

## Promoting Education Quality through Learning & Teaching Styles

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### ABSTRACT

Teaching style is one of the most effective factors for individual learning. In the field of education and pedagogy many of the researchers and experts have been always expressed learning and teaching styles besides together. Considering different viewpoints about education, teaching always shades the learning, thus the nature of the relationship plays an important role in promoting quality learning environments.

The main purpose of this paper was to investigate the relationship between learning styles of students and teaching styles of professors in Islamic Azad University of Semnan. The research method is descriptive - correlation. The population consisted of all undergraduate students of the Engineering, Humanities and Nursing Faculties. The questionnaires of Honey and Mumford learning styles and Grasha teaching style had been applied in order to study the learning styles of students and also teaching styles of professors. Results showed that there is no suitable correlation between learning and teaching styles. It can affect the learning environments and efficiency of the students undesirably. Additionally it can be expressed that professors do not use the correct teaching styles and the opportunity to provide feedback and enhanced learning for students is not available. Finally, some suggestions have been presented to improve the quality of education at the University.

**KEY WORDS:** learning styles, learning methods, education quality, teaching styles, educational administration

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### INTRODUCTION

Due to the perspective of great thinkers like Confucius, learning is the beating heart of all human activities. He notes that the human mind is a blank slate at birth that the environment and experience have a great influence on shaping it (Huang, 1997). Therefore the environment which contains education as a component, play important role in the lives of individuals. Teaching method is one of the most impressive factors on the individual learning. Many of the speakers and experts of the education field always had been mentioned learning and teaching methods besides together. Considering the different perspectives about the education plays an important role to improve the quality of learning environments. According to the Socrates perspective if an individual achieves academic independence then effective teaching occurs. In another word, learning environment should create a research perspective so that people can change their environment and reach the thought independence. Thus professor should leave being the eloquence and allow people to ask questions (Rowe, 2001). It is necessary to change the people world perspective to reach the development way in order to promote the teaching environments.

Socrates mentions nurturing the research spirit and strengthen the reasoning in the learning environment. If we assume that students are only consumer in the educational system and they aren't able to produce knowledge then it is a major threat for education environment as it causes the downturn for widespread. Plato also has expressed the learning environment as a platform for individuals to achieve the desired state of society (Cooper, 2001). Actually Plato notes the pedagogical aspects of teaching more than others. If the knowledge is not used wisely then it leads to destruction and corruption. Confucius knows the teaching as a tool to educate people (Shen, 2001).

In this regard, Freire (1970) distinguishes two different types of training. He mentions two models named "teaching banking model" and "the problem solving method" which describe the nature of the relationship between professor and student. At the first type of training, learner is assumed as a bank account which should be filled with abundant information of the professor however learner isn't allowed to apply his/her own bank account that is actually the "Repository of information". The banking model of education, learner plays a passive role and there is a unidirectional flow of information from professor to student in the classes. At this educational system, learner isn't allowed to ask question about accuracy and inaccuracy of

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information and should blindly accept everything. Professor is exactly single speaker and there is no dialogue. On the other hand, in the problem resolving model student is allowed to participate in the class discussions and the unidirectional becomes a bidirectional and interactional educational relationship. In this way, individual achieve the feel of being and concludes that he/she shouldn't be only acceptor against the environment. According to Freire, the only way to improve the education system is the "problem-solving model". The problem resolving model empowers the creativity of individual. Individual, who leaves this education system, is able to change the fact and surrounding world. It is obvious that teaching method affect the quality of training organizations basically.

