

The Effect of Gender and Teaching Experience on Iranian ESP Instructors' Teaching Styles

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to investigate whether gender and teaching experience have predicting power in specifying teaching styles. To this end, 87 ESP (English for Specific Purposes) instructors, selected from different universities in Tehran, Iran, participated in the study. The participants filled in the Teaching Styles Inventory (version 3.0). An independent samples t-test analysis and a one-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) were used to evaluate the predicting power of gender and teaching experience in identifying ESP instructors' teaching styles. The findings revealed that the relationship of teaching styles with teaching experience and gender is not statistically significant. The findings and their implications are widely discussed.

Key words: ESPinstructors, teaching styles, gender, teaching experience

1. Introduction

Various studies have increasingly investigated teachers' beliefs, thoughts, behaviors, and performances due to the major roles they play in educational contexts. Exploring teachers' beliefs and behaviors along with the factors associated with them is essential to interpret their classroom performance, which brings about significant effects on learners' achievement.

The teachers' teaching styles, as an important element of their belief structure, is highly associated with students' achievement (Akbari et al., 2008; Grasha, 1996). Hence, examining various factors affecting this construct is necessary to shed light on what leads to efficient teaching performance.

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Reviewing the related literature reveals that teaching styles have been individually examined in different studies, especially in mainstream education, but rarely have there been studies to explore this construct in the case of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teachers. Therefore, examining various factors influencing this construct is necessary to determine the elements of productive teaching performance among ESP instructors. Teaching experience and gender are among the factors whose relationship with teaching styles has been explored in various studies. However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, very little research, to date, has been undertaken to explore the relationship of these two factors with teaching styles in the case of ESP. Definitely, the scarcity of research in this area along with the possible factors associated with it provides a strong rationale to do a research in order to investigate the predicting power of gender and teaching experience in specifying teaching styles. To fill this gap, the current study aims at exploring the relationship of teaching styles with gender and teaching experience among Iranian ESP instructors.

2. Review of Literature

Teaching style has been defined by Grasha (1996, p.1) as "enduring personal qualities and behaviors" that emerge in how teachers perform in their classes. Grasha noted that teaching styles have a crucial role in defining, leading, and guiding teachers' instructional processes and have a substantial effect on learners and their ability to learn. It is known that teaching style is a multifaceted construct with various dimensions. Various aspects and components have been introduced for this construct in the literature; however, there is no clear consensus in defining its categories and there is little agreement among the various authors to identify the elements of teaching styles. The following classifications are some of the examples mentioned in the literature to define different elements of teaching styles:

- intellectual excitement, interpersonal rapport (Lowman, 1995)
- grade oriented, learning oriented (Jim Eison, 1991, cited in Grasha, 1996)
- expert, formal authority, personal model, facilitator, and delegator (Grasha, 1996)
- task-oriented, cooperative-planner, child-centered, participant-centered, learning-centered and emotionally exciting (Henson & Borthwick, 1984, cited in Heidari et al., 2012)

After investigating the various categorizations of teaching styles proposed in the literature, Grasha's teaching styles model was applied in the current study. In this model, five types of styles named *expert*, *formal authority*, *personal model*, *facilitator*, and *delegator* are offered to specify teachers' styles. As a matter of fact, each teacher takes possession of each style to varying extents. This means that placing each teacher into one of the distinct categories is almost impossible (Grasha, 1996). In Grasha's model, there is an attempt to consider classroom experience, as one of the effective factors in specifying teaching styles, which was ignored in some other models. Grasha's model also tries to make the nature of teacher-student encounters more conceivable and takes the significant role of the students in defining teachers' styles into account. Moreover, this model recommends conditions under which specific styles will be more effective and introduces what should be implemented to modify the styles. As a result, practicality, totality, and empirical reinforcement, along with the above-mentioned qualities convinced the present researchers to use Grasha's teaching styles model in this study.

The first style is *expert*. The teacher who has the expert teaching style provides the knowledge and expertise required in his/her class. One of the main concerns of an expert teacher is to convey his/her knowledge to students and to ensure that they are all well prepared. By indicating detailed expertise and also by challenging learners to improve their proficiency, an expert teacher endeavors to keep his/her status as an expert among learners. The advantage of being an expert teacher is the possession of knowledge, skills, and expertise. However, demonstrating knowledge, if excessively used, can be threatening to less experienced learners.

The next style is *formal authority*. The teacher with this type of style maintains status among students because of his/her expertise and knowledge. His/her concern is to transmit the positive and negative feedback to the learners while defining learning goals, expectations, and the rules of conduct for them. Moreover, s/he makes an effort to do things in the accurate, acceptable, and standard ways and focuses on the provision of necessary structure students need to learn.

