESL students and makes a real difference to their English learning skills.

Figure 6 – In your opinion, what kind of support do pre-service English teachers need to be better prepared to teach English to Fijian ESL students?

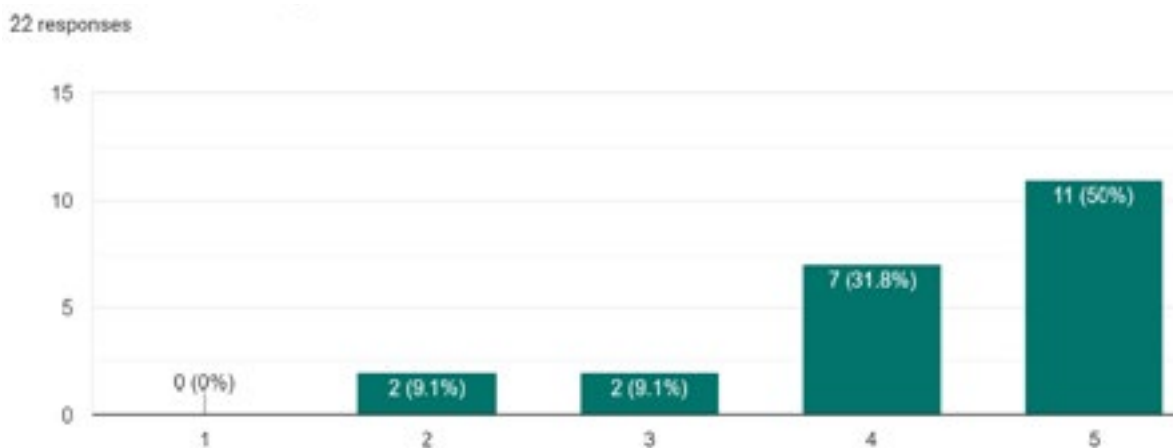


Use of Technology in Teaching

The ratings provided by the students regarding their confidence in using technology to teach English to Fijian ESL students (Figure 7) indicated that most of the ratings fell between four and five (31.8% and 50%, respectively). This suggests that participants generally feel comfortable or very comfortable using technology in teaching. Higher ratings indicate greater comfort and confidence in utilizing technology for instructional purposes. Integrating technology in the English as a foreign language classroom has become increasingly important in recent years. Studies

highlight the potential benefits of technology in language learning, including expediting language acquisition, fostering enquiry and communication, enhancing writing and speaking skills, expanding vocabulary, and aiding in the development of teaching and learning resources (Haswani, 2014; Hubbard, 2013; Kawinkoonlasate, 2020; Kessler & Hubbard, 2017; Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020; Lai Wah & Hashim, 2021; Nawaila et al., 2020; Shih, 2010; Smeda et al., 2014; Yunus, 2007). However, it is essential to consider and ensure these technologies' relevance to students' specific needs.

Figure 7 –How comfortable are you with the use of technology in teaching English to Fijian ESL students?

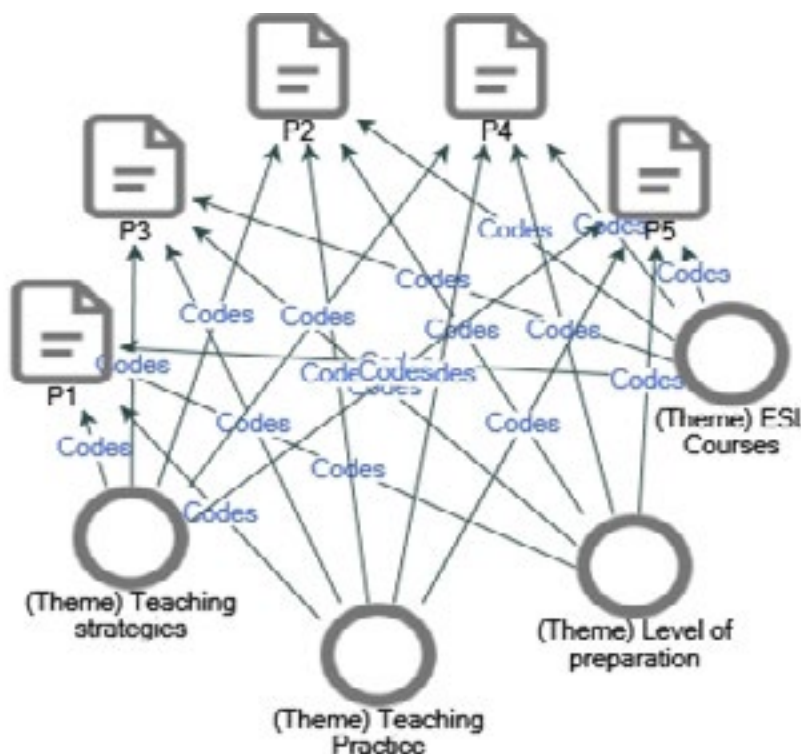


RQ2: How prepared are pre-service English teachers to teach English to Fijian English language students in secondary schools?