It is possible to conclude that teaching always shade the learning and certainly the nature of this relationship play a crucial role to promote the quality of learning environments. Additionally it is possible to express that learning environments are influenced by many factors that can play a constructive or deterrent role in learning. Undoubtedly we cannot consider a unidirectional method to advance the education system but it is necessary to apply various theories for different situations. Therefore, there is no magical way to increase the quality of the educational environment; however it is possible to identify the indicators of helpful health and education system through various studies and apply them as guidelines to achieve the desired quality of teaching. Some of the factors that lead to improve the learning and are confirmed by Kumaravadivelu (1994) include:

- Provide learning opportunities
- Create interactive space for exchange students
- Involve the students in the learning process
- Strengthen the heuristic method in which individual tends toward thinking
- Integration of skills together
- Motivate and increase the autonomy of learning in students
- Create public awareness and understanding of science

It should also be noted that the viewpoints of teaching have great influence on the nature of learning. The techniques of "NLP" methods help professors to have better relationships with the training organization. In this method, it is assumed that each individual has a particular feature. Professors should identify the dominant feature and enter the learner mind and guide him/her (Millrood, 2004).

Therefore people have different ideas about reality and it is necessary to professors be familiar with these differences. Professors should help students to put their new skin down and to reach new insights. Coordination between professor and student leads to more motivation, more sensitivity to knowledge, self-esteem of students, increasing positive role of learner in the classroom and reduces the tension (Thornbury, 2001). Teaching is not only expertise but also is an art. Sometimes the professor has great expertise but cannot convey information clearly and learning occurs slowly. Undoubtedly confrontation of teaching and sciences such as psychology and sociology causes many challenges for organizational learning.

### ***Theoretical Framework of Teaching***

Looking at the theories of teaching is necessary to understand basic skills of teaching. It is worth noting that good teaching methods aren't necessarily the fixed ones because the theory of sociology believes that every person has different needs and individuals imagine their surrounded world considering the environment in which they were grown. Undoubtedly the teaching method in the area with "cultural capital" and "social capital" will be different from the method of teaching in disadvantaged area (Bourdieu, 1986). Regardless of whether teaching methods have been adopted, "education ecology" should be considered to improve the learning (Williams & Burden, 1997). Zahorik (1986) divided theories of teaching into three main parts:

#### ***The scientific - research concept***

"An empirical investigation" plays an important role in the scientific research concept of teaching, as Zahorik (1986) states that "the exploitation of the teaching principles", "following the validated and tested teaching method" and "compliance and experienced professors" are examples of the scientific research concept. Utilization of the teaching principles means that desirable characteristics may be discovered and followed through research on mind, motivation, and other factors of learning. In the valid teaching model good teaching model has been determined through logic and previous researches however the model can achieve the reliability if it can provide useful and productive changes for student. One of the other methods for finding the effective teaching is identifying the applied strategies by experienced, skilled and capable experts and provides them in the teaching frame of other professors. Blum (1984) in a study of successful teaching methods, teaching feature twelve (effective in these states):

- Conducting the teaching through pre-designed training program.

- Expectations for student high learning.
- Learner should be fascinated carefully to teaching.
- Teaching should be clear and purposeful.
- The learning process should be evaluated carefully.
- If learner didn't be noticed, teaching should be repeated.
- Class time should be spent for learning.
- In each session, a specific activity that is effective should be repeated.
- Educational groups which are formed in the classroom should be established on the basis of educational requirements.
- Behavior standards should be high in classroom.
- Personal relationship between professor and learner should be positive.
- Incentives and rewards should be used for learners.

By applying these principles, less experienced professors can teach in a better way. It must be acknowledged that

Blum educational standards have been listed only as some successful principles of teaching and it does not mean that they are only components of effective teaching but also needs of learners is spread gradually and professors should always use their creative mind to improve the teaching process.

#### *Theoretical-philosophical concept*

The group is divided into two subsets:

1. Theory based methods
2. Value based method.

The theory based methods are the basis of many teaching techniques (Richards, 2002). In this theory, teaching methods will be assessed through logic and reasoning. The important point of this method isn't experimental study, but it's valuing the nature of objectively thoughts. Value based method determines the teaching model through the definition of people about professor, student, classroom and the role of education in society (Richards, 2002). So, the effective teaching method is coordinated with the society.

