

Iranian EFL Instructors' Opinions Regarding the Effective Foreign Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers about effective teaching. It analyzed descriptive statistics to examine what teachers felt about characteristics of an effective foreign language teacher and what s/he should be aware of and perform in the language classroom. A likert-scale questionnaire was applied as research instrument of this study. The current research mainly aimed at exploring and comparing the perceptions of university teachers about effective teaching behaviors. Some pedagogical implications have been presented at the end of the study that can help language teachers to enhance the quality of their performance.

KEYWORDS: foreign language (FL), effective learning, language teaching methodologies

1. INTRODUCTION

In adult foreign language (FL) education field, administrators, teachers, and students are still confused about the exact characteristics of effective teaching. Rosenshine & Furst (1971) reviewed the literature on teaching performances and behaviors and resulted that there is very little knowledge about the exact relationship between how teachers behave in the classroom and what students gain. In a similar study, Travers (1981) maintained that there is not a certain set of teacher competencies to help predict the students' gain. In spite of this lack of knowledge in language teaching/learning context, it is identified that some certain general principles of the effective education and some complementary social variables are identified to have impact on all learning and teaching types (Rosenshine & Furst, 1971; Murray, 1991; Travers, 1981; Dunkin & Biddle, 1974). In a study conducted to explore the relationship between behaviors of teachers and outcomes of students, Rosenshine & Furst (1971) introduced eleven variables in effective teaching that could result in effectively learning of students. They are as follow:

1. Enthusiasm;
2. Clarity
3. Variability;
4. Student Opportunity to Learn Criterion Material;
5. Task-Oriented and/or Business-like Behaviors;
6. Use of Student Ideas and General Indirectness;
7. Criticism;
8. Use of Structuring Comments;
9. Probing;
10. Level of Difficulty of Instruction;
11. Types of Questions.

Travers (1981) stated that teachers' behaviors and performances in the classroom is only one variable in students' learning and outcome, and there are some social variables to be considered in assessment of the students' learning; variables such as home environment and participation of family members in the learning process of their children, and the extent to which parents support students and encourage them to learn more effectively. In addition, there are other variables like availability of learning materials and learners' genetic endowment that is far from the control of teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students & teachers perceptions:

Richardson (1996) stated that the early 1950's and early 1970's witnessed many studies on teachers' attitudes, and recently, this issue again became a key to understanding the motivation factors of teachers' performances. She also introduced the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes as mental constructs that describe and define the content and structure of mental conditions that are considered to

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drive an individual's actions. Additionally, she mentioned the definition of the term 'beliefs' in the literature of philosophers, social psychologists, and anthropologists that consider it as psychological propositions and other knowledge about the world around that people feel to be true.

Williams and Burden (1997) emphasized on a close relationship between performance and beliefs in the case of both learners and teachers. From the viewpoint of social constructivism, they stated that teachers' performance is clearly influenced by their beliefs, and the belief about what the education is as a whole is the matter teachers bring to the context of teaching and learning, and, explicitly or implicitly, this issue affects their performances and actions in the classroom in relation with the learners and learning materials. According to their findings, they maintained that to be more effective, teachers essentially should identify their beliefs about education.

Richardson (1996) introduces three different kinds of experiences that are thought to be influential in case of relationship between teachers' beliefs and their teaching process: (A) personal experience that refers to the individuals' moral tendencies, personal values, their view of the world, familial background, and cultural values; (B) schooling and instruction experience that refers back to teachers experience of the time they were student; and (C) formal knowledge experience that refers to understandings thought to be valid due to their source that are scholars of the respective field. Among these three experiences, the first two ones are very deep and, consequently, cannot be easily changed or modified.

Objective & Significance of the study:

1. To identify foreign language teachers' ideas of effective foreign language teaching in an EFL context of Iran.

Regarding the significance of the study, it can be stated that the results of this study would be useful for three groups and they can benefit from the results:

1. Foreign language material writers to include the finding of the study in their materials.
2. Instructors to express ideas about effective foreign language teaching.
3. Finally, English language teaching administrators to consider findings of this study in their future work.

