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Research Article

Iranian EFL Learners' Perceptions of Pluralistic Teacher Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

Abstract

Pluralistic education includes diversity in language, culture, mindset, understanding, socio-cultural orientation, and communicative styles and seeks promotion of multicultural and multi-linguistic interaction and peaceful co-existence. This study aimed at exploring EFL learners' perceptions of pluralistic teacher effectiveness. In so doing, it benefited from a basic interpretive design. 46 (21 males and 25 females) Iranian pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate level EFL learners were selected through available sampling from across Iran. Data collection was done through a semi-structured interview in four open-ended questions. To analyze the data, thematic analysis was conducted. The following themes were extracted through qualitative thematic analysis of the data: Being Accountable to Stakeholders, Generating a Friendly Class Environment, Using Technology in Teaching and Assessment, Having Motivational Skills, Using Diverse Assessment Methods, Enacting Classroom Fairness, Having Warm Interaction with all the Students, Enacting Flexibility in Teaching and Assessment, Using the Same Teaching/Assessment Method for Students with Different Socio-Cultural Backgrounds, Avoiding Bias, Avoiding Racial Subjectivity, Being Objective in Teaching and Assessment, and Respecting Retarded Students. The findings have some implications for EFL teachers, teacher educators, and teacher education curriculum planners.

Key terms: Effective Teaching, Pluralism, Pluralistic Education, Teacher Effectiveness.



1. INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching/learning is among the main areas influenced by globalization in different ways. Pluralistic educational communities are the products of the effects globalization has had on education (Zohrabi et al., 2019). Stika (2012) refers to a paradigm change towards the employment of pluralism in educational circles at the service of acquisition of new knowledge and ideology with the help of diversity. Pluralism is an opportunity for the peaceful co-existence of diverse worldviews, thinking lines, cultural stances, social attitudes, personal tastes, etc. (Hongladarom, 2011). Accordingly, pluralistic education is a democratic construct that encompasses diversity in language, culture, mindset, understanding, socio-cultural orientation, and communicative styles and seeks promotion of multicultural and multi-linguistic interaction and peaceful co-existence (Giselbrecht, 2009; Motamed et al., 2013).

Moreover, one of the most important factors in EFL teaching/learning is teacher effectiveness as a central element of the educational systems all over the world due to the belief that effective teaching leads to effective learning, which is the ultimate goal of English classes (Richards, 2015). Chen et al. (2022) relates teacher effectiveness to personal ability of teachers to teach successfully and external impersonal factors that contribute to students' success. To them, teacher effectiveness is of significant effects on learning effectiveness of learners as well as their mental growth. Effective teachers are those capable of changing and transforming students' views and thinking. They are not just seeking to pour a pre-determined amount of knowledge into students' minds. Mehta and Gupta (2022) argue that teacher effectiveness is necessary for quality teaching at various levels and determine pedagogic practices and methods adopted or adapted by teachers in different contexts. Campbell et.al (2004), as a pioneer in teacher effectiveness research, extends the effects of teacher effectiveness to different aspects of classroom including teaching methods, assignment and utilization of resources, and students' performance. Interestingly, Ronald (2009) considers a mutual interplay between teacher effectiveness and classroom outcomes by arguing that teacher effectiveness leads to classroom outcomes and is generated by them. To him, linearity cannot be taken for granted in thinking about teacher effectiveness and teaching products.

