Social behaviors of foreign language teachers at Anatolian high schools in Turkey

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to assess in-class behaviors of Foreign Language Teachers working at Anatolian High Schools in terms of social aspects. Accordingly, 18 teachers who were working during 2010-2011 academic year were interviewed. Participating teachers stated that they mimed new vocabulary through gestures, cared about making eye contact with students, and walked around instead of standing in front of the board or desk during the lesson. In addition, they also declared that they used greeting and good-bye expressions at the beginning and end of the lessons, that they called their students by their names, and that they greeted their students outside the school. Some of the participants stated that they were in touch with students’ families and this helped build a sincere connection with their students. The results revealed that teachers tolerated the mistakes students made during a lesson, and that they provided a comfortable environment where students felt free to ask questions. Furthermore, results pointed that some of the participating teachers were open to criticism.

Keywords: Social Behaviors, Foreign Language, Teachers

1. Introduction

Turkish educational system has undergone drastic changes with the reforms started in 2004, and instructional programs based on EU norms and developed with a constructivist approach have been employed at primary schools since then (MEB, 2005). The contents of levels within Common European Framework of Reference for Languages have also been adopted for foreign language teaching. This new system and programs have been put into practice gradually in a step-by-step manner, and the academic year of 2008–2009 was the first time these programs were started at secondary schools. “The key to constructivist approach is that it shifts the control on the teacher to teach onto the student to learn” (Hein, 1991, 3). Learning approaches that assign more responsibility on students during the learning process are most often utilized within the education settings where constructivist approach is at large. In a constructivist educational setting, the teacher is no longer the sole source of authority and information. Rather, a teacher in a constructivist atmosphere is a kind of an advisor who organizes the setting and directs the students. This teacher provides a sincere, funny, and comfortable environment where students can raise their questions without any fear and where many opportunities are offered to them. The teacher designates students with more responsibilities and tools to be used during monitoring their own learning (Lorsbach & Tobin, 1997, Yasar, 1998, Deryakulu, 2001). This teacher has to have the social competence to provide such a setting to the students.
Through a qualitative method, this study aims to determine in-class behaviors displayed by teachers of Foreign Language in Turkey.

Accordingly, 18 teachers who were working during 2010-2011 academic year were interviewed. The participants were first asked to answer the following demographic questions in order to identify the subject profile:

1. How long have you been working as a teacher?
2. How long have you been working as a Foreign Language teacher?
3. Where is your present workplace?

Subsequently, the participants were asked the questions below:

1. How effectively do you use body language in your classes?
2. What do you do to trigger student-teacher interaction?
3. Are you a tolerant teacher, how do you know that?

2. Method

2.1. Research Model

Semi-structured interview technique has been employed in this study. In semi-structured interviews, several questions worded with the terminology familiar to the participants are prepared. Hypotheses are not tested based on a theory, rather concepts and hypotheses emerge during the research (Atteslander 2003, p. 84). The flow of the interview follows the pattern of greeting, informing, and questions. This type of research has an open and flexible nature. (Atteslander 2003, p. 84). Since the researcher prepares the questions in advance and allows the reorganization of questions and discussion of other related issues during the interview, this flexibility and open-endedness give way to the new and unknown sub-themes (Ekiz 2003, p.62). Therefore, qualitative methods are best to discover the unforeseen consequences (Oswald 2010, p. 192).

2.2. Participants

This study has been conducted with 18 Foreign Language teachers dwelling in 6 different provinces. All the participants—11 female, 7 male—work at Anatolian High Schools. The average of total work experience of the participants is 14 years whereas the mean amount that they have been working as German Language teachers is 5 years. All the participants worked as class teacher, English teacher, or Turkish teacher at the beginning of their professional life. Since the need for German Language teachers is quite little in Turkey, the number of teachers employed each year is so small; thus, many of them work at co-branches at the initial phase of their career. All interviews have been audio-taped. Each interview lasted 35-to-40 minutes.

2.3. Data Analysis

Research findings were analyzed through Context Analysis method. The data were subjected to four stages in accordance with content analysis: coding of the data, identification of themes, organizing and defining the data in terms of the codes and themes, and interpretation of findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005, 228-238).

Each interview was coded independently; for instance, T1 (Teacher 1), BL (Body language). For the reliability of the study (Punch, 2005, 245), two participants reviewed their own interviews after the transcription.

3. Findings

3.1. Effective Use of Body Language
3 sub-themes were identified after the analysis of the answers provided for this question by the participants. These themes and their frequencies are as follows: miming unknown vocabulary items through use of gestures (12), sustaining eye contact with students during the entire lesson (10), walking around during the lesson (7).

3.2. Student-Teacher Interaction

5 sub-themes were identified after the analysis. Using greeting expressions in Foreign Language at the beginning of each lesson (18), saying good-bye expressions in Foreign Language at the end of each lesson (17), greeting students outside the school (15), calling students by their names (14) and keeping in touch with students’ families (8).

3.3. Being Tolerant

4 sub-themes were identified after the analysis. Tolerating students’ mistakes (15), stress-free environment to raise questions (12) and to criticize teachers (7), making use of humor in class (6).

4. Result

Participating teachers stated that they mimed new vocabulary through gestures, cared about making eye contact with students, and walked around instead of standing in front of the board or desk during the lesson. In addition, they also declared that they used greeting and good-bye expressions at the beginning and end of the lessons, that they called their students by their names, and that they greeted their students outside the school. Some of the participants stated that they were in touch with students’ families and this helped build a sincere connection with their students. The results revealed that teachers tolerated the mistakes students made during a lesson, and that they provided a comfortable environment where students felt free to ask questions. Furthermore, results pointed that some of the participating teachers were open to criticism, and didn’t feel any frustration when criticized. Moreover, a few of the participants said that they made jokes and allowed students to make jokes in order to create a funny language learning setting. However, a majority of the teachers stated that the weekly session was not enough to include several group or pair activities that would make the class a more appealing environment. Besides, many participants complained that the number of class sessions was not enough to work with each student one on one.

The results indicate that increasing the weekly class hours at secondary schools would be beneficial. Furthermore, conducting seminars where teachers can gain the new competencies required by the new programs may also be suggested based on the results of this study. These seminars may enhance teachers’ motivation and energy and may provide them with necessary techniques and methods to build a cozier and more effective learning environment.

References


