

Research Article

Stylistic Perspectives to Language Teaching and Learning: (two cameras angled for a single cross-way)

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Abstract

Though teaching and learning associate two sides of one coin, each is assumed to be approached stylistically in different ways by teachers and learners as far as the issues of teaching and learning styles are concerned, respectively. In line with this perspective, this study is an inquiry into the extent to which language teachers and learners' teaching-learning styles match or vary, particularly in the light of the educational setting in which they are involved. To this end, 32 EFL teachers and 72 learners doing their language teaching and learning career from two different EFL settings in Iran; military and non-military ones were selected. Each group received its respective questionnaire addressing teaching and learning styles. Cross comparative analysis of the data showed that neither teachers-teachers and learners-learners nor teachers-learners from both settings do recruit much different styles in the process of teaching and learning. It means the teachers' teaching styles and the learners' learning styles are not related to each other.

Keywords: EFL teaching and learning, teaching styles, learning styles, perceptions of teaching and learning

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning are interwoven both theoretically and pedagogically as any theory of teaching primarily emanates from a specific theory of learning and in the process of pedagogy similar processes are followed, partly by teachers in the field of teaching and partly by the learners while they are indulged in the process of learning. That is why these two terms build up a cross-way, but each way is supposedly approached differently by its respective practitioner; learning part by learners but teaching part by teachers. The assumed interdependence of these apparently different perspectives might be the source of pedagogical achievements and thereby the major motive behind the conduct of this study.

By the same token, Felder and Brent claim that "Learning begins when you, the teacher, learn from the learner. Put yourself in his place so that you may understand what he learns and the way he understands it" (2005, p.57). The quotation is an assertion to the fact that learners supposedly employ different skills, strategies, and styles from those of their teachers. Some of them are visually-oriented, some learn by experimenting, while others prefer to learn by working in groups. Similarly, teachers' teaching styles are supposed to be different. Some teachers are excellent lecturers, some teach mainly through demonstration; others are more comfortable with theories and abstractions, while some others may resort to their own specific styles of various types in their career.

Learning styles are the general approaches that students use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subject. Felder and Henriques (1995) define them as "The ways in which an individual characteristically acquires, retains, and retrieves information." They are durable ways of approaching a learning situation which are not usually amenable to change. On the contrary, the term teaching style, according to Conti (2004), refers to the distinct qualities displayed by a teacher that are consistent from situation to situation regardless of the subject matter. Felder (1993) argues that teachers' teaching style reflects either their own learning styles or the way they were taught in college classes given these points, the major challenge would be what happens when the learners are confronted with a teaching process which is in contrast with their preferred learning style?

Related literature shows that where such a mismatch occurs, the students tend to be bored and inattentive, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the course, and may conclude that they are not good at the subjects of the course and give up (Oxford, Ehrman and Lavine, 1991). The same judgment holds true with regard to teachers. To this end, Felder and Henriques (1995) state: "Instructors, confronted by low test grades, unresponsive or hostile classes, poor attendance, and dropouts, may become overly critical of their students (making things even worse) or begin to question their own competence as teachers." (p. 21).

To document successful learning and to minimize the adverse effects arising from a conflict between teaching modes and learning orientations, some researchers in the area of learning styles advocate teaching and learning styles be matched (e.g. Griggs and Dunn, 1984; Smith and Renzulli, 1984; Oxford et al., 1991; Wallace and Oxford, 1992). Kumaravadivelu (1991, p.98) states that: "the narrower the gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation, the greater are the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes". The awareness about learning styles might encourage teachers to think about how their students learn and what would be the best instructional methods for a particular group of learners. Dupin-Bryant (2004) defines effective teaching style as "a style of instruction that is responsive, collaborative, problem-centered, and democratic in which both students and the instructor decide how, what, and when learning occurs" (p.42)

Several studies have shown that in order to reduce attrition and improve skill development in engineering; instruction should be designed to meet the needs of students whose learning styles are neglected by traditional pedagogy (Stice, 1987; Felder and Silverman, 1988; Felder, 1996).