2. REVIEW of LITERATURE

Lee (2013) sought to dissect the impediments which block the operationalization of pluralistic principles in international education. Absence of a well-defined set of programs to promote pluralistic education, mental distance between instructors and pluralistic education, shortage of accessible facilities and lack of technical knowledge to bring pluralism down to the educational ground were decoded as the most prevalent challenges. Taylor et al. (2015) launched a research to touch English teachers' attitudes towards pluralistic teacher education and released a report showing that most of the teachers propped the use of pluralistic education in teacher education. In the research by Enyew and Melesse (2018), the extent to which pluralistic principles are already employed in the curricula of the Ethiopian universities was examined and it was confirmed that the respective curricula have been developed with a semi-pluralistic attitude. Parker's (2019) study was concerned with the positive implications of pluralistic education for the field of ELT. The results revealed the re-definition of teaching and evaluation procedures as the most important outcomes of pluralistic education for the ELT field. Zohrabi et al. (2019) set out a modeling study wherein a pluralistic model was proposed to teach English in Iranian high schools which consisted of pluralistic education, pluralistic evaluation, racial and ethnic equality, social class equality, and cultural diversity as its main components. As revealed by a collection of similar studies by Abdeli Soltan Ahmadi and Sadeghi (2016), Colombo (2013), Daryai-Hansen et al. (2015), Mostafazadeh et al. (2015), and Sadeghi (2012), pluralistic teachers.

Concerning teacher effectiveness, Kaboodvand (2013) explored perceptions of a group of Iranian young learners, their parents and language teachers about characteristics of effective language teachers in public



schools. Data collection instruments were interview and questionnaire. To achieve the objectives, a mixed methods design was employed. Data analysis revealed that interviewees regarded teachers' language proficiency, class management, affective factors, appearance and dressing style and ability to build the right rapport with the students as determinants of teacher effectiveness. Navidinia et al. (2014) sought to examine the effectiveness of the current teacher effectiveness evaluation system in Iran from the EFL teachers' perspectives. Besides, they aimed to propose an alternative model. To this end, a survey was done using researcher-made Likert-scaled and open-ended questionnaires. The results indicated the current teacher effectiveness evaluation system was not conducive to teacher professional development and teacher accountability. In a study by Rahimi and Hosseini Karkami (2015), the role of EFL teachers' classroom discipline strategies in their teaching effectiveness and their students' motivation and achievement in learning English as a foreign language was examined. According to the results, teaching effectiveness, motivation and achievement in learning English were significantly correlated with discipline strategies. Furthermore, students perceived those teachers who used involvement and recognition strategies more frequently as more effective teachers and those who used punitive strategies as less effective ones. Shahvand and Rezvani (2016) investigated Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about effective teaching in foreign language classrooms with the aim of addressing the need for a deep understanding of the role of teaching effectiveness in EFL classrooms. The data analysis results showed no significant difference between male and female Iranian EFL teachers in terms of their teaching effectiveness, no significant difference between experienced and novice Iranian EFL teachers' stated beliefs on their effective teaching, and no significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about effective teaching and their effective teaching. In a series of studies by Aho et al. (2010), Bullock (2015), Danielson (2013), Khojastehmehr and Takrimi (2008), Lee (2019), Reynolds et al. (2021), Ramos-Rodríguez et al. (2022), Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009), Shojaei et al. (2022), Starkey (2010), Strong (2007), Wichadee (2010), and Zein (2017), teacher good relation making in the class, teacher emotional behavior, teaching and evaluation method diversity, teacher motivational skills, and digital literacy were enumerated as features of effective teachers.

As it can be seen in the reviewed studies, pluralistic education and teacher effectiveness have been explored from various viewpoints. However, to the best knowledge of the researchers, no study has yet dealt with pluralistic teacher effectiveness from Iranian EFL learners' viewpoints. This study was an attempt to fill this gap.

