On EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Pluralistic Teacher Effectiveness: Iranian Teachers in Focus

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Abstract

Seeking to promote multicultural and multi-linguistic interaction and peaceful co-existence, pluralistic education is a democratic construct that encompasses diversity in language, culture, mindset, understanding, socio-cultural orientation, and communicative styles. Moreover, teacher effectiveness is a crucial factor in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching/learning. Combining the two concerns, this study aimed at exploring EFL teachers' perceptions of pluralistic teacher effectiveness. It benefited from a basic interpretive design. A group of 30 Iranian male and female EFL instructors participated in the present study, selected through convenient sampling

from State and Azad universities in Iran. A one-on-one semi-structured interview was used to collect data. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Data analysis revealed the following perceptions of pluralistic teacher effectiveness among EFL teachers : Building Verbal Relations with all Students, Identifying Learning Styles of all Students, Mastery over Content in Different Fields, Teaching through Different Teaching Methods or Strategies, Showing Care and Support to all Students, Teaching Reflectively, Being Accountable, Generating a Friendly Class Environment, Using Technology, Having Motivational Skills, Using Diverse Assessment Methods, and Enacting Classroom Fairness. 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

Globalization affects various aspects of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching/learning. Pluralistic educational communities are the products of the effects globalization has had on education (Zohrabi, Razmjoo, & Ahmadi, 2019). Stika (2012) describes a paradigm shift that uses pluralism in education to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge and ideology through 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 endeavor that encompasses diversity in language, culture, mindset, understanding, socio-cultural orientation, and communicative styles to promote multicultural and multi-linguistic interaction and peaceful co-existence (Giselbrecht, 2009; Motamed et al., 2013).

Moreover, teacher effectiveness is a central element of the educational systems all over the world due to the belief that effective teaching leads to effective learning (Richards, 2015). Chen et al. (2022) relates teacher effectiveness to teachers' personal ability to teach successfully and external impersonal factors that contribute to students' success. They believe that teacher effectiveness influences both learning outcomes and learners' mental development. 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, determining 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. Ronald (2009) suggests a reciprocal relationship between teacher effectiveness and classroom outcomes. He argues that teacher effectiveness produces and is produced by classroom outcomes. He rejects the idea of a linear connection between teacher effectiveness and teaching products.

The above discussion shows that teacher effectiveness and students' learning are interrelated. However, as argued above, effective teachers seek to transform students' mentality and thinking. Being transformative requires keeping up with the latest changes and trends in the educational systems of the world. Teachers cannot be effective without considering the most recent ideological shifts and developments in the educational programs of the world. This suggests that aligning teacher effectiveness with pluralistic education can enhance the quality of teaching and learning. That is, teacher effectiveness should be examined in relation to pluralism to make it consistent with the recent changes in the world's educational systems, such as the emergence of pluralistic

education. The first step towards this aim is to cogitate teachers' perceptions on the application of 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. However, as stated above, pluralistic education has affected different aspects of the world's educational systems. The negative consequences of ignoring pluralistic education in EFL teacher effectiveness can be so severe that they may require unattainable amounts of opportunities and resources to remedy. With a view to these arguments this study sought to scrutinize EFL teachers' perceptions of pluralistic teacher effectiveness. In so doing, the following research question was formulated:

1. What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of pluralistic teacher effectiveness?

2. Literature Review

Several studies have approached towards the investigation of pluralistic education as well as teacher effectiveness from different viewpoints. For example, on pluralistic education, 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) carried out a study to touch English teachers' attitudes towards pluralistic teacher education, reporting that most of the teachers proponed the use of pluralistic education in teacher education. A study by Enyew and Melesse