The research questions generated four themes

(Figure 8) based on the survey questions and interviews: (i) teaching strategies, (ii) level of preparation, (iii) teaching practice, and (iv) ESL courses.

Figure 8 – RQ2 themes generated through participant coding using the NVivo software



Teaching Strategies

The preferred teaching aid for pre-service teachers to effectively teach English Fijian ESL students is shown in Figure 9. Visual aids were the preferred choice (63.6%). Visual aids provide visual representations of language, aiding the comprehension and retention of vocabulary and concepts.

Games and activities were also highly favoured (63.6%), providing an enjoyable teaching and learning experience. The interactive and engaging nature of games and activities motivates students to actively participate and practice English in a fun manner.

Communicative language teaching (59.1%) emerged as a significant choice among the participants. This approach focuses on developing students' communicative competence in real-life contexts, emphasizing meaningful interactions

and the practical use of English for communication.

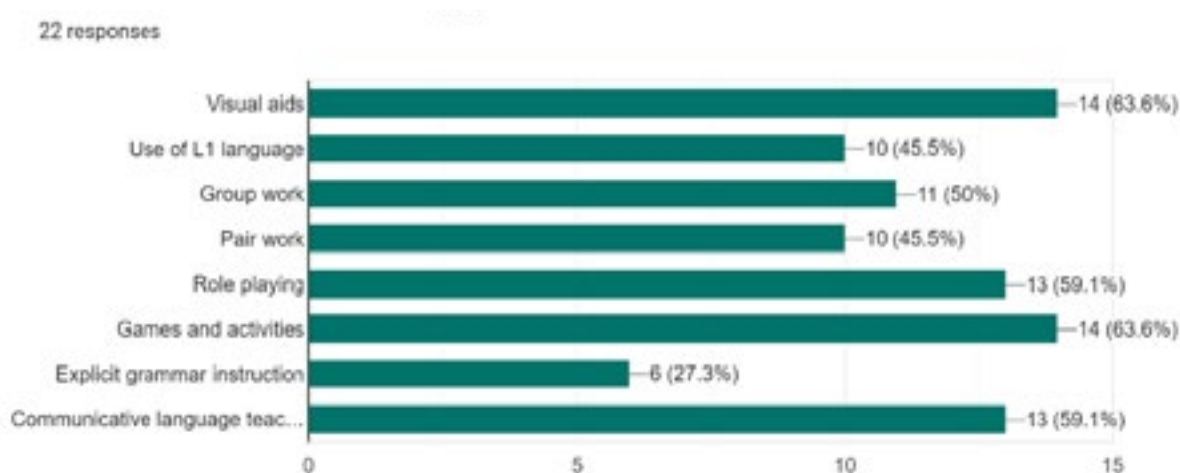
Collaborative learning strategies such as group work (50%), paired work (45.5%), and role-playing (59.1%) were found to be valuable in promoting communication, interactions, and peer learning within a supportive environment. Role-playing, in particular, with its diverse roles and characteristics, aids in developing speaking and listening skills and cultural awareness.

Using students' L1 language was considered important (45.5%) as it facilitates effective teaching by providing explanations, clarifications, and scaffolding to support understanding.

Explicit grammar instruction (27.3%) was the least preferred strategy. However, its lower presence does not imply weakness but suggests the potential for teaching grammar in an enjoyable manner that benefits learners. Explicit grammar

instruction helps students understand English language usage. mechanics and enhances their accuracy in

Figure 9 –What teaching strategies have you learnt that are effective in teaching English to Fijian ESL students?



In the interviews, Participants 1 through 5 emphasized the significance of immediate feedback, active student participation, peer interactions, diverse resources, and using both English and L1. Incorporating these strategies enables teachers to create supportive, inclusive learning environments.

Teaching strategies play a crucial role in establishing effective and engaging classrooms. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the effectiveness of these strategies can vary depending on the specific context and needs of the lesson and the students. Thus, teachers must be creative and adaptable to their pedagogical approaches to meet their students' unique needs.