STATEMENT of PROBLEM

With a view to the above discussion, it is clear that teacher effectiveness and students' learning are closely tied with each other. However, it cannot be denied that, as argued above, effective teachers seek to transform students' mentality and thinking. Obviously, being transformative is not materialized in the absence of the last transformations in educational systems throughout the World. In other words, teachers cannot be effective without taking the most recent ideological transformations and twists in the educational programs of the World. It is convincing enough to lead us to the argument that re-conciliating teacher effectiveness with pluralistic education may contribute to higher quality teaching and learning. That is, teacher effectiveness should be probed as connected to pluralism so that it is made in line with the recent changes in educational systems of the World, among which the emergence of pluralistic education can be mentioned. The first step towards this aim is to cogitate teachers' perceptions of applying the pluralistic education principles in teacher effectiveness. However, it can be observed that although teacher effectiveness and pluralistic education have been addressed in some studies (e.g., Demiroz & Yesilyurt, 2015; Motamed et al., 2013; Parker, 2019; Sezer, et al., 2019; Shahvand & Rezvani, 2016; Zamani & Ahangari, 2016; Zohrabi et al., 2019) at different contexts, it has been neglected by the EFL researchers from the pluralistic viewpoint. This is while, as mentioned above, pluralistic education has encompassed different aspects of the World



educational systems. The horrid outcomes of the negligence of pluralistic education in EFL teacher effectiveness for the realm of EFL teaching/learning can be so serious that compensating it may require unachievable volumes of opportunities and resources. With a view to these arguments this study sought to scrutinize EFL learners' perceptions of pluralistic teacher effectiveness. To justify the novelty of this study, it is worth noting that most of the similar studies have dealt with the issue quantitatively. This is while the present study has taken a qualitative approach. Moreover, usually, previous studies have explored teachers' perception, rather than learners' perceptions.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research question was formulated:

What are the components of pluralistic teacher effectiveness in Iranian EFL learners' perceptions?

3. METHODOLOGY

The suitable design for this study was a basic interpretive design (Creswell, 2015) since it aimed at uncovering the perceptions of EFL teachers of pluralistic teacher effectiveness. 46 (21 males and 25 females) Iranian pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate level EFL learners were selected from across Iran. They were recruited through availability sampling and ranged in age from 18 to 32 years. This group provided essential insights into how learners perceive pluralistic teacher effectiveness.

The primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview, developed specifically to explore perceptions of pluralistic teacher effectiveness from the perspectives of Iranian EFL learners. This format allowed participants to share their views in an open yet guided manner, facilitating both in-depth responses and a degree of consistency across interviews. The interview guide comprised four open-ended questions, each crafted to elicit insights into different dimensions of pluralistic teacher effectiveness, such as inclusivity, cultural responsiveness, and adaptability in teaching.

The interviews were conducted individually in English through the WhatsApp and Telegram platforms, providing flexibility and convenience for participants across various locations in Iran. To ensure clarity and accuracy, the interviews were transcribed verbatim for detailed analysis. The choice of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to probe participants' responses as needed, adding depth to the qualitative data collected.

To strengthen the credibility and dependability of the interview data, two techniques were employed: First, direct quotations from participants were used in the analysis to preserve the authenticity of their responses and reduce researcher bias. Second, interpretations of participants' responses were reviewed and confirmed by the participants themselves, ensuring that their perspectives were accurately represented.

For data collection, the semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with learners, using WhatsApp and Telegram to ensure accessibility and convenience for all participants. Each interview was designed with open-ended questions that allowed participants to share in-depth perspectives on what they considered essential for effective pluralistic teaching. The interviews were conducted in English, with no time limitations to allow participants ample freedom to elaborate. After each interview, the researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim, producing detailed textual data for subsequent analysis. To analyze the data thematically, in the first step, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data through taking notes or reading through the data. Then, to code the data, some phrases were made bold to identify some codes as indicators of the bold parts. Next, the codes were again analyzed to recognize the recurrent themes. Finally, the identified themes were checked in terms of accuracy through a review.



4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following themes were extracted through qualitative thematic analysis of the data. With each theme, two quotations are presented from the participants.