Rosati (1993) assessed the learning styles of engineering faculty members and first-year and fourth-year engineering students at the University of Western Ontario. He found that faculty members were significantly more reflective, intuitive, and sequential than the students. The results suggested that professors could improve engineering instruction by increasing the use of methods oriented toward active learners (participatory activities, team projects), sensing learners (guided practice, real-world applications of fundamental material), and global learners (providing the big picture and showing connections to related material in other courses and to the students' experience).

In another study, Domino (1979) found that college students who were taught in preferred learning styles scored higher on tests, fact knowledge, attitude, and efficiency than those taught in instructional styles different from their preferred styles.

Montgomery (1995) developed multimedia instructional modules that addressed the spectrum of learning preferences. To do this, she assessed her students' learning styles with an *Index of Learning Styles* (ILS) that classified learners on four dimensions (sensing vs. intuitive, visual vs. verbal, inductive vs. deductive, and sequential vs. global) and surveyed them to determine the attitudes of the different types toward different features of instructional modules. She reported that sensing and visual learners rated demonstrations highly; sensing learners liked having access to derivations of equations (which they might not have grasped as fully as the intuitors when the instructor first presented the equations in class); and active, sensing, and visual learners preferred movies more than their reflective, intuitive, and verbal counterparts did.

Lumsdaine and Voitle (1993) studied the learning styles of students and faculty members. They found that many students and professors were left-brain thinkers—logical, analytical, verbal, and sequential. Their data also indicated a strong attrition rate among right-brain thinkers, with many of them dropping out despite earning top grades in analytical courses.

A review of previous studies shows the importance of studying the relationship between instructors' teaching styles and learners' learning preferences. However, little attention has been paid so far to examining the issue in the military context of education. Therefore, the present study purports to further investigate the relationship between instructors' teaching styles and students' learning preferences in a military context. A related goal is to find out about the relationship between military and non-military teachers' teaching styles.

Purpose and Settings of the Study

The study intends first to investigate the extent to which EFL learners' learning styles match or mismatch their teachers' teaching styles. Believing that educational setting affects to some extent one's cognition (Abbasian, 2005, 2009, and Birjandi, Mirhassani and Abbasian, 2005), the researchers also try to study the issue of teaching and learning styles in both military and non-military settings. To this end, the extent of match/mismatch between EFL teachers' teaching styles from the above settings will be investigated. On the other hand, similar attempt is made on the match between teachers' and learners' styles in those settings.

Method

Participants

Given the purpose of the study and the settings addressed, the participants were totally 32 EFL teachers and 72 EFL learners in the following composition:

- 12 EFL teachers and 36 learners from the Iranian military setting
- 20 EFL teachers and 36 learners from the non-military setting; Applied University

Instruments

The students' learning style was measured through a 30-item questionnaire. The Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire, which has been validated for non-native students, consisted of randomly arranged sets of 5 statements on each of the six learning style preferences to be measured: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, group and individual learning.

In order to find out about teachers' teaching style, another 26-item questionnaire measuring activities that they frequently do in their classrooms was administered to the teachers from the both contexts.

Data collection and Analysis Procedures

To collect the required data, two main instruments including two specific questionnaires tapping the learners' and teachers' respective styles were administered to 32 EFL teachers and 72 EFL learners. The students were asked to decide and express range of their agreement on the Likert Scale choices with each statement in the learning style categories.

The teachers' questionnaire contained statements that a teacher might do in the classroom. For each item, they were instructed to respond to the way they most frequently practiced the action described in the item.

The responses given to the questionnaires were statistically analyzed using independent t-test procedure in order to investigate about the significance of differences and answer the research questions.

Results and Discussion

Results

The obtained results are reported in the form of answers to each research question.

Research Question 1: To what extent do military setting teachers' teaching styles and their students' learning styles match?

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for teachers' teaching styles and students' learning styles in the military contexts. As displayed in the table, the mean scores for the military setting are 123.09 and 118.64 respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Military Setting Teachers' Teaching Styles and Students' Learning Styles

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Students	37	118.6486	10.35271	1.70198
Teachers	11	123.0909	22.51868	6.78964

In order to find about the difference between means of two groups, independent t-test was used. Table 2 shows the results of t-test procedure. As shown, the t-observed value for comparing the military setting teachers' teaching styles and their students' learning styles is .63 ($P = .53 > .05$). Based on these results it can be concluded that there is not any significant difference between the military setting teachers' teaching styles and their students' learning styles. In other words, the teachers' teaching styles match to some extent those of their students in the process of learning.

