

Teachers' Teaching Styles at English Language Institutes in Iran

By

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Abstract

Different teaching styles may be used by English language teachers in their classrooms. In this study the researcher aims to examine the dominant teaching style used by teachers in private language institutes in Iran based on Grasha's taxonomy; Grasha (1996) identified five teaching styles in his taxonomy as: Expert, Formal Authority, Personal Model, Facilitator and Delegator Styles (p. 154). Further, the researcher aims to investigate whether there is any relationship between using the dominant style of teaching and variables of sex, age, and years of teaching experience.

Keywords: *Delegator, expert, facilitator, formal authority, teaching style*

Introduction

English language teaching in Iran has passed through a host of ups and downs and has experienced extreme courses (Aliakbari, 2004). Prior to the Islamic Revolution in 1979, because of the exceptional relations between the Iranian government and the West, especially the U.S. and England, English language teaching received particular attention.

Post-revolutionary reactions to English Language Teaching (ELT), in certain ways, went to extremes as well. Following the revolutionary oppositions against the U.S. as the main supporter of the fallen kingdom, ELT received waves of hostility.

At present, the dominant trend in Iran is toward more English language teaching. As a required course in junior high school, English is taught three to four hours in a week. Due to limitations in state schools, private language institutes have simply attracted an increasing number of interested learners including young children and adults. Although English is taught as a required subject both at universities and schools in Iran along with other subjects, the real act of English learning takes place not in these educational centers but in non-academic centers (Talebinezhad and Sadeghi, 2005). This might be due to inefficiency of public centers or ever-increasing number of English users. Whatever the reasons might be, many English users resort to non-academic places to learn English. One can probably refer to English language institutes as the largest systematic non-academic centers.

Iran's educational system is still under the influence of modernist, behaviorist and positivist views of learning. Iranian teachers would rather exercise their authority in the class, be the absolute determiner of all class decisions (Pishghadam and Navari, 2010). In their study of learners' perception they found that institute learners' considering themselves and their teachers as following the conventions of cognitive/constructive learning, illustrate the different condition they experience comparing to that of school learners who are mostly passive in the learning process. In fact the institute learners opt for the situative perspective of learning to gain more knowledge from the interaction between them and teacher and more opportunities for practice and using the L2.

The majority of learners, especially at schools, seem frustrated by the way they English language classes are presented to them which may eventually discourage them to pursue learning English. In addition, learners can notice that the way they conceptualize themselves as language learners may not equip them with enough motivations or abilities to deal with the learning process (Pishghadam and Navari, 2010).

The highly standardized national tests force both teachers and learners to focus only on structural or formal grammatical features of English because these are the ones needed to perform well in the exams (Ghorbani, 2008). In his study he concerned the need to use textbooks which address the needs of the students. He believed that there must be a serious reviewing of the Iranian curriculum in English language teaching in order to broaden the skills required for students to learn in school.

According to Grasha (1996), teaching style is viewed as a particular pattern of needs, beliefs, and behaviors that teachers display in the classroom. He also states that style is multidimensional and affect how teachers present information, interact with students, manage classroom tasks, supervise coursework, socialize students to the field, and mentor students (p. 3). In other words teaching style refers to a teacher's pervasive qualities that persist even though situational conditions may change. It is a label associated with various acquirable and identifiable sets of consistent classroom behaviors by the teacher regardless of the content that is being taught (Conti & Welborn, 1996). It can also be defined as "the expression of the totality of one's philosophy, beliefs, values, and behaviors" (Jarvis, 2004).

A look at published research reveals the existence of various conceptualizations of teaching styles. Some attempts to clarify the construct include the following categories (Akbari & Karimi Allvar, 2010):

- Visual, Auditory, Group, Kinesthetic, Individual, and Tactile Styles (Salem, 2001)
- Formal – Informal (Bennett, Jordan, Long, & Wade, 1976)
- Open -Traditional (Solomon & Kendall, 1979)
- Intellectual Excitement/ Interpersonal Rapport (Lowman, 1995)

- Expert, Formal Authority, Personal Model, Facilitator, and Delegator (Grasha, 1996)

Lowman (1995; 1984, cited in Razak, Ahmad, and Mohd Shah, 2007) developed the two-dimensional model of *Intellectual Excitement & Interpersonal Rapport* that constitute nine combinations or cells, each representing a unique style of instruction associated with a particular probability that students will learn to their fullest. Lowman cautioned that these nine styles are generalizations and will not describe every teacher exactly; individual instructor may show elements of more than one type.

Grasha (1996) identified five teaching styles in his teaching style models (p. 154). The five styles are Expert, Formal Authority, Personal Model, Facilitator and Delegator Styles. Although it may seem appropriate to place teachers into one of the five categories of teaching styles, Grasha (1996) emphasized that everyone who teaches possesses each of the five teaching styles to varying degrees. Therefore, he identified the four clusters of teaching styles that are dominant among teachers. These clusters are Cluster 1 (expert/formal authority style), Cluster 2 (personal model/expert/ formal authority style), Cluster 3 (facilitator/personal model/expert style), and Cluster 4 (delegator/facilitator/expert style). According to Grasha (1996), each cluster of teaching style conveys a distinguished message to the students, and this helps to create the *mood* of the class. He defined these categories as follow (p. 154):

Expert; possesses knowledge and expertise that students need and strives to maintain status as an expert among students by displaying detailed knowledge and by challenging students to enhance their competence. S/he is concerned with transmitting information and insuring that students are well prepared.