1. Being Accountable to Stakeholders

Accountability and accepting responsibility of one's own actions is of importance in teacher effectiveness. Effective teachers have no problem with accountability to students, parents and administrators. (Participant 28)

Teaching in an effective way is intermingled with showing accountability to different groups of stakeholders from management at the top level to families of students at the lowest level. Without accountability, teaching cannot be categorized as effective. (Participant 41)

2. Generating a Friendly Class Environment

Teachers should attempt to create a class wherein warm and intimate relations does exist among the students as well as between teacher and students. Students should be instructed that they have shared objectives and targets whose materialization requires friendliness. (Participant 46)

Teachers who are eager to be effective should be aware that effectiveness is not achieved in classes where teachers command and students obey. Friendship and warmth in relations should not be neglected in English classes. (Participant 40)

3. Using Technology in Teaching and Assessment

In digital era, no EFL teacher can claim that he is effective but does not try technological advancements in his class. Technological education and pluralistic education are tied to each other. Pluralistic teaching is enemy to traditional methods of doing things. (Participant 29)

Teacher effectiveness in the shadow of pluralism school has no way to flank technology. In a period where technology has penetrated all aspects of life, teaching English cannot be irresponsive to technological achievements. (Participant 2)

4. Having Motivational Skills

I believe that to teach effectively cannot be separated from motivational ability of teacher. A successful teacher is one who can motivate students effectively. This is so important in teaching English that lack of which can be associated with many problems. (Participant 28)

Effectiveness of teaching has many gauges including motivational skill of teachers. Therefore, teacher should be skillful at motivating students in the process of learning. Without motivation, students find language learning a daunting and boring task. (Participant 21)



5. Using Diverse Assessment Methods

Pluralism in education says that students perform differently in different test types. In such a view, teaching effectiveness is equal with using various evaluation methods to allow all students to show their full competence. (Participant 39)

A teacher with high effectiveness does not constrain assessment of students to mainstream procedures. He or she is enlightened that appropriate assessment involves utilization of different techniques. Maybe a student performs well in multiple choice tests but is weak in open-ended exams. (Participant 27)

6. Enacting Classroom Fairness

Implementing fairness in different dimensions of teaching is a characteristic of effective teachers. EFL teacher should be fair in teaching students, supporting them, evaluating and scoring their exams and so on. Teachers should also be fair in expecting learning outcomes from students. (Participant 40)

Justice enactment is a sign of teacher effectiveness. Teachers who act fairly in their profession are really effective in their work. They recognize the right of students to be treated fairly. This enhances their teaching quality and consequently fairness. (Participant 42)

7. Having Warm Interaction with all the Students

All students should benefit from warm interaction with teacher. It is their exclusive right. No student should be deprived from this right. (Participant 20)

Friendship with teacher is a big advantage for any student. Students, whether weak or strong, like friendly interaction with teachers. (Participant 43)

8. Enacting Flexibility in Teaching and Assessment

Teachers should not merely use one teaching method. They should be flexible in teaching. They should even be flexible in assessing students. (Participant 36)

Teachers who are flexible in class are effective. They use different methods of teaching and evaluation. They do not let monotony weakens their teaching. (Participant 10)

9. Using the Same Teaching/Assessment Method for Students with Different Socio-Cultural Backgrounds

If a teacher is affected with social background of students, he is not effective. Social and cultural level of students is not a determinant factor in teaching. (Participant 19)



Teacher effectiveness is not consistent with founding teaching or assessment upon culture or social class to which students belong. All students are to be treated the same in teaching and assessment no matter what is their culture or class. (Participant 22)

10. Avoiding Bias

I think teachers' bias toward some students reduce teacher effectiveness. Teachers must avoid bias in teaching. Bias leads to unjust behaviors that are not welcomed by students. (Participant 18)

If teacher puts bias aside, teacher effectiveness is enhanced. Bias and discrimination should be removed from teaching. Otherwise, teacher effectiveness is not attained successfully because it is not congruent with bias. (Participant 32)

11. Avoiding Racial Subjectivity

Race is a feature that is specific to each person. Each student may have a different race from others. This means that teachers should not behave students based on their race. (Participant 9)

