An Examination into the Role of English Teachers' Stroking Behavior in their Effectiveness from the Iranian Learners' Perspectives

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Abstract

Introduction: The quality of teacher-learner relationship plays such an important role in learners' academic lives that finding the factors helping teacher effectiveness seems to be investigated worthwhile. Stroke, as a relatively new concept in education, is one of these factors helping teacher effectiveness. This paper, thus, aimed to find whether the amount and the kind of stroke learners receive in their class might have any role in how they perceive their teachers to be effective.
Method: Through convenience sampling, 400 male and female English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners from both formal and informal educational settings of the Khorasan Razavi province were selected to whom two sets of questionnaires, Characteristics of Effective English Language Teachers Scale and Student Stroke Scale were administrated. In this survey study, structural equation modeling and multiple regression analysis were then used to examine the possible relationships among the study variables.
Results: The regression analyses of the results revealed a positive relationship between stroke and teacher effectiveness. In addition, among the four subscales of stroke, valuing and verbal stroke were found to be the significant predictors of teacher effectiveness. These findings were then discussed in the light of previous research.
Conclusion: Due to the newness of the research in this area and the limitations as discussed for the current study, future researchers were invited to study the interrelationships of stroke and some other variables in teacher effectiveness since such studies could better reveal the nature of stroking behaviors in producing healthy teacher-learner bonds in educational settings.

Keywords: Teacher Effectiveness, Stroke, Valuing, EFL Learners, EFL Teachers

Introduction

Education has always been an inevitable part of human life, and research in educational field has so far formed a continuation line. From this respect, the integral goal of any educational planning should be to assist learners to develop different dimensions of cognitive, social, and knowledge-enhancing skills [1-3].

Moreover, in some countries like Iran in which language learning is just restricted to informal class situations, teachers function as facilitators of learning through establishing sound interactions with learners, maintaining emotional equilibrium [4], and providing opportunities for learners to recognize their talents and implement them.

Since effective teacher-learner communication is pivotal in satisfying learners' emotional needs, social researchers have paid great attention to the quality and essence of this relationship [5-7]. Several studies have also focused on various factors that establish sound teacher-learner interaction, namely teacher effectiveness [8-13], teacher care [14-16],

teacher immediacy [17-19], and teachers' personality traits [20].

However, in teacher effectiveness researches, a missing topic may turn up that has not been thoroughly discussed. This topic is actually stroke. Indeed, in getting learners involved, the recognition or the credit teachers give to them is quite important [21, 22]. Stroke is thus applied with the intention of satisfying this "recognition hunger", and both teachers and learners are similarly on a continuous line of stroke hunger [23]. A teacher (stroker) can stroke learners (strokees) in several ways such as acknowledging their names, providing enough feedback to them, letting them express themselves, and encouraging them in various possible ways, thus teachers have a major role in creating rich learning environments [24]. Concerning the notion of stroke, very few studies have systematically studied it [6, 25-27]. Stroke is one of the integral parts of teacher care that seeks to maintain efficacious relationships among teachers and learners [16, 28].

Strokes are exchanged unconsciously and continuously and that is why all individuals need to be acknowledged by others [29, 30]. In giving and taking stroke, individuals use various ways. In this regard, [30] have classified stroke into *Positive/ Negative*, *Verbal / Non-verbal*, *Conditional /Unconditional*. Positive strokes are those pleasant actions and responses by means of which a teacher interacts with a learner. Negative strokes, on the other hand, are unpleasant to learners. Verbal strokes are also exchanges of spoken words or sentences while the non-verbal strokes use any kinds of activities or gestures in which no word is uttered by a teacher. Finally, in this classification, we have conditional strokes that are only dependent on what an individual does while the unconditional strokes are related to what an individual really is.

Although negative strokes in any kinds have negative effects on receivers, [30] have argued that any type of stroke is better than receiving no stroke at all. Nevertheless, positive strokes are more elemental in mental health development and positive quality of one's life [23, 31].

By examining the amount of stroke students received in different language majors of Persian, English, and Arabic, [25] found that Arabic and English teachers gave more strokes to learners. Another study also examined the relationship between stroke and burnout indicating that burnout was positively related to personal achievement and negatively to stroke [27]. However, these are only a few research on stroke and the gaps of scientific knowledge in this regard must be experimentally filled up.

In the literature of educational psychology, a very overlapping term that carries the same goal as stroke is teacher immediacy. Immediacy is defined as perceived psychological or physical closeness between teachers and learners [19] and is seen as teachers' expression of liking, which ameliorates teacher-learner interpersonal relationships [32]. Earlier research in teacher immediacy has revealed that teacher immediacy positively contributes to teachers and instructional effectiveness [17, 18]. Similar to stroke, immediacy is also classified into *Verbal* and *Non-verbal* [33, 34]. It has been found that between verbal and non-verbal immediacy, students used both types of immediacy, but mostly the verbal one [34]. Unlike stroke that suffers from inadequate research, a plentitude of studies have been conducted to examine the effect of teacher immediacy behaviors [17, 18,34-38].