Formal Authority; possesses status among students, concerned with providing positive and negative feedback, establishing learning goals, expectations, and rules of conduct for students. Concerned with the correct, acceptable, and standard ways to do things and with providing students with the structure they need to learn.

Personal Model; believes in "teaching by personal example" and establishes a prototype for how to think and behave. Oversees, guides, and directs by showing how to do things, and encouraging students to observe and then to emulate the instructor's approach.

Facilitator; emphasizes the personal nature of teacher-student interactions. Guides and directs students by asking questions, exploring options, suggesting alternatives, and encouraging them to develop criteria to make informed choices.

Overall goal is to develop in students the capacity for independent action, initiative, and responsibility. She works with students on projects in a consultative fashion and tries to provide as much support and encouragement as possible.

Delegator; is concerned with developing students' capacity to function in an autonomous fashion. Students work independently on projects or as part of autonomous teams. The teacher is available at the request of students as a resource person.

Jarvis (1985) proposed three classifications to identify teaching styles: (a) a didactic style which was teacher-controlled through lectures and student note taking; (b) a Socratic style which was teacher directed through the use of questions to which the students responded; and (c) a facilitative style in which the teacher prepared the learning environment and the students were responsible for their own learning.

From literature review, it was found that different researchers and authors used different terminologies to describe teaching styles depending on the research or study at hand. (Akbari & Karimi Allvar, 2010). In this study, teaching style refers to the five teaching styles of Grasha's Teaching Style Model (Grasha, 1996, p. 154) namely the Expert Style, Formal Authority Style, Personal Model Style, Facilitator Style, and Delegator Style. The researcher wants to investigate the dominant teaching styles used by teachers in private language institutes in Iran based on Grasha's taxonomy and to examine whether there is any relationship between using the dominant style of teaching and variables of sex, age, and years of teaching experience.

To fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research questions were raised:

Q1: What is the dominant style of teaching in language institutes in Iran?

Q1: Is there any relationship between using the dominant Style of teaching and sex?

Q2: Is there any relationship between using the dominant Style of teaching and age?

Q3. Is there any relationship between using the dominant Style of teaching and years of teaching experience?

Method

Participants in the study consisted of twenty two EFL teachers; eight female and fourteen male, teaching at different private institutes in Tehran, and Karaj. Fifteen of the teachers held BM degrees in TEFL, four of them held MA degrees, and the rest three were currently working on their Ph.D., with the age range of 23 to 38. The participants teaching experience was from 2 to 14 years.

In order to fulfill the study the researcher used the following instruments:

Questionnaire; Grasha's Teaching Style Inventory (1996) was used as an instrument in this study. The instrument employs a seven-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (=1) to Strongly Agree (=7) (See Appendix). It includes 40 items. The instrument is a rigorously model for characterizing the range of teaching styles of different teachers (Razak et al., 2007). The reliability and validity of the items in the questionnaire was determined by Razak, Ahmad, and Mohd Shah (2007), and the Cronbach alpha coefficient was found to be 0.882. The questionnaire appears in full in the appendix.

Interview; Five of the teachers were interviewed with the expectation to understand how they use some techniques in their classrooms. The insights gained from the interview notes were used to interpret the findings of the study as a supplementary source of data. Two of the questions in the questionnaire which seemed to lend themselves to description were chosen to be included in the interviews.

The researcher contacted four institutes in Tehran and Karaj; in which New Interchange Series were taught as course material. The teachers were asked to fill in the study questionnaire in a week's time. The researcher requested permission to have interview with the participants. Five of them agreed to participate in the interview. All participants were informed to the purpose of the research.

In order to analyze the data the SPSS software was used. Data analysis includes descriptive statistics which are presented using frequencies and percentages. As shown in Table. 1, based on the mean score, it was found that teachers preferred to use Formal Authority Style (mean = 2.82, SD = 0.395), Expert Model Style (mean = 2.45, SD = 0.510) and Facilitator Style (mean = 2.23, SD = 0.429) as compared to the Personal Style (mean = 2.00, SD = 0.436) and Delegator Style (mean = 1.86, SD =0.560). Therefore, the dominant style was shown to be the Formal Authority Style.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------------|----|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| Expert Range | 22 | 2 | 3 | 2.45 | .510 |
| Formal Authority Range | 22 | 2 | 3 | 2.82 | .395 |
| Personal Model Range | 22 | 1 | 3 | 2.00 | .436 |
| Facilitator Range | 22 | 2 | 3 | 2.23 | .429 |
| Delegator Range | 22 | 1 | 3 | 1.86 | .560 |
| Valid N (list wise) | 22 | | | | |

Then the data were examined to see the possible relationship between Formal Authority Style of teaching, and three variables of sex, age, and years of experience.