Concentrating on obvious expectations and permissible ways of doing things is the advantage of this style, while a strong commitment to the style, which can contribute to severe, standardized, and less flexible ways of directing students, is the possible disadvantage.

The third style is *personal model*. Teachers with this style provide personal examples in their class to illustrate the material. They attempt to encourage their students to observe and then emulate the teachers' approach. They teach students by demonstrating how to do things. Highlighting direct observation and emulating a role model are the advantages of this style. The disadvantage is that some teachers may believe that their manner of teaching is the best way which can lead some learners to feel disappointed if they cannot fulfill the teacher's expectations and standards.

The fourth style is named *facilitator*. The teacher with this style believes in highlighting teacher-student intercommunication, instructing students through asking questions and offering alternatives, developing the sense of responsibility and independence among learners, providing the opportunity of gaining capacity for the application of innovation in the learning process, and encouraging and inspiring students in a consultative manner. This style is advantageous because students enjoy the teacher's flexibility, their needs and goals are emphasized, and the opportunity for exploring options and finding alternatives is available for them in the learning context. However, this style can have disadvantages because it is frequently time-consuming and can bother learners if it is not employed in a positive way.

The last style in this categorization is *delegator*. The teacher with this type of style considers autonomous learning as the main and important goal of his/her class. If the learners request assistance, this kind of teacher is available as a resource for support. The advantage of the style is that it gives students a sense of autonomy and provides an opportunity to learn independently. Nevertheless, the negative point is that sometimes learner's readiness for autonomous functioning may be misinterpreted. Furthermore, some students may become anxious if they are given independence.

Studies about teaching styles illustrates that there are different factors influencing them. In an effort to discover the factors affecting teaching styles, Grasha (1996) sought the opinions of 560 college teachers in different workshops and seminars he conducted and the following elements appeared:

- Size of the class
- The subject matter (e.g., hard sciences versus humanities)
- Grade Level of the student (e.g., first-year, seniors, graduate)
- How much they liked the class

- Time pressure
- Need to prepare students for standardized exams
- Information about alternate ways to teach
- Willingness to take risks
- Not wanting to deviate from department and college norms for teaching” (Grasha, 1996, p. 156)

In addition, scrutinizing various studies has confirmed that teaching style is a multidimensional construct which is in association with many factors. Grasha declares that teachers’ styles affect “how they present information, interact with students, manage classroom tasks, supervise course work, socialize students to the field, and mentor students” (p. 153). He also notes that “teaching styles, learning styles, and classroom processes are interdependent; selecting any one has direct implications for the appearance of the other two” (p. 233). Various studies have demonstrated teaching styles as a substantial factor affecting students’ achievement (e.g., Aitkin & Zuzovsky, 1994; Akbari et al., 2008; Ebmeier & Good, 1979). In other words, teachers’ role in the classroom and their teaching styles result in the creation of a classroom atmosphere which is positive, stimulating, and efficacious for language learning (Brown, 2007). Hence, teachers’ behavior and their styles can make a crucial difference in student learning (Centra & Potter, 1980; Wentzel, 2002). Furthermore, it is stated that teachers’ personality (Cooper, 2001), their classroom management (Yilmaz & Çavaş, 2008), and the specific context of teaching performance (Rahimi & Nabilou, 2010) are all in association with teaching styles. As a result, studies on teacher education confirm the significance of teaching styles and the need for conducting further studies to explore the factors associated with them.

3. Purpose of the Study

Various studies have confirmed that teachers’ role is significant in the process of instructing students. Wright et al. (1997) declared that “more can be done to improve education by improving the effectiveness of teachers than by any other single factor” (p. 63). Hence, studying and exploring teachers’ personalities, beliefs, and performances is arguably required to discover the efficient options for fostering the learning process. Teaching styles as one of the significant factors in the area of teacher education have been examined individually in different studies, but rarely has there been any research to investigate various factors associated with them in ESP instruction.

Teaching experience and gender are among the variables explored to find out whether and how they are associated with teaching styles, but to the best of the researches' knowledge there has been very little research carried out to examine this relationship in the case of ESP instruction. To fill this gap, this study aims at exploring the relationship of teaching styles with teaching experience and gender in the case of ESP teachers. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is there any relationship between ESP instructors' gender and their teaching style?
2. Is there any relationship between ESP instructors' teaching experience and their teaching style?