#### *Professional artistic concept*

Teaching method is defined as personal skills and professor character (Zahorik, 1986). The most important point in this method is the personal skills of professor which they use on certain conditions. Therefore, there is no universal method of teaching, but the professors coordinate their teaching methods based on the knowledge which they acquired from the environment. The decision-making power and authority of the professor is very important in this method obviously. Previous theories considered professors as the consumer of others but they are theorists in this method who have diversity and creativity by being aware of the needs and tools of their teaching methods.

The research questions

1. How is the using order for different teaching methods by professors?
2. Is there any significant difference between the methods of teaching?
3. How is the order of using the learning styles between the students?
4. Is there any significant difference between the using of learning styles?
5. How is the relationship between students' learning styles and teaching methods?

## **MATERIALS & METHODS**

### ***Methodology***

#### *Samples*

The main aim of this study is to determine the relationship between students' learning styles and teaching methods of professors from Islamic Azad University of Semnan through frequency analysis method. Testing people were selected from different branches of three faculties for better generalization. For this purpose, 102 students and 84 professors were chosen among the students of engineering, humanities, nursing disciplines randomly. Undergraduate students participated in the study.

#### *Research Instruments*

Questionnaire of Mumford and Honey Learning Styles (Honey & Mumford, 2006)

This questionnaire has been prepared in order to study the students' learning styles. During the academic period, different learning styles were developed by students that can help them reach their goals. Many of the

learners are not aware of their learning styles therefore this questionnaire can be effective in identifying and changing the style of learning. The duration of answer to all the questions in the questionnaire was usually 10 to 15 minutes. Students should choose "agree" or "disagree" items based on their tendency for each learning style. The questionnaire of Honey and Mumford learning styles consists of 80 items, which measures four different learning styles. The styles include "activist", "reflector", "theorist" and "pragmatist" (Figure 1).

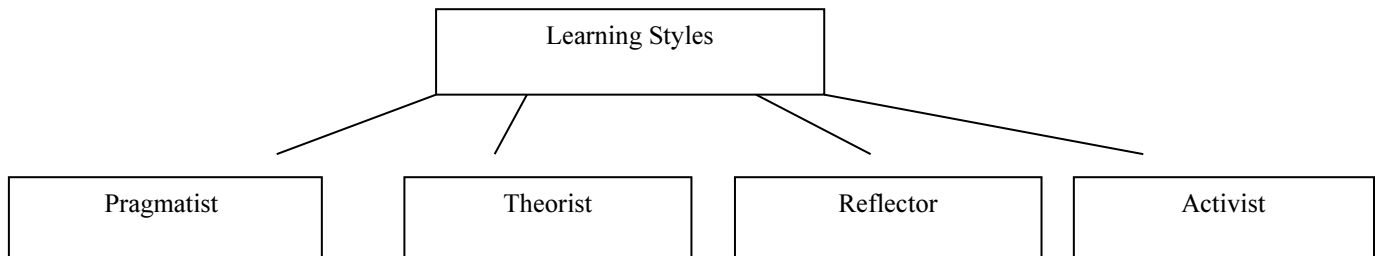


Figure 1. Honey and Mumford Learning Styles (2006)

"Activists" participate in new experiences fully and without any bias. Therefore, the activists have an acceptor mind and the experiences of new activities are the motivation factor for them. Their motto is: "anything is worth a try". Challenging the mind is only important point and implementation of challenges are dull for them. "Reflectors" examine the ideas and experiences through different perspectives to discover the hidden corners. Gathering the evidences and information are necessary to achieve these results. For these people, the conclusion is the last stage of thinking, and is only obtained after reviewing the collection of data and checking the result. The slogan of reflectors is being cautious. Therefore they have no desire to express themselves in discussions and team works however they only state the views after listening to the views of other people. "Theorists" place their evidences and observations in the form of different theories, while they use reasonable methods to overcome the problems of this group. The important point is "analysis" and "composition". Logic and reason are the mottos of these people. Then mentality, vagueness and judgment due to their desire aren't accepted by theorists. "Pragmatists" tend to perform the theories and the applicability of them is the basis of theories. This group of people is looking for new ideas to implement them.