Results & Discussion

Regarding the sex variable, as is seen in Table.2, 66.7% of male, and 33.3% of female participants were shown to lie in the Formal Authority High category and 50% of male and 50% of female participants were shown to be in the Formal Authority Moderate category.

Table. 2: Formal Authority Range * Sex Cross tabulation

| | | | Sex | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|
| | | | Female | male | Total |
| Formal Authority Range | Formal Authority-Moderate | Count | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| | | % within Formal Authority Range | 50.0% | 50.0% | 100.0% |
| | Formal Authority-High | Count | 6 | 12 | 18 |
| | | % within Formal Authority Range | 33.3% | 66.7% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | 8 | 14 | 22 |
| | | % within Formal Authority Range | 36.4% | 63.6% | 100.0% |

Regarding the age variable, as is seen in Table.3, 66.7% of the participants in the Formal Authority High category were in the age range of 23-30, and 33.3% were in the age range of 31-38. Within Formal Authority Moderate category 75% of the participants were in the age range of 23-30, and 25% were in the age range of 31-38.

Table. 3: Formal Authority * Age Cross tabulation

| | | | Age | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | | | 23-30 | 31-38 | Total |
| Formal Authority- | Formal Authority- | Count | 3 | 1 | 4 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------|-------|--------|
| Authority Range | Moderate | % within Formal Range | Authority | 75.0% | 25.0% | 100.0% |
| | Formal Authority-High | Count | | 12 | 6 | 18 |
| | | % within Formal Range | Authority | 66.7% | 33.3% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | | 15 | 7 | 22 |
| | | % within Formal Range | Authority | 68.2% | 31.8% | 100.0% |

Regarding the years of experience as is seen in Table. 4, 61.1% of the participants in the Formal Authority High category had 2-8 years of experience, and 38.9% of them had 9-14 years of experience. Within Formal Authority Moderate category 75% of the participants had 2-8 years of experience, and 25% had 9-14 years of experience.

Table. 4: Formal Authority Range * Experience Cross tabulation

| | | Expr | | Total | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|-------|--------|
| | | 2-8 Years | 9-14 Years | | |
| Formal Authority Range | Formal Authority-Moderate | Count | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| | | % within Formal Authority Range | 75.0% | 25.0% | 100.0% |
| | Formal Authority-High | Count | 11 | 7 | 18 |
| | | % within Formal Authority Range | 61.1% | 38.9% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | 14 | 8 | 22 |
| | | % within Formal Authority Range | 63.6% | 36.4% | 100.0% |

Analyzing the data obtained from interviews showed that almost half of the interviewees have used small group discussions in their classrooms because they thought that it would help students to have interaction with others and to learn from each other. Some of them believed that shy students should be encouraged to take part in discussions.

The other half does not use small group discussions in their classes. Some of them believed that using this activity may result in chaos in the classroom and others believed that it is a time consuming activity.

Regarding the use of negative feedback there were different views. Most of the participants agree with using negative feedback in the classroom when the students' performance is unsatisfactory. But some of them believed that it should be used in an indirect way. Two of the interviewees believed that teachers should never use negative feedback in their classrooms because it will be discouraging and the students will lose their self confidence.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrated that participants of the study preferred to use Formal Authority Style, Expert Model Style, Facilitator Style, Personal Style, and Delegator Style respectively.

Using the results of the data analysis the null hypotheses were rejected by the researcher and it was shown that there is a relationship between using the dominant style of teaching (Formal Authority style of teaching) and three variables of sex, age, and years of teaching experience.

More male than female participants, were shown to use the Formal Authority style. Younger teachers were found to have more interest to use Formal Authority style. Furthermore low experienced teachers used the Formal Authority more than high experienced ones. Maybe this is because young and low experienced teachers want to have more control over students and want to prevent chaos in the classroom.

The aim of this study was to examine the dominant teaching style of a group of English teachers taught at private institutes in Iran and to see whether there is any relationship between the dominant style of teaching and three variables of sex, age, and years of experience. The researcher conducted the study on twenty two EFL teachers; both male and female, teaching at private institutes in Tehran, and Karaj. All of them were degree holders of TEFL, with age range of 23 to 38. The participants teaching experience was 2 to 14 years. They were asked to fill in the Grasha's teaching style questionnaire in a week's time. Some of the participants have also been interviewed by the researcher.

The results showed that all of the five teaching styles in Grasha's Model (1996) were present in the at language institutes with different percentages of use. The findings drew attention to dimensions of teaching styles' diversity that might be present in

language institutes. In this study, the three dominant teaching styles were found to be Formal Authority, Expert Model and Facilitator Styles. The most dominant teaching style used by the teachers in this study was Formal Authority Style while the least dominant teaching style was Delegator Style.

The null hypothesis was rejected and it was shown that there is a relationship between Formal Authority teaching style and three variables of sex, age, and years of experience. Formal Authority style was shown to be used mostly by male, younger, and low experienced teachers.

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