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The participants of the present study were 87 university instructors including 42 males and 45 females. They taught either General or Specific English to B.A. students in various fields of study. The samples were selected from different universities in Tehran, Iran. They held either M.A. (n=38) or Ph.D. (n=49) degrees with various teaching experience ranging from 1 year to 46 years. Table 1 demonstrates the demographic information of the participants of the study.

Table 1: Demographic Information

Demographic information		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	45	51.73
	Male	42	48.27
Degree	M.A.	38	43.67
	Ph.D.	49	56.33
Teaching experience (Classification criteria: the number of years)	1-5	28	32.18
	6-10	30	34.48
	11 and up	29	33.34

4.2. Instrument: Teaching Styles Inventory (version 3.0)

In this study, in order to evaluate the teaching styles of ESP instructors, Teaching Styles Inventory (version 3.0) was applied.

Teaching Styles Inventory (version 3.0) designed by Grasha (1996) includes 40 items examining the five types of teaching styles called *expert*, *formal authority*, *personal model*, *facilitator*, and *delegator*. Each style is measured by assessing the mean score of the eight items associated with each specific style. Furthermore, in this scale each item is calculated by utilizing a 7-point Likert scale in which 1 stands for strongly disagree and 7 stands for strongly agree. The reliability and validity of this instrument have been corroborated by Grasha's own studies and its wide application in different research studies. In the present study, the reliability of the instrument was measured and the average Cronbach's alpha of the five teaching styles was found to be 0.72.

4.3. Data Collection Procedure

The participants, who were ESP university instructors, were selected from the various universities in Tehran based on practicality and feasibility criteria. They were given the Teaching Styles Inventory along with the demographic questionnaire exploring their gender, teaching experience, and degree. 130 questionnaires were distributed through either hard copy or soft copy among the samples and finally 87 were returned to the researchers. The participants were also assured that their answers would be merely used for research purposes.

5. Results

5.1. Differences in Teaching Styles with Regard to Gender

In order to clarify whether there was any significant difference in ESP instructors' teaching styles with regard to their gender, an independent *t*-test analysis was carried out using SPSS. The results (Table 2) showed that there was no significant difference between male and female ESP instructors regarding their expert style ($t = -0.187, p > 0.05$), formal authority style ($t = -0.104, p > 0.05$), personal model style ($t = 0.533, p > 0.05$), facilitator style ($t = 1.567, p > 0.05$), and delegator style ($t = 1.453, p > 0.05$). Thus, it can be concluded that gender had no effect on ESP instructors' teaching styles.

Table 2. T-test for Teaching Styles and Gender

Styles	Groups	N	M	SD	t	df	P																																												
Expert	M	42	42.38	6.23	-0.187	85	0.852																																												
	F	45	42.15	5.35				Formal Authority	M	42	41.46	5.57	-0.104	85	0.918	F	45	41.35	4.54	Personal Model	M	42	41.60	6.24	-0.533	85	0.596	F	45	40.89	6.09	Facilitator	M	42	40.59	7.90	1.567	85	0.121	F	45	42.83	5.19	Delegator	M	42	38.15	6.47	1.453	85	0.150
Formal Authority	M	42	41.46	5.57	-0.104	85	0.918																																												
	F	45	41.35	4.54				Personal Model	M	42	41.60	6.24	-0.533	85	0.596	F	45	40.89	6.09	Facilitator	M	42	40.59	7.90	1.567	85	0.121	F	45	42.83	5.19	Delegator	M	42	38.15	6.47	1.453	85	0.150	F	45	40.02	5.49								
Personal Model	M	42	41.60	6.24	-0.533	85	0.596																																												
	F	45	40.89	6.09				Facilitator	M	42	40.59	7.90	1.567	85	0.121	F	45	42.83	5.19	Delegator	M	42	38.15	6.47	1.453	85	0.150	F	45	40.02	5.49																				
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	F	45	42.83	5.19				Delegator	M	42	38.15	6.47	1.453	85	0.150	F	45	40.02	5.49																																
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	F	45	40.02	5.49																																															

5.2. Differences in Teaching Styles with Regard to Teaching Experience

In this study, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run in order to determine whether there was any significant difference among ESP instructors with different teaching experiences regarding their teaching styles. Results (Table 3) depicted that there was no significant difference among ESP instructors with different teaching experiences regarding their expert style $F(2,84) = 0.940$, $p > 0.05$, formal authority style $F(2,84) = 1.517$, $p > 0.05$, personal model style $F(2,84) = 1.262$, $p > 0.05$, facilitator style $F(2,84) = 0.115$, $p > 0.05$, and delegator style $F(2,84) = 0.484$, $p > 0.05$. In short, teaching experience had no effect on ESP instructors' teaching styles.