(2018) examined the extent to which pluralistic principles had already been employed in the curricula of the Ethiopian universities. The study found that the respective curricula had 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 study found that the re-definition of teaching and evaluation procedures was the most important outcomes of pluralistic education for the ELT field. Zohrabi et al. (2019) proposed a pluralistic model 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. Similar models have been proposed 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. Adopting a mixed-methods design, they used an interview and a questionnaire to collect data. The interviewees identified teachers' language proficiency, class management, affection, appearance and dressing style and ability to build the right rapport with the students as determinants of teacher effectiveness. Navidinia et al. (2014) investigated how the EFL teachers in Iran perceived the current teacher effectiveness evaluation system. Besides, they aimed to propose an alternative model. They employed a survey, using researcher-made Likert-scale and open-ended questionnaires. The study indicated the current teacher effectiveness evaluation system was not conducive to teacher professional development and teacher accountability. A study by Rahimi and Hosseini Karkami (2015) examined whether teachers' classroom discipline strategies influenced their teaching effectiveness and their students' motivation and achievement in learning English as a foreign language. The study found that

teaching effectiveness, motivation and achievement in learning English were significantly influenced by discipline strategies. Furthermore, the students most often perceived those teachers who used involvement and recognition strategies as more effective teachers than those who used punitive strategies. 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. They found 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 how effective they were. 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), the following features of effective teachers were enumerated: building good relationship with students, expressing emotions appropriately, Using diverse methods of teaching and evaluation, motivating students effectively, and being digitally literate.

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 teachers' viewpoints. This study was an attempt to fill this gap.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

The basic interpretive design was employed to uncover the perceptions of EFL teachers of pluralistic teacher effectiveness. The basic interpretive design is a type of design wherein the researcher is interested in understanding how the participants make meaning in a situation (Creswell, 2015).

3.2 Participants

Selected through convenient sampling from state and Azad universities in Iran, a group of 30 Iranian male and female EFL teachers participated in the present study. They were MA and Ph.D. holders in different branches of the English major with 5 to 25 years of teaching English experience. They were in the 35-50 age range. Data saturation point was the criterion used to determine the sample size. Research ethics was observed in the sample selection by making the participants conscious of the purposes of the study and ensuring them about the anonymity and confidentiality of their personal information. Further, they took part in the study voluntarily in the absence of any obligation.

3.3 Instrument

A one-on-one semi-structured interview was used to collect data. Semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method that merges a pre-set series of open questions with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore the interviewees' responses (Creswell, 2015). The semi-structured interview used in the present study included three open-ended questions which were carefully derived similar previous studies. To ensure the credibility and dependability of the interview data, low-inference descriptors and member checks were used.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

To start data collection, the selected participants were requested to attend a one-on-one interview. Local social networks were used for the convenience of the participants. The interview was conducted in English with no pre-set time boundary. Before the interview, the interviewees gave their consent to their voice being recorded. Then, the audio-recorded files were transcribed verbatim for thematic 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 help them 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

The following themes were recognized in the transcribed data as a result of thematic analysis:

1. **Building Verbal Relations with all Students**

Pluralistic teacher effectiveness means that EFL teachers should communicate verbally with all the students. No student is superior to other students in this regard. (Participant 11)

Effective teaching based on pluralism has several characteristics including building relationship with all the class students indiscriminately. English teachers should not have bias towards or against some students. (Participant 5)

2. **Identifying Learning Styles of all Students**

To teach pluralistically effective, EFL teachers should first of all know that students learn differently through different personal strategies. They are to identify students' learning styles and try to adapt their teaching methods to their students' styles of learning. (Participant 16)

Pluralism can be shown in teaching by paying attention to learning styles of different students. Just teaching based on one or two students' styles is problematic according to pluralistic school of thought. (Participant 9)

3. Mastery over Content in Different Fields

Effective teachers who are in line with pluralistic ideas should have basic knowledge of different fields other than English field. This helps them respond to students' needs in the classes. It also helps them teach English better. (Participant 17)

Pluralistic education in effective teaching implies having command of different fields. EFL teachers should know sociology, psychology, politics, and other fields to some extent. (Participant 10)

4. Teaching through Different Teaching Methods or Strategies

Merge of pluralism with teacher effectiveness leads to using different teaching methods. In fact, teachers should be competent enough in teaching to use a set of teaching methods rather than a specific method. (Participant 30)