Stroke is hypothesized to be a positive factor in improving teaching quality. Thus, any research about the amount and type of teachers' stroking behaviors can be of paramount significance since its findings can further shed lights on, for example, the way pre-service teachers can regulate teacher-learner relationships to establish emotional equilibrium in classroom settings. Second, such findings can benefit teachers to broaden their perception of stroke if they want to gain more recognition from learners. Third, teachers using stoke can promote learners' achievement motivation, and help them grow more optimistic about their progress and concentrate on their strengths [5, 39].

With the main goal of filling the literature gap in stroke studies the present study tried to find out more about the relationships between stroke and teacher effectiveness in Iranian EFL context including both informal and formal settings of English teaching. It is worth to mention that the previous related studies have been mostly conducted in either language institutes or just universities while examining the issue in both educational contexts seems to be timely. The current study also was concentrated on the two following key research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between stroke and teacher effectiveness from the Iranian EFL learners' viewpoints?
2. Which subscale(s) of stroke can strongly predict teacher effectiveness?

Method

To fulfill the objectives of the present quantitative survey study, a total of 400 English as a foreing langauge learners, from Khorasan Razavi province were chosen through convenience sampling. The EFL learners included 190 language learners, 93 males and 97 females, from various private language institutes with the age range of 18 to 22. Furthermore, 210 English major university students, 142 males and 68 females, from Neyshabur, Mashhad and Sabzevar universities, Iran, were the other portion of the sample. The mean age of the total sample was 18.95 (SD=4.53). For the aim of enhancing the possibility of generalization, the participants selectively collaborated from both formal and informal pedagogical settings. Thus, all the participants were of the two proficiency levels in English: upper-intermediate and advanced levels. Moreover, the participants took part quite willingly in filling up the research questionnaires.

The tools used in this study were as follows:

Characteristics of Effective English Language Teachers Scale:

To assess EFL teachers' performance and effectiveness in English language teaching, a 40-item questionnaire in English, named Characteristics of Effective English Language Teachers Scale was employed [40-42]. It was a

five point Likert type scale ranging from 1 *(Strongly agree*) to 5 *(Strongly disagree)*. It consists of four subscales: English proficiency (5 items), pedagogical knowledge (17 items), organization and communication skills (8 items), and socio-affective skills (10 items). The internal reliability of the scale was assessed by Cronbach's alpha. Moreover, indices of internal consistency in four subscales were, English proficiency 87%, pedagogical knowledge 74%, organization and communication skills 80%, and socio-affective skills 89 %. Its reliability and validity was checked in three descriptive stages including generating an item pool, reviewing the items by experts, and selecting the final items in Wichadee's scale. Its reliability in the present study was .89.

Student Stroke Scale

To assess students' stroke in response to teachers' actions and behaviors, an 18 items Persian questionnaire named Student Stroke Scale (SSS), designed and validated by [6] was employed. This scale was a five point summated rating scale ranging from 1(*never*) to 5(*always*). The SSS consists of four subscales: Classroom activities (CA), Valuing (VI), Non-verbal (NV), and Verbal (VS). The reported value of reliability was estimated from .75 to .89. Regarding the estimated reliability value for four subscales, the whole reliability value was .78. The reliability of the whole scale in the present study was .91.

The first step in the process of data collection was to distribute the two questionnaires among the learners both at universities and institutes. For the aim of receiving more reliable answers, the researcher explained the purpose of completing the questionnaires and assured that all the ethical matters, namely the confidentiality and anonymity of their information were taken into consideration. This anonymity was presumed to enhance the rate of veracity in students' responses. Also the participants were informed that filling the scales was voluntary. Following collecting the data, the normality of data distribution was checked by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Then, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to shed light on the causal relationships among the intended variables. Finally, the coefficient of the standard regression was employed to find out which subscale(s) of stroke could predict teacher effectiveness.

Results

The descriptive statistics, presented in the following table provide the required information for the analysis of the two variables. Descriptive statistics of stroke and its subscales, i.e., verbal, non-verbal, valuing, and classroom activities are presented in Table 1. As the Table shows, among four subscales of stroke, valuing has the highest mean (3.35) and non-verbal has the lowest mean (2.84).

Structural Equation Modeling

In order to address the first research question, SEM was conducted to examine the strengths of the causal relationships and predictive power between stroke and its subscales in teacher effectiveness. In the proposed model, stroke predicted stroke and stroke predicted teacher effectiveness reciprocally. Moreover, among the four subscales, valuing and then verbal stroke predicted teacher effectiveness. The ultimate model can be seen in Figure 1. The figure shows that stroke is a positive significant predictor of teacher effectiveness in language teaching (β= .41, p<0.05).