A teacher who pays extra attention to students' race cannot teach effectively. Unimportant things should not be regarded as important by teachers. Racial subjectivity is not moral. (Participant 17)

12. Being Objective in Teaching and Assessment

Objectivity in teaching and assessment leads to teacher effectiveness. Being objective in teaching and assessment is a characteristic of effective teachers. Pluralistic teaching is objective in both teaching and assessment methods. (Participant 35)

Teaching based on objective principles enhances effectiveness of teacher. Personal ideas should not be included in determining teaching procedures. Objective principles should build teaching not personal ones. (Participant 2)

13. Respecting Retarded Students

In fact, some students are retarded. They learn less slowly than normal students. Being retarded does not mean that they do not need respect of teachers. Teachers should respect retarded students. (Participant 33)

Disabled students must not be excluded from class affairs. They should be treated respectfully by others. Respecting retarded students corroborates teacher effectiveness. (Participant 5)

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of the extracted themes.



Table 1
Frequency and Percentage of Extracted Themes

Theme	Being Accountable to Stakeholders	Generating a Friendly Class Environment	Using Technology in Teaching & Assessment	Having Motivational Skills	Using Diverse Assessment Methods	Enacting Classroom Fairness	
Frequency	32	36	24	38	29	40	
Percentage	69.56%	78.26%	52.17%	82.60%	63.04%	86.95%	
Theme	Having Warm Interaction with all the Students	Enacting Flexibility in Teaching & Assessment	Using the Same Teaching/Assessment Method for Students with Different Socio-Cultural Backgrounds	Avoiding Bias	Avoiding Racial Subjectivity	Being Objective in Teaching & Assessment	Respecting Retarded Students
Frequency	42	34	30	32	30	45	24
Percentage	91.30%	73.91%	65.21%	69.56%	65.21%	97.82%	52.17%

As indicated in the Table 1, all the themes have been recurrent in the quotations of more than 52.17% of the participants.

The following themes were extracted through qualitative thematic analysis of the data: Being Accountable to Stakeholders, Generating a Friendly Class Environment, Using Technology in Teaching and Assessment, Having Motivational Skills, Using Diverse Assessment Methods, Enacting Classroom Fairness, Having Warm Interaction with all the Students, Enacting Flexibility in Teaching and Assessment, Using the Same Teaching/Assessment Method for Students with Different Socio-Cultural Backgrounds, Avoiding Bias, Avoiding Racial Subjectivity, Being Objective in Teaching and Assessment, and Respecting Retarded Students. Some of the extracted themes are in line with the findings of Aho et al. (2010), Bullock (2015), Danielson (2013), Kaboodvand (2013), Khojastehmehr and Takrimi (2008), Lee (2019), Reynolds et al. (2021), Ramos-Rodríguez et al. (2022), Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009), Shojaei et al. (2022), Starkey (2010), Strong (2007), Wichadee (2010), and Zein (2017). Further, in the studies by Abdeli Soltan Ahmadi and Sadeghi (2016), Colombo (2013), Daryai-Hansen et al. (2015), Mostafazadeh et al. (2015), Sadeghi (2012) and Zohrabi et al. (2019), some other themes were similarly found. Finally, some themes were similar to the findings of Aparicio-Molina and Sepúlveda-López (2023), Beqiri and Sylaj (2021) and Enyew and Melesse (2018).

To justify the findings, it is worth noting that effective EFL teaching is a multi-layered construct that is the product of interaction among different types of knowledge and skill. That is, EFL teacher effectiveness is not a unitary construct that is achieved in the vacuum. More importantly, effective teaching with a pluralistic stance cannot be achieved in the absence of several kinds of knowledge, ability, skill and practice, some of which have been identified in the present study. It means that different kinds of knowledge, practice, skill, and ability should be reconciliated for pluralistic EFL teacher effectiveness to be achieved. Thus, pluralistic effective teaching is not a simple or linear task that any EFL teacher can perform regardless of



their knowledge and actions in English language classes. Rather, it is a specialized profession that requires the integration of theory and practice in terms of teacher effectiveness and pluralistic education.