*The questionnaire of Grasha teaching style (Grasha, 1996)*

The questionnaire of Grasha teaching method includes 40 questions that professors should choose "totally disagree", "disagree", "no idea", "agree" and "strongly agree" items in each question based on their own teaching method. Grasha questionnaire measures 5 types of teaching methods. The teaching styles are the "expert", "formal authority", "personal model", "facilitator" and "delegator" (Figure 2).

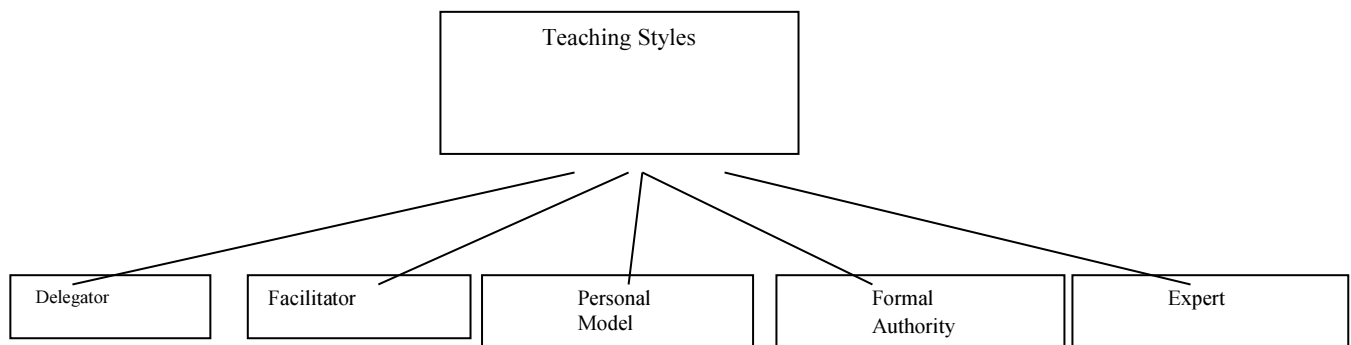


Figure 2. Grasha teaching style (1996)

In teaching style called "Expert" required knowledge and expertise for students are important for professors. These professors try to be known as an expert among learners. Therefore a detailed description of acknowledge is very important for these professors. Knowledge transfer is unilateral and is actually from professor to student. As a result, the learner play passive role in the class while there is no consultation like space in the class.

The "Formal authority" group considers the professors especially because of the position and the experiences of them who are the transfers of knowledge or the faculty member. Professor plays different roles in the classroom including demonstrating positive and negative feedback, determining the overall learning objectives and encouraging for using appropriate styles and standards. "Personal model" which is another style of teaching is actually based on Grasha questionnaire. In this style, observation and imitation are the elements of learning. In other words, learner should observe and imitate the behavior of professor. Indeed the professor is the behavioral and inclusive patterns for students.

The "facilitator" style emphasize on the relationship between student and professor. In this style which had been mentioned by some scholars and researchers of history such as "Gazelle", questions asking, exploring different options and encouraging students to achieve independence and accountability are important factors for the relation between professor and students. In this group, the professor creates a consultation like space in the class for the students. Finally "delegator" style which makes professor as only the source of science and students are responsible of their own learning as single or team projects. In other words, students are professors of each other and contribute to each other.

## DISCUSSION

After reviewing the learning styles of the students, the conclusion showed that most of them are "reflectors". Chi-square analysis showed significant difference between the frequencies (sig. = / 000  $\chi^2$  = 48/850).

Surveying the teaching styles also showed that most professors tend to "formal authority" and "expert", which is opposite of the dominant learning style of learners. The professors who have a high level of expert and formal authority, they don't allow students to participate in class discussions that are not compatible with the nature of "reflector".

Chi-square analyzes showed significant differences between the frequencies among the professors. ( $\chi^2$  = 34/075; sig. = / 000).