Table 3. ANOVA for Teaching Experience and Teaching Styles

Teaching Styles	Teaching Experience	N	M	SD	F	df	p
Expert	1-5 years	28	42.93	4.99	0.940	B=2	0.395
	6-10 years	30	41.10	5.47		W=84	
	11 & up years	29	42.82	6.67		T=86	
	Total	87	42.26	5.76			
Formal Authority	1-5 years	28	40.20	4.95	1.517	B=2	0.225
	6-10 years	30	41.46	4.76		W=84	
	11 & up years	29	42.51	5.28		T=86	
	Total	87	41.41	5.03			
Personal Model	1-5 years	28	40.82	5.51	1.262	B=2	0.289
	6-10 years	30	40.23	5.96		W=84	
	11 & up years	29	42.67	6.80		T=86	
	Total	87	41.23	6.14			
Facilitator	1-5 years	28	41.50	4.64	0.115	B=2	0.892
	6-10 years	30	41.51	6.96		W=84	
	11 & up years	29	42.24	8.14		T=86	
	Total	87	41.75	6.69			
Delegator	1-5 years	28	38.52	5.45	0.484	B=2	0.618
	6-10 years	30	39.98	5.64		W=84	
	11 & up years	29	38.80	6.96		T=86	
	Total	87	39.12	6.02			

6. Discussion and Conclusion

As noted earlier, the purpose of this study is to discover whether teaching experience and gender have a predicting power in identifying ESP instructors' teaching styles. Concerning the relationship between gender and teaching styles, no significant result was noticed.

This means that gender did not have a predicting power in specifying teachers' dominant style. This is not in line with the finding reported by Grasha (1996). In one of his studies conducted with 381 college or university instructors teaching different fields, Grasha asserted that female instructors had somewhat lower scores on the expert and formal authority styles and somewhat higher scores on the facilitator and delegator styles than their male counterparts. This inconsistency may be due to the sample difference in the studies; the samples of Grasha's study were from different educational contexts with different majors, while in this study all the samples were ESP university instructors. Cultural and social factors involved in the different contexts of these two studies may be another reason for this discrepancy.

The findings of this study also illuminated that there was not any significant relationship between teaching styles and teaching experience. This finding is consistent with the findings of Guskey (1987), who reported no significant relationship between teaching experience and teachers' activity preferences, while in conflict with the findings of Rahimi and Asadollahi (2012). Rahimi and Asadollahi (2012) demonstrated that more experienced teachers were inclined to the thinking style of teaching. This type of style is associated with performing cause-and-effect activities and logical explanations in the class. They also indicated that less experienced teachers preferred the sensing style of teaching which is associated with providing concrete exercises and emphasizing facts and practical information (Rahimi & Asadollahi, 2012). However, the reason for this inconsistency may be related to applying different models of teaching styles and different instruments to measure them. In the present study, Grasha's teaching styles model was applied, which is clearly grounded in the classroom experiences, while Rahimi and Asadollahi (2012) utilized the Teaching Activities Preference (TAP) questionnaire developed by Cooper (2001), which is basically grounded in the personality assessment and then related to the classroom environment. Besides, the difference in the context of both studies may be the other reason for this inconsistency.

The findings of this study indicated that teaching experience and gender have no predicting power in identifying teaching styles. This underscores that there is no significant difference between male and female instructors with varying teaching experiences regarding their teaching styles. In other words, there is no significant difference in the preferences of both male and female ESP instructors with different teaching experience for employing different teaching styles in their classes.

This study has some limitations which should be acknowledged while interpreting the findings. Our sample was limited to only ESP instructors. Therefore, it is not evident whether these results can be generalized to other domains or not. Additionally, in this study only quantitative data were utilized to evaluate teaching styles of ESP instructors. Although the quantitative data are informative to evaluate teaching styles, obtaining qualitative data through interview and/or observation would definitely have refined and strengthened the obtained results.

As stated previously, the paucity of research investigating the factors associated with teaching styles in ESP contexts is considerable and there is an urgent need to conduct more studies to compare the obtained findings in order to reach a congruent conclusion. Consequently, replication of the current study is suggested to shed more light on the variables in question.

The present study may have noticeable, albeit preliminary, implications for language policy makers, English language teachers, and teacher trainers. The quality of learning process is so crucial for university students, thus they expect to be involved in an educational process which is productive and efficient. Hence, the factors associated with teachers' styles of teaching as an effective variable in learners' outcome should be considered in teachers' performances, teacher training programs, and policy makers' views.

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