Pluralistic teaching is not compatible with limitations and boundaries. Therefore, English teachers should benefit from various teaching strategies and techniques. This means that they should not limit their teaching to a fabricated teaching method. (Participant 25)

5. Showing Care and Support to all Students

Congruent with pluralism, EFL teachers, regardless of the proficiency level of the students, should be careful to all the students who are present in the class. They should not show bias in the class. (Participant 3)

According to pluralistic ideas, all the learners should be exposed to teacher's passion and attention equally. Differences in the background of students or their English proficiency level should not encourage teachers to pay more heed to some students. (Participant 14)

6. Teaching Reflectively

Reflectivity in teaching is very important in pluralistic education. Teachers should follow reflective teaching principles to increase their teaching effectiveness. In this way, they may experience higher teaching achievement (Participant 11)

Reflective teaching is a part and parcel of pluralistic teaching since pluralism says that without reflection on action not much success can be expected. Accordingly, EFL teachers are required to reflect on their teaching to recognize what works and what does not work in their teaching. (Participant 19)

7. Being Accountable

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 21)

8. 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 16)

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 warmness in relations should not be neglected in English classes. (Participant 6)

9. Using Technology

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 19)

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 1)

10. 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 18)

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 11)

11. 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 9)

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)

12. 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 10)

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 12)

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

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Extracted Themes

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Building Verbal Relations with all Students	28	93.33
Identifying Learning Styles of all Students	26	86.66
Mastery over Content in Different Fields	28	93.33
Teaching through Different Teaching Methods or Strategies	24	80
Showing Care and Support to all Students	26	86.66
Teaching Reflectively	28	93.33
Being Accountable	23	76.66
Generating a Friendly Class Environment	29	96.66
Using Technology	25	83.33
Having Motivational Skills	22	73.33
Using Diverse Assessment Methods	30	100
Enacting Classroom Fairness	20	66.66

5. Discussion

As mentioned above, to be effective, teachers should take the most recent ideological transformations and twists in the educational programs of the World into consideration. Accordingly, teacher effectiveness is worth investigating as tied to pluralism, so that it is made congruent with the recent changes in educational systems of the World, an instance of which is the emergence of pluralistic education. With a view to this, the present study sought to explore Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of pluralistic teacher effectiveness. As revealed by the results, the

following perceptions were extracted concerning pluralistic teacher effectiveness among Iranian EFL teachers: Building Verbal Relations with all Students, Identifying Learning Styles of all Students, Having Mastery over the Content in Different Fields, Teaching through Different Teaching Methods or Strategies, Showing Care and Support to all Students, Teaching Reflectively, Being Accountable, Generating a Friendly Class Environment, Using Technology, Having Motivational Skills, Using Diverse Assessment Methods, Enacting Classroom Fairness.

The findings 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) that reported similar characteristics for the effective teachers. 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), similar features were enumerated for pluralistic teachers.

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. 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. 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.

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. Finally, 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 their opinions about pluralistic teacher effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that if EFL teachers seek to teach effectively as well as pluralistically, they should build verbal and emotional interaction with all the students in the class. In this way, discrimination in its simplest form is reduced in educational contexts. Further, it can be concluded that teaching effectively with pluralistic position is not compatible with traditional mainstream assessment methods already used in many educational places. However, pluralistically effective teachers should use different forms of assessment at the service of assessing EFL learners' English achievement. Additionally, it is concluded that giving motivation to the students and remaining accountable to them in a warm and friendly situation is among the things which push EFL teachers forward to effective teaching based on pluralism. Finally, it can be concluded that to pave the ground for the reconciliation of effective teaching with pluralistic education, EFL teachers should resort to diverse teaching methods so that all the students can benefit from the method(s) that more accords to their learning style.

As such, the findings have some implications for EFL teachers, teacher educators and teacher education curriculum planners. EFL teachers can take advantage of the findings in trying to teach EFL effectively and in line with pluralistic education. EFL teacher educators can use the findings in educating pre-service and in-service teachers based on the pluralistic principles. EFL teacher education curriculum planners may plan future curricula in a way that pluralistic lessens and effective teacher characteristics are taken into account.

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