Table 2. Independent t-test comparing Military Setting Teachers' Teaching Styles and Students' Learning Styles

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	7.598	.008	-.928	46	.358	-4.44226	4.78469	-14.07335	5.18883
Equal variances not assumed			-.635	11.284	.538	-4.44226	6.99971	-19.80136	10.91684

Research Question 2: To what extent do non-military setting teachers' teaching styles and their students' learning styles match?

As displayed in table 6, the mean scores for the non-military setting teachers' teaching styles and students' learning styles are 111.52 and 117.08 respectively.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Non-Military Setting Teachers' Teaching Styles and Students' Learning Styles

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Students	36	117.0833	12.71079	2.11847
Teachers	21	111.5238	11.00281	2.40101

The t-observed value for comparing the non-military setting teachers' teaching styles and their students' learning styles is 1.67 ($P = .10 > .05$) (Table 5). Based on these results it can be concluded that there is not any significant difference between the non-military setting teachers' teaching styles and their students' learning styles. Similarly, the teachers' teaching styles match, to some extent, those of their students in the process of learning.

Table 4. Independent t-test Non-Military Setting Teachers' Teaching Styles and Students' Learning Styles

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.110	.741	1.671	55	.100	5.55952	3.32731	-1.10855	12.22760
Equal variances not assumed			1.736	46.988	.089	5.55952	3.20199	-.88210	12.00114

Research Question 3: To what extent do military and non-military teachers' teaching styles match?

Descriptive statistics for the mean scores for the military and non-military settings teachers' teaching styles are 123.09 and 111.52 respectively (table 5).

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics Military and Non-Military Settings Teachers' Teaching Styles

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Military	11	123.0909	22.51868	6.78964
Applied	21	111.5238	11.00281	2.40101

As Table 6 indicates, the t-observed value for comparing the military and non-military settings teachers' teaching styles is 1.96 ($P = .059 > .05$). Based on these results it can be concluded that there is not any significant difference between the military and non-military settings teachers' teaching styles. Then, the teachers from both the military and non-military settings recruit roughly similar styles as to their carrier.

Table 6. Independent t-test Military and No-Military Settings Teachers' Teaching Styles

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	4.145	.051	1.967	30	.059	11.56710	5.88182	-.44517	23.57937
Equal variances not assumed			1.606	12.559	.133	11.56710	7.20167	-4.04684	27.18104

DISCUSSION

Statistical analysis did not provide any significant differences. The results of independent t-test showed that the mean differences for teachers' and learners' questionnaires in two settings were not statistically different. In other words, there was some degree of concordance between teachers' teaching styles and learners' learning styles. Also, the results were consistent in both settings, that is, military and non-military ones. Similar interpretation holds true with regard to the relationship between teachers' teaching styles in the two settings, as there was no significant difference between military and non-military contexts in terms of teaching styles employed by the teachers from both contexts.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Generally speaking, the results of this study showed there was no significant difference between teachers' teaching styles and learners' learning styles. Moreover, the context of teaching, that is, military or non-military did not have any effect on the findings. In addition, military and non-military teachers didn't differ in the general approach they adopted in their teaching. This means that teachers and students do not employ much different styles from each other in the light of educational setting parameters. As Felder and Brent (2005) rightly point out, the point is not to determine each student's learning style and then teach to it exclusively; however, teachers may need to incorporate a range of learning styles in order to meet the needs of various learners in different contexts. The findings also confirm previous research that there may not be a necessary relationship between teachers' and learners' styles (Felder, 1993; Rosati, 1993; Felder and Brent, 2005)

The present study aimed to find out about the match, if existed, between teachers' teaching style and their learners' learning style in the military and non-military contexts. Further studies into learning style preferences might focus on EFL learners in other majors and contexts. Also the use of other data collection measures such as interviews, classroom observation, and portfolios can more deeply investigate into learners' and teachers' styles and reveal interesting facts about them.

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