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On the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' classroom management orientations and teaching style

Mehrak Rahimi^a *, Fatemeh Asadollahi^a^a*Faculty of Humanities, Shahid Rajaee Teacher Training University, Lavizan, Tehran, 1678815811, Iran*

Abstract

The present study explores Iranian EFL teachers' classroom management orientations and their relationship with the teaching styles teachers employ in English classes. Three hundred EFL teachers filled in Attitudes and Beliefs on Classroom Control inventory and Teaching Activities Preference questionnaire. It was found that most Iranian EFL teachers were interventionist with respect to their classroom management approaches. Furthermore, it was found that teachers who were more interventionist in their classroom management used more teaching activities than those teachers with interactionalist classroom management orientation. More in-depth analysis revealed that classroom management orientations could predict 28% of the variance of teaching style.

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1. Introduction

The role that the EFL teachers play in the classroom and the styles they use affect creating a classroom climate that is positive, stimulating, energizing, and effective for language learning (Underwood, 1991; Brown, 2007). Teaching style refers to all of teaching techniques and activities and approaches that a teacher employs in teaching a certain subject in the classroom (Cooper, 2001). The way teachers teach in the classroom has been found to be associated with teachers' personality (Cooper, 2001), their content knowledge (Mewborn 2001), their behaviour in the class (Cotton, 2000), how they manage their classes (Yılmaz & Çavaş, 2008), and even the context of teaching (Rahimi & Nabilou, 2010),

However, one crucial factor in teaching practices preferences is the outcome of teaching or students' achievement (Erdle, Murray, & Rushton, 1985), meaning that teachers often try to match their teaching styles with learning styles of their students to prevent problems such as students' boredom and inattentiveness, poor performance in class activities and tests, or lack of interest about the course (Oxford, Ehrman, & Lavine, 1991). Although teachers always look for reasons in their students or their competencies as teachers for low scores of their students (Zenhui, 2001), the source of the problem is the conflict between teacher-student styles most of the time. Some of the researchers in this area (e.g. Smith and Renzulli, 1984; Griggs & Dunn, 1984; Charkins, O'Toole, & Wetzel, 1985) suggest that there should be a strong match between teaching and learning styles in any school subject in general and English as a foreign language in particular (e.g. Oxford, Ehrman, & Lavine, 1991; Wallace and Oxford, 1992; Zenhui, 2001).

* Mehrak Rahimi. Tel: +9821 22970035; fax: +9821 22970033
E-mail address: mehrahr Rahimi@yahoo.com; rahimi@strttu.edu

Therefore, studies on the factors that affect teachers' practices and their preferred teaching activities have started to boom recently.

Cooper (2001) believes that "a study on foreign language teaching styles, must start with the assumption that the make-up of teachers' personality determines what she will do in her classroom, that is, it determines which teaching activities will appeal to the teacher when she plans and teaches a lesson" (Cooper, 2001). He uses MBTI (Instruction fitting the personality dimensions of the Myers-Briggs type indicator) (1998) and divides teachers into eight groups including the extroverting types, the introverting types, the sensing types, the intuitive types, the thinking types, the feeling types, the judging types, and the perceiving types. A positive relationship between these personality types and teaching preferences of teachers, using Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and teaching Activities Preference Inventory (TAP) has been reported (Akbari, Mirhassani & Bahri, 2005) meaning that personality traits of teachers are reflected in classroom instruction through the teacher's use of various instructional strategies and material (Erdle, Murray, & Rushton, 1985).

Some researchers believe that the teaching styles of teachers are related to their students' learning style and thus much of the research in this regard has focused on portraying learners' style of learning. Sato (1982) studied the Asian and non-Asian students in this regard and compared the class participation of these two groups. Sato found that "the Asians took significant fewer speaking turns than did non-Asian classmates (36.5% as opposed to 63.5%)". Also, Sue and Kirk (1972) conducted a study on Asian students learning styles and concluded that many Asian students are less autonomous, dependent on authority figures in the class, and more obedient and conforming to rules and deadlines.