Moreover, descriptive statistics of teacher effectiveness scale is presented in Table 2. As the table shows, the reported mean for teacher effectiveness is 186.90 with standard deviation of 26.79.

Furthermore, to check the acceptability of the model, goodness of fit indices was employed. In the current study, five indices of X^2/df, GFI, CFI, NFI and RMSEA were used. Having a fit model, X^2/df should be less than 3, GFI, CFI, NFI should be more than .90, and RMSEA should be less than .08 (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). As Table 3 indicates, all the fit indices were above the cutoff points. Hence, it can be concluded that the proposed model had an acceptable fit with the empirical data.

With regards to the second research question, multiple regression was used in order to examine how the four subscales of stroke contributed to the prediction of teacher effectiveness. To examine the linearity of the relationship between the subscales in the regression model, the Beta values under Standardized Coefficients were used [43]. The value of the regression coefficient is presented in column B; these values indicate the importance of each variable (Table 4).

Based on statistical values in Table 4, VI (Beta= .46) made the strongest prediction in teacher effectiveness. After VI, VS and to a lower extent CA had the most correlation with the dependent variable. In addition, only NV (Sig=.35) did not predict teacher effectiveness statistically.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of stroke and subscale

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Verbal	400	1.00	5.00	3.33	.84
Non-verbal	400	1.00	5.00	2.84	.92
Valuing	400	1.33	9.67	3.35	.89
Class Activities	400	1.25	4.75	2.96	.84
Total Stroke	400	1.44	4.78	3.14	.64

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of effective English language teachers scale

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teacher Effectiveness	400	95.00	235.00	186.90	26.79

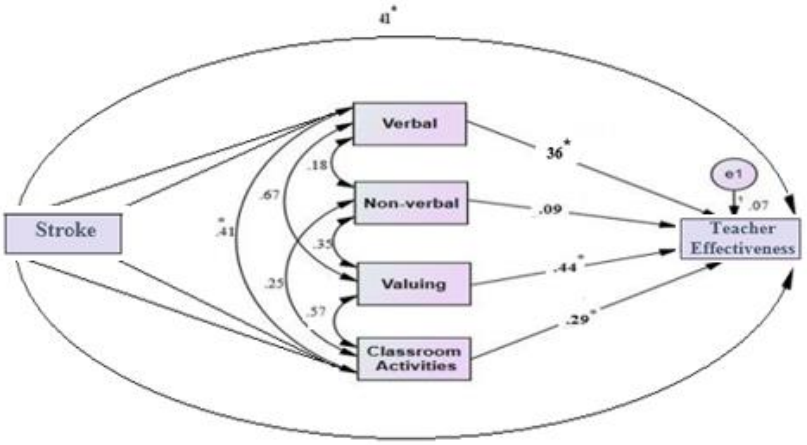

Figure1. The schematic representation of stroke, and teacher effectiveness

Table 3. Goodness of fit indices

	X2/df	GFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Acceptable Fit Model	<3S	>.90	>.90	>.90	<.08
	2.35	.93	.92	.94	.05

Table 4. Coefficients of the standard multiple regression

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant[a])	147.90	10.28		14.38	.001
VS	9.48	3.36	.27	2.81	.04
NV	-3.16	3.40	-.09	-.93	.35
VI	13.41	2.77	.46	4.83	.02
CA	6.73	3.45	.13	1.94	.05

a. Dependent variable: Teacher effectiveness

Discussion

Regarding the first research question, the results indicate that there is a positive relationship between stroke and teacher effectiveness. This finding is supported by [26], who found a significant relationship between stroke and teacher effectiveness. It is also backed up by [44] and [45] studies in which they explained that learners strongly emphasized teachers' personalities and behavioral traits rather than just their mere abilities to teach. Implicitly, we can say that learners' primary emphasis on teachers' behavioral traits can include teachers' stroking behaviors at the same time. The finding also carries the overtones of what Irajzad et al. found in 2016 indicating that among Persian, English, and Arabic teachers, Arabic and English teachers gave more amount of stroke to students, thus they were regarded as more successful in their profession compared to the Persian language teachers.

Regarding this meaning association, it can be further explained that stroke is interconnected with various positive consequences including students' more attendance, lower anxiety, improvement in educational achievement, enhanced study time, decreased rate of drop-out, and higher levels of autonomous motivation [28, 46, 47].

According to [48] in a research on essay writing, the learners whose teachers interacted positively and regularly were more successful in carrying out the required writing tasks. In other words, the extent to which the teachers provided their learners with positive strokes, could guarantee the teacher's effectiveness in the eyes of learners. Thus, it can be concluded that in a bidirectional teacher-learner relationship, when teachers become effective stokers, they can take a leaping step towards success; moreover, stroking reinforces the very particular behavior which is shown for stroking [31].

