Pride and Prejudice

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify how accommodating the teacher behavior toward congruency and in congruency in the EFL (English as Foreign Language) classroom at university level. The major approach in this study was qualitative. The data were collected through observation and interviews. The participants were 4 lecturers from a university in Iran. The findings indicated that knowledge on learners’ learning styles preferences would optimize the learning procedures both for learners and their teacher.

1. Introduction

This paper is the 2nd part of the study titled “Have you heard about the new fashion? (Tailoring your lesson plan based on learners preferences)”. In the first part the learning and teaching styles of the learners and teachers were investigated, it also look at the impact of the congruence and incongruence between students’ learning styles and teachers’ teaching styles in the EMSs classroom setting on their achievements and in the second part the teaching styles accommodation based on learners differences is presented. This paper aimed to answer the questions about the accommodations of EMSs lecturers toward students’ learning styles in a university classroom setting in Iran, the data obtained from observation and interview were analyzed to investigate how the lecturers address and accommodate the student’s learning needs in the university classroom in Iran. After obtaining the findings, one can claim that in order to accommodate the learning style preferences of EMS learners, lecturers would need to use more than the traditional lecture method. The traditional lecture method is considered as the style in which instructors continuously speak on a given topic and stand in front of the students without interacting with them; therefore, it would cater to the verbal learners only. The instructors should add the written notes to what they are saying so that both the visual and verbal may have their learning styles attended to. In the case of foreign language faculties, however, it was observed that often the typical lecturer using the traditional method was unable to deliver a

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comprehensible lesson to visual and verbal learners. Through classroom observation, questionnaires and interview, the researcher noticed that both senior and new lecturers used to read and transfer whatever they have learned to the blackboard. These two styles are the most common styles used in the classrooms observed. Only one of the senior lecturers was an exception. She used a combination of all methods to cope with the variety of student learning styles in the class without her knowledge on her class learning styles preferences diversity. Classes that were conducted in this way were reduced even more in the quality of delivery by the fact that reading was unclear, of monotonous pitch, not all the students were able to hear and in cases like this the use of blackboard was not considered a practical solution even for those sitting in front rows. Teachers seldom questioned the students, and when they did, the duration of the time waiting for their responses was insufficient; in this situation, there is no chance for the learners to practice critical thinking or synthesizing of the information. It is believed that teaching based on learning style preferences is an impossible task due to the styles diversity in classroom. Researchers observed that some of the young lecturers successfully tailored their teaching styles in order to cover most of their learners’ learning styles preferences. It is hoped that teachers all over the world will benefit from this experience of sharing success and failure, triumphs and pitfalls; however, this may become the starting point for the teachers to think twice about teaching to students’ learning styles and improving the quality of EFL educational content in Iran. This study aimed in part, to help the lecturers at a foreign language faculty become more aware of learning style importance in the EFL context, especially in the classroom setting.

2. Objective

Based on the results obtained in the first part of the study, this research aimed to investigate the accommodations of EMSs lecturers toward students’ learning styles in a university classroom setting in Iran. This study aimed in part, to help the lecturers at a foreign language faculty become more aware of learning style importance in the EFL context, especially in the classroom setting.

3. Methodology

Samples those who participated in the first part of this study, 4 lecturers were the main participants of the current study. In the first round of research the researcher used the survey to obtain the variety of the students’ learning styles and their teachers’ teaching styles. In the second round, the researcher used interview and observation to provide the necessary information for the related research questions and also to strengthen the results obtained in the first round of data collection.

4. Findings

The lecturers were questioned on three areas of their teaching, following is the summary of the data obtained, due to the huge data obtained, researchers pick the relevant one and arranged, classified and briefed them into tables.

Table 1. Observation and Interview on Teaching Styles (Case Study 1)

| Background of learning styles: |
|-------------------------------|
| - She was introduced to learning styles through her bachelor program |
| - Shows interest in tailoring her teaching based on her students’ needs in her class (she was taught by the traditional method) |
| - She was showing confusion over remarks about addressing the learning styles |
| - After the first primary session for addressing the students’ needs in the classroom, the lecturer noticed that there were chances that had been wasted during her class because she had not noticed this point |
| - First time students have no awareness about what type of change is happening in the class |
| - To evaluate the teaching and learning process in the class and the points that need improvement |
| - Using the interactive methods to convey the message to students |
| - She tries to balance her speed tone when she lectures. |
Actual practice:
- Previously she used the traditional method in the majority of her classes
- She started her teaching styles shift with involving more interaction in her ‘teaching by using phrases such as “have you ever heard of this …?”
- She also tried all kinds of group activity in the class; to her surprise students responded even the ones who were quiet in class most of the time
- She managed to maintain a high level of enthusiasm and excitement about what she was doing, and exclaimed about the learning that she could not only see but also feel that is happening in her class.