Besides, Asian students prefer visual learning to other styles. Reid (1987) in an investigation of sensory learning preferences found that Asian students are visual learners, with the Korean students on the top of the rank. These students read the texts and look for visual stimulations. Lectures, conversations, discussions, and oral directions are confusing for them without any visual backup and lead to anxiety. According to Brown (2007) when students' learning styles are matched with appropriate approaches in teaching, their motivation, performances, and achievements will increase. Zenhui (2001) who studied learning mismatch between learning and teaching styles provides examples of how teachers' teaching style can be matched with students learning style:

1. Diagnosing learning styles and developing self-aware EFL learners
2. Altering the teaching style to create teacher-student style matching
3. Encouraging changes in students' behavior and fostering guided style-stretching
4. Providing activities with different groupings

Ehrman and Oxford (1990) did a study on adult language learning style and strategies and came to the conclusion that "effective foreign language learning depends on mobilization both of strategies associated with ones' native learning style-preferences (indicated by the four MBTI letters) and of the strategies associated with less preferred functions that are opposites of the four letters of a persons' type". It indicates that individuals' ability to use a wide range of learning styles and strategies, both those developed readily in their personality and those which are not readily accessible; contribute to successful learning outcomes (Cooper, 2001).

1.1. Teaching style and classroom management

Over the past decades, knowledge about how children learn English and understanding what constitutes effective EFL teaching and language classroom management has increased considerably. An EFL teacher can dramatically influence the amount and quality of language learning for students (Brown, 2007). Some educators in the field of language teaching agree on a number of classroom management issues that can contribute to the construction of a positive and effective language learning environment (Brown, 2007; Underwood, 1991). These techniques include

establishing rapport, balancing praise and criticism, and generating energy. Teaching large classes and multiple proficiency levels, dealing with disruptive behaviors are among those imperfect and difficult situations that make EFL teacher to employ proper and precise techniques and styles to manage the classroom effectively and establish a rich teaching-learning environment (Brown, 2007; Hamer, 2007).

Language teachers' perception of classroom management depends on how they see their job as a language teacher. In an EFL classroom, a teacher control over many factors, such as classroom physical environment, students mood and behavior, the amount of communication between teacher and students which in turn will affect not only students' motivation for English language learning but also their environment and behavior. Moreover, it is necessary for language teachers to investigate how their language teaching style can affect progress and behavior of different students in their class. With this information at hand, still foreign language teaching situation regarding characteristics of EFL teachers, their classroom management orientations and their teaching styles remains challengeable and needs more practical study and investigation. Effective classroom management has been recognized to significantly contribute to student learning and development (Ormrod, 2003; Vitto, 2003). Teachers in all fields have always been reporting that classroom management is one of their most enduring and widespread challenges in their classroom (Manning & Bucher, 2003; Smith. 2000; Sokal, Smith, & Mowat, 2003). An effective EFL teaching and learning classroom consists of some crucial elements that contribute to establishing a positive classroom climate. Therefore, identification and explanation of these elements will cast light to the EFL classroom management which is the main and primary concern of pre-service and many in-service teachers.

Furthermore, the issue of classroom management in English classes has been discussed only from the theoretical standpoint. In the way that, some language educationists have determined the principles for managing a language classroom successfully (Brown, 2007; Chastain, 1989), but the relationship between language teachers' classroom management and their teaching style and with other classroom variables is still open to research. Classroom management in general and EFL classroom management in particular is one of the major concerns of pre-service and in-service teachers, especially English language teachers in Iran (Esmaeeli, 1381). Ayers (2001), believes that an essential first step toward becoming a good teacher is good classroom management. Unfortunately, this subject is not included in any teacher training course in Iran. Therefore, it is necessary to look for some classroom management strategies that will facilitate an environment that is conducive to learning a foreign language. "Teaching ESL or EFL to young learners is an evolving field, and many efforts are being made around the world to improve the process to both teachers and students" (Murray, 2002).