Level of Preparation

According to the interview, participant 1 explained that there is *"still room for improvement,"* acknowledging that the learning process is ongoing. Pre-service teachers must recognize the need to improve their teaching strategies and skills to make a real difference in their teaching. Participants 2, 3, 4 and 5 expressed high confidence

in their preparation for teaching English:

"Preparation to teach English was done well." [P2]

"It's good." [P3]

'I'm well prepared.' [P4]

'I think I'm prepared well enough in terms of content. But some aspects of the English language are very different in depth and meaning.' [P5]

Participants believed that their teacher training was adequately equipped to teach English. However, Participant 5 recognized that certain aspects of English, particularly those related to depth and meaning, require further understanding and improvement.

Teaching Practice

Most participants (63.6% and 18.2%) indicated they could participate in or observe teaching English to Fijian ESL students (Figure 10). This suggests that their teacher-education program allowed them to teach English. However, four participants (18.2%) stated they had not yet received an opportunity to teach or observe.

Figure 10 –Have you had any opportunities to observe or participate in teaching English to Fijian ESL students during your teacher-education program?

22 responses



During the interviews, issues concerning the experiences of teaching practices in schools were identified. Participant 1 emphasized the importance of incorporating more activities and addressing spelling and pronunciation problems while ensuring students correctly understand the language. Participant 2 highlighted the importance of encouraging students to read, manage their attitudes, and stay motivated as teachers, thus emphasizing the need for patience. Furthermore, Participant 3 stressed the importance of creating an environment where students feel comfortable making mistakes, providing online teaching resources, and understanding their attitudes and needs towards the subject. Participant 4 discussed the importance of providing assistance and support, encouraging students, and addressing the fears of teaching a second language. Finally, Participant 5 mentioned the importance of accepting mistakes, providing equal participation opportunities, explaining concepts in students' native language (L1), boosting student confidence, and utilizing various strategies and resources to enhance students' English language proficiency while considering their cultural and linguistic background.

These reflections highlight the significance of creating supportive and motivating learning environments, addressing individual needs, fostering confidence, and utilizing diverse strategies and resources to improve Fijian

ESL students' English language proficiency, considering their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Teacher Preparation in ESL Needs

Adequate teacher preparation is crucial for equipping pre-service teachers with essential skills and knowledge relevant to English classrooms. Figure 11 summarizes the views on the critical skills and knowledge necessary to teach English to Fijian ESL students effectively.

First, it is important to understand the diverse cultures in the classroom. This includes recognizing and respecting students' cultural backgrounds, values, and beliefs, which creates an inclusive and supportive classroom environment. Additionally, having an understanding of Fijian languages can be beneficial in addressing language-specific challenges and facilitating communication with students who may be more comfortable expressing themselves in their L1.

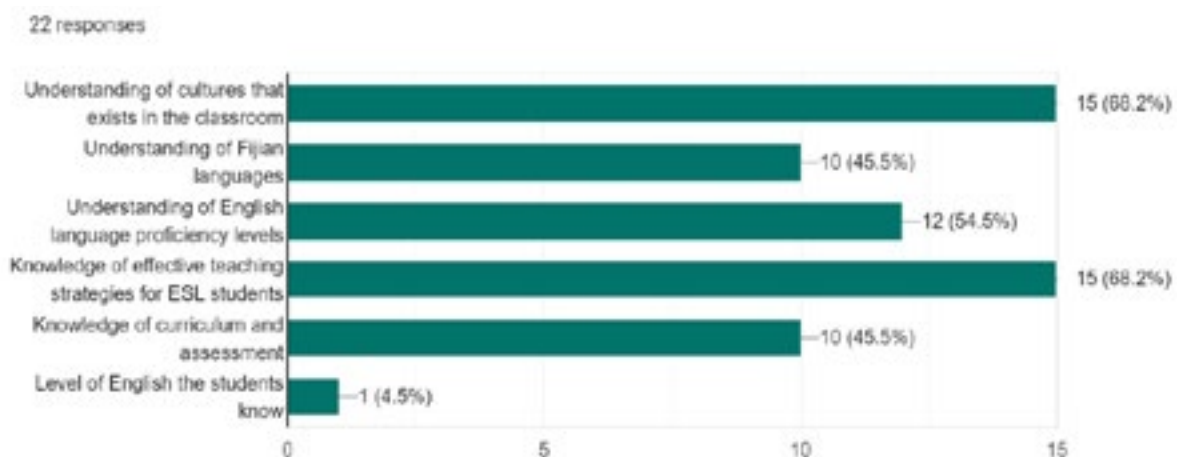
Moreover, pre-service teachers must have a solid understanding of their English language proficiency levels. As the saying goes, *you cannot give what you have not got*. Therefore, teachers must have the appropriate knowledge to accurately assess language abilities and design appropriate teaching methods and activities with relevant resources to accommodate students' individual needs. Familiarity with effective teaching strategies

for ESL students is fundamental and includes employing differentiated teaching methods and scaffolding techniques and incorporating interactive and engaging activities that promote language acquisition and development.