Importance of considering the learning styles preferences for classroom
- While she was persistent in her efforts in each class that I observed to evaluate, investigate, changes her teaching styles with the aim of continuously coming closer to address effectively the learning styles of her students.
- She was really fascinated that she could apply that in her teaching style.
- In the beginning of this research, she does not really think of the learning style concept and its key role in student learning but by the final stage of this research, she was committing herself to adapt her teaching styles for reducing the mismatch between teaching style and learning style preferences in the faculty of foreign languages.

| Table 2. Observation and Interview on Teaching Styles (Case Study 2) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Background of learning styles:**                             |
| - She learned about the learning styles while she was doing her degree |
| - She also was taught via traditional teaching methods, she recalls that only two of her foreign lecturers used a style which was fun and lively. |
| - These two persons were very interactive with their students, they normally called their students by their first names |
| - She remembers that in these two classes she was allowed to move around and have activity… |
| - She totally agrees with the notion that learning styles preferences must be considered while teaching |
| - Show concern about the problems while deciding to accommodate the learners styles in her teaching plan |
| - She believed that mixed teaching methods will make it easier for the students to understand the concept matter. |
| - She tried to look at her class carefully |
| - She shows awareness of the students’ needs in her class and she tries to cover their needs and preferences even though she believed that it is bothersome. |

**Actual practice:**
- Admitting that most of her class time was spent giving the students lectures but sometimes there were some activities that she used to perform to see how is it going
- After the awareness about the learner’s styles, she starts using the interactive styles in the class, besides activities that she used to conduct.
- She also used the documents and other resources to cover the majority of her learning style in class /also use the mix of the methods in her teaching
- The intention of using the mixed teaching mood in the class was two-fold: to fulfill all the students’ educational needs and also to train the students for their future when they appear as teachers.

**Importance of considering the learning styles preferences for classroom**
- The gap between the previous teaching and current teaching was observed
- In the beginning of the study the lecturer believed that it is impractical to address all the learning style preferences in the class but at the end she found it quite interesting and useful
- Regardless of her initial disagreement on considering students’ needs in her teaching plan, currently she considers the impact of the match between two styles on student learning improvement quite interesting and practical.

| Table 3. Observation and Interview on Teaching Styles (Case Study 3) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Background of learning style styles:**                      |
| - Learning styles concept was introduced to Flora during her bachelor program. |
| - She was very confident that the students are happy with her styles and she does not see the necessity to change her styles |
| - She was the only lecturer who showed disagreement clearly from the beginning of the study but towards the end she highlights that she is happy she took the initiative to participate in this study. |
| - She believed that this kind of activity is kind of “time consuming” for the lecturers, considering their teaching schedule and the number of classes they are teaching. |
| - Toward the end of the first interview she decided to give it a try and see the results. |

**Actual practice:**
- In her case, the challenge was more difficult, considering the fact that she did not really believe that this kind of accommodation to students needs would really works and the first few session till the end
- She provided the students with some pair activities, brainstorming, interacting with the students and cross over styles.
- Regardless of Flora’s efforts, at the beginning of her class the students were not quite responsive and they were somewhat confused.
- First few lessons were frustrating and boring for the students.
- Methods used were discussion, crossover and small group discussion.
Importance of considering the learning style preferences for classroom:
- Compared to other lecturers Flora took a longer time to become convinced that these kinds of efforts were practical and important in her context.
- Comment on her teaching style during the last few weeks
- At the beginning of her teaching based on the students needs, she found it frustrating
- This idea challenged her to review her teaching methods and also observe her class through the thicker lens.
- First few session made her think whether she is doing right things or not
- Flora mentioned “we teachers have to create a fertile environment for the students that addresses their needs.” She also mentioned the need for this kind of consideration in teaching.