So if we want to manage the EFL classroom effectively, we need to be able to handle a range of variables. Examples of those variables include; how the classroom space is organized, whether students are involved in pair/group work or they are working on their own and, organization of the class time, and choosing and employing appropriate styles. As mentioned before, some studies have been done on classroom management in Iran (Sabahgian, 2001; Siyami, 2001; Zamani, 2000; Marashi, 2000; etc. cited in Esmaeeli, 2002), however, in the field of EFL teaching, we still lack supporting documentation on EFL teachers' classroom management orientations, the challenges they face, and the teaching styles that they prefer. The purpose of this study, thus, is to explore the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' classroom management orientations and their teaching styles. Moreover, the study attempts to know whether there is a significant difference among EFL teachers regarding their classroom management orientations and their teaching style. The study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are Iranian EFL teachers' classroom management orientations?
2. Is there any relationship between classroom management orientations and teaching style?
3. How much of the variance of teaching style can be predicted by classroom management orientations?

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Three hundred EFL teachers participated in this study. The sample were selected through stratified random sampling based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula with confidence level of 95% (margin of error = 5%) among 1000 English teachers who worked in 8 districts of the capital city, Tehran. Of the sample 184 (61.3%) were female and 116 (38.7%) were male teachers.

2.2. Instruments

Two instruments were used in order to gather data for this study: the Attitudes and Beliefs on Classroom Control (ABCC) Inventory and Teaching Activities Preference (TAP) questionnaire. Each of these instruments is described below.

2.2.1. TAP questionnaire

Teaching Activities Preference (TAP) questionnaire was developed by Cooper (2001) to see how EFL teachers would rate a variety of teaching activities in teaching English based on their personality dimension. It groups teaching activities in eight teaching styles; extroverts, introverts, sensing types, intuitive types, thinking types, judging types, perceiving types, and feeling types (Lawrence, 1997; Myers & Myers, 1998). The questionnaire includes 20 items and the participants were asked to rate the teaching activities they use on a 5-point scale, whereby "1" meant "I don't agree with the statement at all" and "5" meant "I fully agree with the statement". Examples of items include: *I try to give students opportunities to think out loud by having them discuss things they are working on with me; I like to have students share personal experiences, events, and ideas with me and with the class; and, I like group tasks such as mobiles, collage, comic strips, story books, and songs.*

In addition to 20 items, cooper (2001) added a 21 question in which participants were asked to list any other activities that they considered effective for teaching English as a foreign language. Although, this questionnaire has been used in a study in Iran (Akbari and Mirhassani and Bahri, 2005), there is no report of reliability estimation of the questionnaire. But both researchers Cooper (2001) and Akbari et al (2005) reported that TAP inventory turned out to be reliable in their studies. The adaption process for the questionnaire include translation and back translation, and reliability estimation. The reliability coefficient of TAP in this study was estimated to be .80.

2.2.2. ABCC Inventory

The Attitudes and Beliefs on Classroom (ABCC) Inventory were used to measure teachers' classroom management orientations (Martin, Yin, & Baldwin, 1998). ABCC is a 26-item inventory composed of three subscales that address components of classroom management including instructional management (14 items), people management (8 items), and behavior management (4 items). Instructional management dimension includes monitoring seat work, structuring daily routines, and allocating materials. The people management dimension pertains to what teachers believe about students as persons and what teachers do to enable them to develop. The third dimension, behavior management, includes providing feedback, commenting on behavior, and giving directions. Examples of items include: *During the first weeks of class, I announce the classroom rules and inform students of the penalties for disregarding the rules* (instructional management); *I allow the students to select their own seats* (people management); and *when students behave opportunity, I provide a reward of some kind such as points toward a party or free time* (behavior management). Respondents indicate on a 4-point, Likert-type scale (Describes me very well, Describes me usually, Describes me somewhat, Describes me not at all), how well each item describes their beliefs concerning classroom management.

The adaptation process of the ABCC inventory to Iranian context included translation and back translation and reliability studies. In order to assess the reliability of the ABCC Inventory Cronbach's α coefficient was computed and turned out to be .71.

3. Results

3.1. Iranian EFL teachers' classroom management orientations

Iranian EFL teachers' classroom management orientations have been described using descriptive statistics on three sub-scales of ABCC, that is, instructional management, people management, and behavior management. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of mean scores on the ABCC subparts. As Table 1 illustrates, the mean of the sample in instructional management subpart is 44.62 (SD=5.11). Instructional management subscale includes 14 items and thus the possible minimum score is 14 (less controlling) and the maximum score is 56 (most controlling). Results indicate that EFL teachers have high scores on this scale indicating more controlling and interventionist approach. People management subscale mean score was 24.22 (SD= 34.51). For the People management subscale, the possible minimum score is 8 and maximum score is 32. Results showed that EFL teachers tend to be still interventionist and controlling on this scale. Further, behavior management mean of EFL teachers was found to be 11.03 (SD=2.15). Behavior management subscale includes 4 items and the possible minimum score is 4 and the maximum score is 16. So again the result shows that in this subscale, the teachers are controlling and interventionist, although it is not as high as the first two components.