Research Questions:

1. What teaching behaviors do instructors consider to be representative of effective foreign language teachers?
2. What are the modern language techniques which teachers can benefit in the foreign language context classes?

METHOD

The study supported by the quantitative data which has been collected by the questionnaires in order to investigate teacher's perception regarding effective foreign language teaching.

Participants:

The participants of the study consisted of 30 foreign language teachers from Islamic Azad University (IAU) of Tehran; they will be selected based on availability sampling procedure. Their age range was 28 to 55 years old. Their teaching experience was from 2 to 24 years. 11 male and 19 females have been participated in the current study and all of them were general English course instructors.

Instrument:

Effective teacher questionnaire

The first draft of the questionnaire has been extracted from Reber's study (2001), which has been adopted and piloted for this study; the original version had 80 item questions while the final version which seemed appropriate for the purpose of the current study has 24 items. The format of the questionnaire was likert scale comprising of different language teaching techniques extracted from different language teaching approaches. At the first section of the questionnaire some personal information of the teachers has been asked and all the questionnaires were anonymous.

DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Questionnaire of the current study consisted of 19 items in which researcher investigated teacher's attitudes regarding different techniques of language teaching namely: 1.using computer devices, 2.group works, 3.teaching culture, 4.necessity of using English outside of the classroom for the students, 5.error correction in speaking, 6.allowing students to respond different tests in English, 7.not using English in EFL classes, 8.writing error correction indirectly instead of directly, 9.knowing

student's culture, 10. not grading writing and speaking based on accuracy, 11. Using authentic tasks, 12. Student's responses to the questions by body language, 13. error correction immediately, 14. necessity of using English at class, 15. not using pair work to complete the tasks, 16. teaching grammar implicitly, 17. asking students to speak English when they are ready, 18. not teaching grammar by using authentic tasks, 19. teaching English by a native-like accent.

Respondents answered Likert-scale type questionnaire based on 4 options namely strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Researchers analyzed the data by SPSS software using descriptive statistics & frequency for each item which can show teachers' perceptions regarding each technique which has been elaborated more in the following sections.

Teacher's attitudes regarding using computer devices in the classroom

Using computer					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	14	43.8	46.7	46.7
	Agree	11	34.4	36.7	83.3
	Disagree	2	6.3	6.7	90.0
	Strongly Disagree	3	9.4	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 1. Teacher's attitudes regarding using computer devices in the classroom

As it is clear from table 1, most of the teachers chose strongly agree and agree options which show the importance of computer teaching in EFL classes from teacher's point of view.

Teacher's attitudes regarding group work

Group works					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	15	46.9	50.0	50.0
	agree	8	25.0	26.7	76.7
	disagree	5	15.6	16.7	93.3
	strongly disagree	2	6.3	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 2. Teacher's attitudes regarding group work

As it seems clear from the table most of the teacher chose strongly agree and agree options, which shows the importance of the group work activities during the course instruction.

Teacher's attitudes regarding teaching culture

teaching culture					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	6	18.8	20.0	20.0
	agree	6	18.8	20.0	40.0
	disagree	7	21.9	23.3	63.3
	strongly disagree	11	34.4	36.7	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 3. Teacher's attitudes regarding teaching culture

As it seems clear from the above table most of the teachers opted disagree & strongly disagree options which show that teaching different Iranian cultures to the students was not much important from the instructor's point of view.

Teacher's attitudes regarding the necessity of using English outside of the classroom

		English outside the class			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	2	6.3	6.7	6.7
	agree	4	12.5	13.3	20.0
	disagree	5	15.6	16.7	36.7
	strongly disagree	19	59.4	63.3	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 4. Teacher's attitudes regarding the necessity of using English outside of the classroom

As it seems clear from the above picture most of the instructors opted strongly disagree and disagree options for using English outside of the classroom which shows that using English outside of the classroom was not that much important from the instructor's point of view.