"Assessment" is also an integral and essential structure of teaching. Inappropriate assessment which is only based on the scores of the written test and not the learning and scientific understanding is a serious injury which had been mentioned by learners. "Oral assessment" in the education period leads to professor shows the immediate feedback to the students however oral assessment has important effects on the students emotionally and cognitively. Actually the education system should move toward the "formative assessment". Dr. Flouden who is the outstanding professor of Michigan State University, has mentioned the formative assessment as a promising approach in the modern educational system (Blum, 1984). Blake and William (1998) expressed the most important features of developmental as coordinating the overall educational goals, showing immediate feedback and the ability to make changes in teaching styles. Johnson (1996) stated that learning has the most reflect when is associated with feedback from the professor and offered the following relationship:

Conventional learning (learning  $\rightarrow$  assessment) Effective learning (learning  $\rightarrow$  assessment  $\rightarrow$  learning)

According to Johnson's model, assessment of the educational system should be reformed. Since the conventional assessment of learning is current where "assessment" or the final written exam is the last phase of training, then the weaknesses of the students will not remove because there is no feedback after exam. In the effective learning of Johnson's model "learning" happens again after the extracting of knowledge from students by question. Therefore, learning is related to the assessment. In other words, the assessment should also a tool for learning.

After reviewing the teaching injuries that were obtained from the views of learners and professors, let find the helpful criterions of teaching due to their viewpoints. Students and professors of Islamic Azad University of Semnan mentioned the "management", "education quality", "learning outcomes", "expert", "character" and "educational policies" as the main criteria of the most effective teaching.

Students identified the "management" as the most important feature of effective teaching. Appropriate teaching styles and skills cannot remove the needs of the individuals lonely. The injured students have no motivation for doing research, they don't participate in discussions and they also loss their thinking power. Additionally in the educational policy section the lack of overall planning, reception students more than the capacity and lack of control over academic performance and professor. Management means considering the cognitive and emotional aspects of students, dividing the learning responsibility, providing a relax space in the class, participating the students in the teaching process, considering the capabilities of students and their efforts during the education. The professors also think that effective communication with students, giving them character and good communication within and outside the organization are important factors that influence teaching.

The "education quality" is another criterion for effective teaching. Students think regular teaching methods, knowledge about modern science related the disciplines, integrating theory and practice, understanding the lessons, absorbing to the teaching process and finally asking and answering the questions are important in the classroom. Although professors think the most important factors that help to improve the quality of education are students' understanding about the educational planning, regulated teaching planning and observing the outlines of lessons. However in the subset of "educational performance" the factors of encouraging students to think and research, training the researcher students, and increasing the insights of students take place. Professors stated the increasing the insights of students after the education duration and training the creative and researcher spirit in them. Due to the students "expert" involves thinking over of professors and having updated science sources while professors state that having high level scientific and general knowledge means the expert for them; however "The character and behavior" of professors is also an important factor. Professors actually know the academic behavior and grand personality as the features of professors during the teaching. For example some professors may avoid the discussions that are opposite of their own viewpoints, then it affects the effectiveness of teaching process. For students having student-friendly manner and respect to the character are the most important criteria of professors.

In the "educational policy" students mentioned the factors of improving the teaching process including observing the learning goals in all aspects, being independence passing the educational term from training programs and availability of required tools for the field.

Professors also stated some factors such as the coordination of teaching style with the society requirements, definition of valuable criteria and supporting of students by government to induce the quality of knowledge in the training organizations.

## Conclusion

In this paper, the status of teaching were considered in universities (Case Study: Islamic Azad University of Semnan) in order to open a window for increasing the quality of the educational environments in Iran. As a result most of the reviewed students were interested in the "reflector style". Also professors demonstrated tendency to the formal authority style which is the opposite of learners' viewpoints. Professors, who tend to have formal authority style, usually don't like participation of students in class discussions. As a result, the students are passive in the class and there is no desirable consulting setting in the class. Therefore, there isn't proper coordination between learning styles of students and teaching style of professors that is a disadvantage while it can affect the educational environments and the effectiveness of student learning. It is hoped that educational administrators will find a solution to make students and professors coordinated and also the aim of education become more than "document orientation". Additionally teaching should involve the development of capability, culture, behavior and emotions of the individuals in the future prospect.

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