Table 1- Distribution of mean scores on ABCC's subparts

Scale	Number of items	Possible range	Mean	SD	Average per item
Instructional management	14	14-56	44.62	5.11	3.18
People management	8	8-32	24.22	3.40	3.02
Behavior management	4	4-16	11.03	2.15	2.75

3.2. The relationship between classroom management and teaching style

In order to find the relationship between classroom management and teaching style, correlation method was applied. The result showed that positive and significant relationship exists between classroom management and the activities teachers use, implying that those teachers who are more controlling and interventionist use more activities than those teachers who are more interactionist (with lower points on classroom management scales) in English classes. The result of correlation analysis is illustrated in table 2.

Table 2. Correlation matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4
1 Instructional management	1	.597**	.502**	.483**
2 People management		1	.417**	.417**
3 Behavior management			1	.407**
4 teaching style				1

Further, in order to determine the proportion of the variance in teaching style that could be explained by teachers' classroom management orientations, multiple regressions analysis was performed. The summary of the regression results is presented in tables 3 and 4. The results indicated that more than 27% of the variance in teaching style was explained by the independent variable of this study. The test statistic was significant at the .05 level of significance ($F(1, 296) = 39.631, p=0.000$).

Table 3. Analysis of variance

Sources	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	R ²	Adjusted R ²	p
Model	5307.600	3	1769.200	39.631	.287	.279	.000
Error	13214.036	296	44.642				
Total	18521.637	299					

Table 4. Multiple regressions on dependent variable (teaching style)

Variables	B	β	t	p
Instructional management	.442	.287	4.401	.000*
People management	.381	.165	2.651	.008*
Behavior management	.709	.195	3.380	.001*

As Table 2 illustrates, the results of multiple regressions indicate that all types of classroom management affect teaching style at the .05 level of significance. The predictors of teaching style in order of predicative value are instructional management ($\beta=2.87$, $t=4.401$), behavior management ($\beta=.195$, $t=3.380$) and people management ($\beta=.165$, $t=2.651$) (table 3).

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was investigating Iranian EFL teachers' classroom management orientations and their relationship with the teaching styles teachers employ in English classes. The findings suggested that Iranian EFL teachers are more controlling in all three classroom management orientations. This can be related to the fact that Iranian students are dependent on authority figures in the class and obedient and conforming to rules. Therefore, it can be concluded that EFL teachers try to match their classroom management orientations and teaching styles with students' learning styles and characteristics. Superficially, this seems to be a promising finding but in-depth scrutiny shows that this is actually the product of traditional book-centered approach and teacher-centered methodology in Iranian EFL curriculum that have negatively affected the outcome of EFL learning in the country (Rahimi & Nabilou, 2009).

Furthermore, the results showed that there is significantly positive relationship between all three subscales of ABCC and teachers' teaching style. In other words, the results indicate that teachers with more controlling and interventionist approach use variety of activities in their English classes. This can be related to the fact that the personality of the teacher influences the teaching styles they select and employ in their classes. In other words, more interventionists prefer teacher-centered activities, interactionalists and non-interventionists prefer learner-centered activities and instruction. This finding confirms what Akbari, Mirhassani and BAhri (2005) found that there is a significant relationship between personality type and teaching preferences of Iranian EFL teachers.

The findings also suggested that classroom management can predict 28% of teaching style, implying that the teaching activities that teachers select can be influenced by their ways of managing people, instruction, and behavior. This finding corroborates theoretical postulations in the realm of language teaching about the role of teachers in language classes as controller, facilitator, or manager of the learning/teaching activities (Brown, 2007). However, more qualitative studies are required to see the impact of teachers' management orientations and teaching styles on students' learning in EFL classes.

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