Teacher's attitudes regarding the error correction in speaking

		error correction in speaking			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	2	6.3	6.7	6.7
	agree	4	12.5	13.3	20.0
	disagree	12	37.5	40.0	60.0
	strongly disagree	12	37.5	40.0	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 5. Teacher's attitudes regarding the error correction in speaking

As it seems clear from the above table most of the instructors opted strongly disagree & disagree options which shows that correction of the student's errors was not much important from the instructors point of view.

Teacher's attitudes regarding responding to different tests in English

		Responding to different tests in English			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	19	59.4	63.3	63.3
	agree	7	21.9	23.3	86.7
	disagree	2	6.3	6.7	93.3
	strongly disagree	2	6.3	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 6. Teacher's attitudes regarding responding to different tests in English

As it seems clear from the above table most of the instructors opted strongly agree and agree options which shows the importance of using English for the students as they have English tests from the instructor's point of view.

Teacher's attitudes regarding responding not to use English in EFL classes

		Avoiding English during the class sessions			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	4	12.5	13.3	13.3
	agree	6	18.8	20.0	33.3
	disagree	10	31.3	33.3	66.7
	strongly disagree	10	31.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 7. Teacher's attitudes regarding responding not to use English in EFL classes

As it seems clear from the above table most of the instructors opted disagree & strongly disagree options which show that they are eager to push their students to speak during the class.

Teacher's attitudes regarding error correction in writing indirectly vs. directly

		writing errors			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	2	6.3	6.7	6.7
	agree	3	9.4	10.0	16.7
	disagree	10	31.3	33.3	50.0
	strongly disagree	15	46.9	50.0	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table8. Teacher's attitudes regarding error correction in writing indirectly vs. directly

As it seems clear from the above table most of the instructors opted disagree and strongly disagree options which shows that they prefer to detect their students errors and mistakes in writing directly in order to avoid fossilization in their minds.

Teacher's attitudes regarding knowing student's cultures

		knowing culture			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	14	43.8	46.7	46.7
	agree	8	25.0	26.7	73.3
	disagree	4	12.5	13.3	86.7
	strongly disagree	4	12.5	13.3	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 9. Teacher's attitudes regarding knowing student's cultures

As it seems clear from the above table most of the students opted strongly agree & agree options which shows that knowing the culture of the students is very important from teacher's point of view.

Teacher's attitudes regarding of not grading writing & speaking based on accuracy

		Accuracy grading			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	13	40.6	43.3	43.3
	agree	10	31.3	33.3	76.7
	disagree	5	15.6	16.7	93.3
	strongly disagree	2	6.3	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 10. Teacher's attitudes regarding of not grading writing & speaking based on accuracy

As it seems clear from the above table most of the teachers opted strongly agree and agree options which shows that accuracy in writing & speaking is much more important for the teachers than fluency.

Teacher's attitudes regarding using authentic tasks

		Authentic tasks			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	13	40.6	43.3	43.3
	agree	8	25.0	26.7	70.0
	disagree	4	12.5	13.3	83.3
	strongly disagree	5	15.6	16.7	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 11. Teacher's attitudes regarding using authentic tasks

As it seems very clear from the above table most of the instructors opted strongly agree & agree options which shows that using real life & authentic tasks is very important from the instructor's point of view.

Teacher's attitudes regarding student's response to the questions by body language

		Body language			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	13	40.6	43.3	43.3
	agree	9	28.1	30.0	73.3
	disagree	5	15.6	16.7	90.0
	strongly disagree	3	9.4	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 12. Teacher's attitudes regarding student's response to the questions by body language

As it seems very clear from the above table most of the instructors opted strongly agree & agree options which shows that teachers are eager in their classes to push the students using body language.