To support the above arguments, as put by Starkey (2010), teacher effectiveness entails a series of basic knowledge and skill, subject matter knowledge, behavior in the classroom context, and teaching methods which make teaching remarkably different from many other professions. The important thing is that when pluralism comes into play, such types of knowledge, skill and practice are queued in a specific direction, so that pluralistic principles are not missed. In other words, knowledge, skill and practice of EFL teachers should have specific properties so that their teacher effectiveness becomes pluralistic.

Moreover, it can be argued that since pluralistic education is intermingled with diversity and variety as opposed to the sameness and similarity, it seems reasonable that the participants perceive mastery over content in different fields, teaching through different teaching methods or strategies, and using diverse assessment methods as significant factors in pluralistic teacher effectiveness. The rationale behind this argument is that one single static and inflexible form of instruction or assessment cannot fully reveal learners' learning and development. Additionally, it seeks to promote this idea that diversity of teaching and evaluation methods indirectly leads to development of teachers' potentials, and encourages democratic attitudes and values among them. In addition, it removes domination of one type of teaching and assessment in educational contexts. Moreover, with a view to the fact equality and fairness have been assigned a high weight in pluralistic education, it is justified that the participants of this study refer to building verbal relations with all students, being accountable, identifying learning styles of all students, showing care and support to all students, and enacting classroom fairness in stating their perceptions of pluralistic teacher effectiveness. Furthermore, participation, engagement, and active involvement of students via any practical and possible means are considered as inevitable aspects of pluralistic education. This can be a reason for the participants' mentioning generating a friendly class environment, and having motivational skills in their views about pluralistic teacher effectiveness. Further, teaching in line with the latest developments in the field of education is a main component of pluralistic education. Therefore, the participants did not ignore the role of technology and mentioned teaching reflectively, and using technology in teaching and assessment in their opinions about pluralistic teacher effectiveness.

All in all, teacher effectiveness is a multi-faceted phenomenon wherein several issues are at play. It is not the product of a single issue, rather, it is a complex and dynamic concept which is the outcome of various components. It is the mission of teachers to take the extracted themes into consideration in their teaching in a way that their teaching effectiveness is enhanced. With a view to the pivotal role of teacher effectiveness in learning quality, this may help EFL learners learn English with a higher quality.

5. CONCLUSION

According to the results, it is concluded that pluralistic teacher effectiveness is not shaped in a vacuum. But it passes from various channels including class communication, students' learning styles, content diversity, method diversity, supporting students, reflective teaching, fairness and equity, and corrective feedback provision. It is also concluded that without accountability to stakeholders, employment of technology, motivation students, evaluation diversity, flexibility in different teaching dimensions and objectivity, pluralistic teacher effectiveness is too difficult to take place.

Further, it can be concluded that pluralistic classroom management, pluralistic pedagogy and pluralistic ethics jointly build pluralistic teacher effectiveness. That is, without penetration of pluralism into classroom



management, pedagogy and ethics, EFL teacher effectiveness does not conform to pluralism. Therefore, EFL teachers should seek to manage classroom pluralistically, make their teaching and evaluation methods pluralistic, and follow ethics of teaching in line with pluralism to achieve pluralistic teacher effectiveness. If teachers pay attention to pluralistic principles in different aspects of teaching, they can claim that their teaching is pluralistically effective. Otherwise, a monotonous teaching environment is generated devoid of pluralistic issues.

Implications of the findings are important for EFL teachers and teacher educators. Teachers should pay more attention to the extracted perceptions in this study if they wish to improve their teaching in line with pluralistic education. Teacher educators are recommended to train teachers on the notions stated by the participants because learners play an important role in the process of teaching and learning. They are not mere recipients of learning materials.

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