We can also compare the findings by [25, 6], with the first result. Teachers gain success when teaching situations are free from psychological and physical tensions. Foreign language teaching profession, by nature, is accompanied by learners' anxiety which makes teachership a stressful career [37]. Hence, stroke can be a means for gaining teacher success. According to [27], teachers who provide their learners with more strokes would less experience burnout. Furthermore, she believes that stroke is amongst the very factors which leads to teachers' eagerness and effectiveness in teachership and willingness to continue their profession. Therefore, stroke is a readily available source of enhancing teachers' chance of becoming successful, and thus ameliorating the conditions under which they may experience burnout.

With regard to the second question, the results indicate that among the four subscales of stroke, first valuing and then verbal strokes correlated significantly with teacher effectiveness. In this study, the valuing subscale as the first predictor of teacher effectiveness referred to the sufficient time a teacher devoted to learners inside or outside the class and the amount of learners' gains in scientific

knowledge and positive personal experiences in the class [6]. Paying attention also referred to efforts to provide stroke which could make learners feel motivated and wanted. In the EFL setting, the only place where learners can find opportunities to use language is the classroom, therefore maintaining a class atmosphere in which learners feel respected and wanted by teachers facilitates success for both teachers and learners [49]. Teachers need to provide students with adequate time to take part in class activities and make them feel free to talk about their personal experiences and emotions. In fact, efficacious teacher-learner relationship can be considered as a worthwhile source of learning and motivational supports and positive interpersonal skills [50, 5]. Simply put, [51] has also asserted that an effective teacher is the one who recognizes himself as an important contributor in learners' achievements. Furthermore, according to [52] those teachers who often make use of recognition and involvement strategies are viewed to be more successful. Thus, teacher-learn relationships based on respect, affection, and positive reciprocity can impact both learners' motivational states and teachers' effectiveness [6].

The second result is also consistent with some earlier studies such as the ones conducted by [36] implicitly supporting the predictability of verbal stroke in teacher effectiveness. Using prosocial actions /approaches (based on rewards) can change learners' behaviors cognitively and affectively and increases learners' perception of teacher immediacy. Based on Gorham, students' understanding of teacher immediacy or his/her positive behavior is extensively influenced by his/her verbal behaviors. In other words, teachers through being more humorous, praising students for their manners and ideas, giving different types of feedback on class performances, calling their students by names, and letting them be free to choose favorite discussion topics encourage their students to speak and produce effective teacher-learner interactions, all leading to students' cognitive and affective enhancement. In fact, teachers' verbal behaviors are such important that according to Guvendir [53], in most studies related to teacher feedback only verbal performances of teachers have been considered as feedback.

The correlation between verbal stroke and teacher effectiveness also signifies teachers' openness and friendliness with learners. When teachers care for their learners by giving them verbal strokes such as "Let's do it together" instead of "You should do this", they indeed provide the prerequisites of all types of effective teacher-learner relationships in class. As stated by [36] the use of verbal messages/behaviors is a means to communicate emotions or feelings.

Simply put, in EFL contexts where communication is a more immediate and essential feature of every classroom situation, employing verbal strokes by teachers would greatly help in developing more stable teacher-learner relationships.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that EFL teachers' stroking behaviors predict their effectiveness as viewed from learners' perspectives. It has been argued that an effective teacher enjoys several characteristics such as having good knowledge of attitudes, teaching via L_2, having suitable appearance, being available even out of class time, paying attention to learners, and having flexibility in presenting instructional materials [10, 11]. In the current study, besides language proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, organization and communicative skills, findings indicated that effective teachers used strokes (especially valuing & verbal stroke). This sheds light on more crucial factors regarding teacher effectiveness that if affirmed by teacher training courses, will lead to a more productive teacher education. In the same vein, [54] asserted that: "it's time to focus on the rightly basic issues affecting learners' judgements on what constitutes an effective teacher".

To conclude, it is unlikely to conduct a study without any limitations. Accordingly, while carrying out this study some limitations were recognized. This is why readers should be cautious in generalizing the findings. Some of the limitations were as follows: First of all, these findings are contextualized by an Iranian sample of learners. Second, for the current study two sets of questionnaires were used as the main research tools. Further studies are also required to collect data via class observations, or even expert interviews. Third, the demographic variables of age and gender were not the focus of study; therefore, future studies are suggested to examine whether or not the demographic changes can affect stroking behaviors of teachers. In addition, further studies are recommended to examine teachers' age and gender as relevant variables in scrutinizing their possible roles in teacher effectiveness. Finally, researchers are encouraged to examine the interrelationships of stroke, teacher effectiveness and some other variables within the field of education. This can certainly help us to better understand the nature of stroking behaviors in creating productive teacher-learner bonds in educational settings.

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