Another important aspect is the understanding of the English curriculum and its assessment. Familiarity with curriculum guidelines and standards is essential in allowing teachers to plan and deliver appropriate content and objectives

that align with their levels of language proficiency. Additionally, understanding the various methods and tools allows teachers to assess student progress and provide targeted feedback for effective improvement. Finally, the awareness of students' current levels of English proficiency is vital. These data help teachers gauge the starting point and track progress, enabling them to tailor their teaching accordingly and set realistic goals for language development.

Figure 11 – In your opinion, what are the most important skills and knowledge that pre-service English teachers should have in order to teach Fijian ESL students effectively?



The findings from the interviews highlighted that all specific courses were offered in teacher training to improve knowledge and skills in the English language, and no particular course focused on teaching English to Fijian ESL students. Participants 1, 2, 3, and 4 generally mentioned 'in *teacher training*' but did not specifically refer to the courses that provided ESL training. However, Participant 5 stated that she did not recall any specific training or workshops offered by the ESL teacher training education institution.

These findings have several implications for teacher training programs.

1. Recognition of specialized training: Teacher training must offer dedicated programs that specifically address the needs of English language teachers and equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary for effective teaching.

2. Professional development opportunities: Teacher training institutions should provide continuous professional development opportunities facilitated by specialized/experienced ESL teacher mentors to meet teachers' evolving needs. Ongoing training will help teachers improve their skills, stay up-to-date with the latest teaching approaches and methodologies for ESL instruction, and improve student outcomes.

3. Addressing variations in teacher-training experiences: The responses indicated a lack of recollection regarding specific ESL training. This suggests potential variations in the training experience provided by institutions. To ensure comprehensive and consistent training, teacher-training institutions should consider incorporating ESL teaching as a core component in their programs or offering specialized training modules.

4. Influence of institutional policies and practices: Institutional policies and practices significantly shape teaching and learning experiences in English language programs (Rind & Kadiwal, 2016). Teacher training institutions must critically evaluate and align their policies with the ESL teaching and learning practices to ensure effective instruction and positive student outcomes.

5. Importance of in-service training programs: In-service training programs can significantly improve teacher quality and enhance student educational performance (Rao, 2019) short-term in-service teacher training programme on the performance of English teachers. Educational policy-makers and practitioners have had a longstanding interest in improving teacher quality. Officials in many education systems around the world have championed in-service teacher training programmes as a cost-effective way to augment the subject knowledge and pedagogical skills of teachers, thus helping them better teach their students. Most teachers (72%). Teacher training institutions should consider offering in-service training

programs to support teachers in the field and provide them with opportunities to improve their skills and pedagogical approaches.

6. Integrating service learning: Service learning, which involves providing pre-service teachers with optimal teaching experiences, has proven to be a valuable approach for training future teachers (Pazilah et al., 2021). This approach allows pre-service teachers to be exposed to actual classroom situations and to apply educational theories in practical settings.

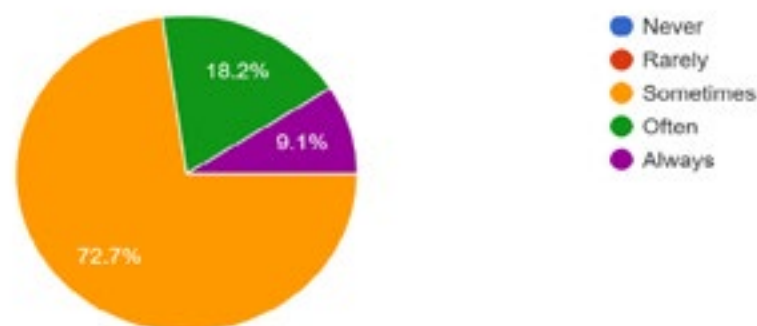
RQ3: How do pre-service English teachers' language learning experiences and perceptions affect their readiness to teach English to Fijian ESL students?

Code-switching

Code-switching was observed to occur frequently and occasionally in English lessons, with variations in usage among participants (Figure 12). The interviews shed light on participants' utilization of code-switching in their language learning.