Table 4. Observation and Interview on Teaching Styles (Case Study 4)

| Background of learning: |
|-------------------------|
| - Introduced to learning styles and its components through the teacher training program before she joined the university. |
| - Mina got the experience with the lecturers who used only one style (during her study time) so she felt demotivated in that time; she used peer discussion if faced with any problem at that time. |
| - Techniques she used to help the students in class are providing the chance to students to talk in the class. However, she was using the lecture methods (the way she used to be taught) but with different approach that is giving the chance for students to talk. |
| - She expressed that she likes to use the lectures that will help her students to achieve higher, however she highlighted that she has never thought of ‘teaching according to her students’ preferences.’ |
| - Her comments about methods to make the class more student centered was to use the different activities in classroom environment, sharing the knowledge and taking responsibilities, get the students to share their ideas. |

| Actual practice: |
|------------------|
| - She used to teach based on the traditional method but during the first observation, she tried some different styles, she grouped the students, she wrote the topic and few related questions on the board, she asked each group to discuss it among themselves. After that she asked the students to check their answers with their classmate who was explaining the right answer in front of the class. |
| - She used the group discussion in her class more than other methods. |
| - She used eye contact with students because she could see that they are inattentive and bored. |
| - She planned to use the mixture of all styles to address all types of the learning dimensions in her class. |

| Future plan: |
|-------------|
| - She showed interest in tailoring her teaching styles based on the students’ preferences in order to fill the existing gap |
| - Decreasing the traditional method in her teaching after knowing the students’ preferences in her class |
| - She strongly agreed with the idea of addressing the students’ needs in her class after getting the knowledge on how it will help the students |
| - She decided to do further reading regarding the different types of learning styles and get the pure idea on that to enable her to teach better and be more purposeful. |

Findings

By implementing and expanding different teaching styles, lecturers can create the environment which caters for all the learners with different learning style preferences, however It was not practical to imply all the teaching styles within the current study data collection. On the other hand, it is suggested that lecturers should explore their students’ learning styles, then identify their own teaching styles and then align their teaching styles based on the learning style versatility. Madden (2008) defined the teaching styles of the teachers by the CORD instrument and concluded that the teachers are adjusting their teaching styles based on the students’ learning styles. Besides, the importance of considering learner diversity was confirmed by the results of the interview in this research which indicted that the teachers are adjusting their assignment to meet student needs.

However the results from Madden (2008) were in line with the results of this study which indicated that addressing the learning styles of the learners in teaching design will improve learner achievement. One of the students’ aims in joining the higher education program is to be efficient learners in “academic growth” while pursuing their degree. The Chickering and Ehrman (1996) study also confirmed the findings of the current study that proper “good” teaching style which matched the learners’ learning styles yielded fruitful results. Wynn (2006) indicated that “as long as the strategy you select meets general guidelines for meeting different needs of different learners, it doesn’t really matter which strategies you choose; just make sure that when you use them, students learn” (p. 82). The majority of the lecturers’ responses during the interviews indicated a need for utilizing diverse teaching styles in the class but lack of knowledge about the impact of congruent teaching styles and learning styles on learner achievement and also the impracticality of the concept make it somewhat difficult for teachers in practice. Number of the researches done on learners’ and teachers’ perceptions in instructional activities highlighted the fact that there is a lack of relationship between the two categories (Barkhuizen, 1998). Therefore, the finding of this study is similar to the studies done by (Agogino & Hsi 1995; Carbo, 1997; Dunn & Dunn, 1993; Leaver, 1998; Klein, 2003;
Woolhouse & Blaire, 2003; Bell, 2007; Xiao, 2006; Kovacic, 2008; Peacock, 2001). The results that have been achieved in this study are similar to the other studies. The findings of this study indicated an important point for the teachers and lecturers who are involved in EFL education in Iran. Iranian teachers and lecturers may have to accept the fact that the traditional methods of language teaching can not be used for all types of learners; therefore they must expose themselves to different teaching styles to convey their message in classroom successfully. The information on learners learning preference will benefit the curriculum developers, syllabus designers and teachers. Barkhuizen (1998) indicated that if learner’s needs and preferences are taken in to consideration by those authorities, they can plan and implement the material according to those preferences and it will assist the learning process and increase the educational outcomes.

It is hoped that teachers all over the world will benefit from this experience of sharing success and failure, triumphs and pitfalls; however, this may become the starting point for the teachers to think twice about teaching to students’ learning styles and improving the quality of EFL educational content in Iran. The results that have been achieved in this study are similar to the other studies. The findings of this study indicated an important point for the teachers and lecturers who are involved in EFL education in Iran. Iranian teachers and lecturers may have to accept the fact that the traditional methods of language teaching can not be used for all types of learners; therefore they must expose themselves to different teaching styles to convey their message in classroom successfully. The information on learners learning preference will benefit the curriculum developers, syllabus designers and teachers. Barkhuizen (1998) indicated that if learner’s needs and preferences are taken in to consideration by those authorities, they can plan and implement the material according to those preferences and it will assist the learning process and increase the educational outcomes.

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