Teacher's attitudes regarding the immediate error correction by teacher

		immediate correction			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	1	3.1	3.3	3.3
	agree	6	18.8	20.0	23.3
	disagree	8	25.0	26.7	50.0
	strongly disagree	15	46.9	50.0	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 13. Teacher's attitudes regarding the immediate error correction by teacher

As it seems very clear from the above table most of the instructors opted strongly disagree & disagree options which shows that they are not eager to detect their students errors & mistakes which reduces their self-confidence a lot.

Teacher's attitudes regarding the necessity of using English at class

		English usage in class			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	14	43.8	46.7	46.7
	agree	10	31.3	33.3	80.0
	disagree	3	9.4	10.0	90.0
	strongly disagree	3	9.4	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table 14. Teacher's attitudes regarding the necessity of using English at class

As it seems very clear from the above table most of the instructors opted strongly agree & agree options which shows the importance of using English in the class from the instructor's point of views.

Teacher's attitudes regarding not use pair work in English classes

		Not to use pair work			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	2	6.3	6.7	6.7
	agree	3	9.4	10.0	16.7
	disagree	9	28.1	30.0	46.7
	strongly disagree	16	50.0	53.3	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table15. Teacher's attitudes regarding not use pair work in English classes

As it seems very clear from the above table most of the instructors opted strongly disagree and disagree options which emphasizes the importance of pair work from the instructor's point of view.

Teacher's attitudes regarding teaching grammar implicitly

		Implicit grammar			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	10	31.3	33.3	33.3
	agree	11	34.4	36.7	70.0
	disagree	5	15.6	16.7	86.7
	strongly disagree	4	12.5	13.3	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table16. Teacher's attitudes regarding teaching grammar implicitly

As it seems very clear from the above table most of the instructors opted strongly agree & agree options which shows that they are eager to teach grammar in an implicit way rather than an explicit way.

Teacher's attitudes regarding asking students to speak English as they are ready to do

		speak English			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	12	37.5	40.0	40.0
	agree	7	21.9	23.3	63.3
	disagree	7	21.9	23.3	86.7
	strongly disagree	4	12.5	13.3	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table17. Teacher's attitudes regarding asking students to speak English as they are ready to do

As it seems very clear from the above table most of the instructors opted strongly agree & agree options which shows the importance of English speaking from the instructor's point of view.

Teacher's attitudes regarding of not teaching English by using authentic tasks

		Grammar by task			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	16	50.0	53.3	53.3
	agree	8	25.0	26.7	80.0
	disagree	3	9.4	10.0	90.0
	strongly disagree	3	9.4	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table18. Teacher's attitudes regarding of not teaching English by using authentic tasks

As it seems very clear from the above table most of the instructors opted strongly agree & agree options which shows that in their idea it is not essential to have authentic tasks during the course instruction.

Teacher's attitudes regarding teaching English by a native like accent

		accent			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	6	18.8	20.0	20.0
	agree	9	28.1	30.0	50.0
	disagree	9	28.1	30.0	80.0
	strongly disagree	6	18.8	20.0	100.0
	Total	30	93.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	6.3		
Total		32	100.0		

Table19. Teacher's attitudes regarding teaching English by a native like accent

As it seems very clear from the above table ideas of different instructors are different with each other in this case some of them are agree and some of them are disagree about using native like accent during class instruction.

Conclusion & pedagogical implications

As it seems very clear from the presented data and above discussions most of the Iranian general English teachers agree with different modern techniques of language teaching derived from two modern and effective language teaching approaches namely Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approaches. Results of the study approved the effectiveness of CLT & TBLT approaches in the era of language teaching and language learning. Hopefully number of people can benefit from the results of the current study, first teachers who expressed their ideas regarding the effective techniques of language teaching, second material writers & curriculum developers of university general English courses to bebenefit from the results of this study and last but not least executive administrators in the ministry of higher education of Iran to consider the results of the current study in their educational programs.

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