Figure 12 – How frequently do your teachers use code-switching during English lessons?

22 responses



One participant emphasized the optimistic perspective of code-switching as a strategic tool for language learning, stating that it can *“help students understand concepts better.”* Recognizing the importance of integrating code-switching in teaching ESL students indicates that participants may adopt a teaching approach that embraces

code-switching to facilitate communication and language acquisition in Fijian English, as it enhances interaction and understanding.

According to Cahyani et al. (2018), code-switching can serve pedagogical functions, such as facilitating comprehension and explaining complex concepts, and affective functions,

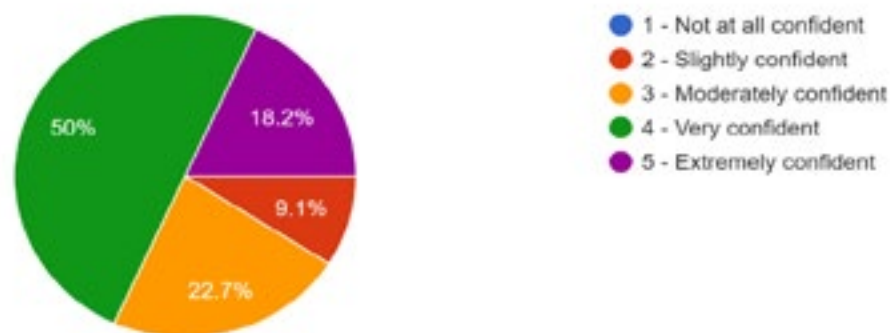
including building rapport and expressing emotions. These functions are integral to the teaching and learning processes. However, further research is needed to understand the specific frequency and motivations behind teachers' code-switching practices during English lessons. Additional research should provide more detailed information regarding the context and demographics of teachers.

Confidence to teach

Based on the collected data (Figure 13), the average confidence level in teaching English to the Fijian ESL students was 3.82, indicating moderate confidence. The rating distribution revealed that most participants felt moderately confident (rating of 3) or very confident (rating of 4) in their ability to teach English. This high confidence level can be a positive factor for effectively delivering English lessons.

Figure 13 – On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about your ability to teach English to Fijian ESL students?

22 responses



Participants' responses shared common sentiments. Participant 2 mentioned the influence of having good teachers, indicating that positive experiences with previous teachers contributed to her confidence. Participant 4 highlighted how confidence played a role in his teaching practice, as he was well-taught. Overall, confidence levels varied among the participants, and several factors contributed to their confidence, including personal experience, previous education, language proficiency, and early exposure to language.

It is important to note that confidence in teaching English to Fijian ESL students can significantly affect the effectiveness of language teaching. Teachers with higher confidence levels are more likely to create a positive learning environment and effectively engage students.

Conclusion

This study shared pre-service teachers' perspectives on the challenges faced by students in Fiji schools, such as limited English proficiency, grammatical difficulties, pronunciation, writing, speaking, vocabulary, cultural differences, and limited resources. The research findings emphasize the importance of cultural awareness in shaping the teaching philosophies of pre-service teachers and underscore the diverse sources of English learning experiences. Motivations for pursuing a teaching career in English varied and included personal interest, enjoyment of the subject, positive experiences with teachers, admiration of influential teachers, and family influences.

Pre-service teachers also emphasized the significance of teacher support during teacher training and teaching practices to enhance the

development of Fijian ESL students. Integrating technology in the ESL classroom tailored to students' needs and cultural contexts is essential. Teachers should be adaptable to their pedagogical approaches, possess knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds and language proficiency levels, and understand the school's English curriculum.

Designing language-teaching methods that incorporate students with diverse language-learning experiences is recommended. English teachers leverage formal schooling and informal language exposure through interactions to create an engaging learning environment. Fostering cultural awareness improves readiness to teach English to Fijian ESL students. Training and support to promote culturally responsive classrooms are essential, which can be achieved through professional development workshops focusing on understanding diverse cultures and teaching strategies for ESL learners.

Providing comprehensive support for pre-service teachers through teacher education programs is important. This includes mentorship programs, increased practical teaching experience, effective feedback mechanisms, and self-reflection and peer reflection opportunities. By implementing these measures, pre-service teachers can acquire the necessary skills and confidence to teach English to Fijian ESL learners effectively.

Finally, effective communication and teaching strategies must be developed. Technology integration into teaching is highly recommended, considering the evolving landscape of educational technology. Incorporating appropriate technological tools and methodologies into teacher education programs can further enhance the readiness of future teachers to meet the needs of the ESL students in Fiji.

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