The Relationship between Students' Perceptions of EFL Teachers' Interpersonal Teaching Behavior and their English Achievement in Ethiopian Universities

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between students' perception of English as a Foreign Language teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior and their English language achievement. To attain this objective, a correlational research design was employed. Participants of the study were 177 first year students enrolled in the department of English Language and Literature at selected Universities. The study used purposive, and systematic random sampling techniques. Questionnaire on teacher interaction and English achievement test were used to gather data. The findings revealed that understanding was perceived as interpersonal behavior which occurred most often in EFL classes followed by strict, student freedom, & leadership respectively. Apart from this, uncertain behavior was found to be least perceived behavior in the classrooms. Also, the finding indicated that teachers in the sample areas were less dominant but more cooperative over the communication process with their students. In line with relationships, the study found positive & significant correlations between students' English achievement & their teachers understanding, & leadership behavior. In sense of its contribution, understanding, followed by leadership interpersonal behavior was found to be the most powerful and significant variable on the students' English achievement. Finally, it was recommended that teachers be given trainings continuously about teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior and its relationship to students' learning.

Keywords: English Achievement; Students' Perception; Teachers Interpersonal Teaching behavior

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Introduction

One can hardly deny that English language plays a very important role in the major aspects of life in this global era. It is the most widely spoken language in the world. At the national level, the Ethiopian government has scrutinized English language as a necessary means for developing the country and hence as a keystone of international competition (MOE, 2009). It has been offered as a subject as of grade one to the first year of university education in Ethiopia. At a more personal (student) level in Ethiopia, proficiency in English is considered as a key to promotion to higher professional ranks, securing a better job, studying abroad and the like. Consequently, there is a huge demand to improve English language teaching in the formal education system, especially at the higher institutions (Jin, 2013). To learn adequately, creating dependable relationship between teachers and students is very important. Specifically, in English as a foreign language settings where the learning of English language takes place in the classrooms with little or no environmental support, ideal teachers-students interpersonal behavior is not optional. At the onset, good teacher–student interpersonal relationship is believed to give a desirable classrooms environment for students' engagement in learning activities (Antos, 2009; Opdenakker, den Brok & Bosker, 2011).

Since learning occurs best in an environment of positive interpersonal relationships in which learners feel appraised, acknowledged, and regarded (Horton, 2010, and Walter, 2009). Moreover, Hansen (2018) stresses that EFL teachers interpersonal teaching behavior needed for effective language teaching-learning processes. Effective teaching is charged with positive emotion. It is not just a matter of knowing one's subject, being available, having correct nous, or learning all the right techniques. Good teachers are not just well oiled machines (Hansen, 2018, & Walter, 2009). Thus, it forth comes that teachers' care, concern and good relationships with the students that ensure smooth functioning of the teaching-learning process are of paramount important as content and pedagogical conceptions if not more. Accordingly, EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior and teaching-learning relations to students' English achievement in an effort to make the teachers teaching-learning process more effective and efficient. It is expected that thorough exploration of the nature of communication between teachers and students would give teachers a clearer picture of teachers-students interactions (Aregbeyen, 2010, & Mohammed, 2013). Therefore, teachers may renovate their behaviors to give more adequately for the needs of students (Aregbeyen, 2010, and Mahle, 2011).

Moreover, studies pointed out that the way teachers affiliate with students and control classroom learning processes are connected with the cognitive and affective development of students (Allvar, 2010). It is tangible that classroom interaction is a converse process that the behavior of the teachers and students influence each other mutually (Wubbels, Créton, & Hooymayers, 1985; Wubbels & Levy, 1993). To find fairness view and obtain comprehensive image of teachers' interpersonal behavior, students' perception of the teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior appear to be necessary. Besides, considering the perceptions of students on teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior gives careful and reflective understanding of the teaching-learning situation in the EFL classrooms (Lourdusamy & Khine, 2005). In addition, Bell (2005) as in Hidayet (2010) claims that a study that would describe students' belief systems would illuminate effective English language teaching behaviors.

Furthermore, the relationship between students' perception of teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior and their English achievement is determined on proximity (i.e. the extent to which teachers cooperate with their students) and influence (i.e. the amount of control) in the interaction. Accordingly, studies on students' perceptions of proximity and influence dimensions of teachers'

interpersonal teaching behavior indicated that students' perceptions of the two dimensions were found to be lower than their teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors (Wubbels, & den Brok, 2002). Pertaining to the two major dimensions of interpersonal behavior, studies conveyed that students generally perceived teachers more cooperative than dominant (Wubbels, 2009; Tale, & Zhou, 2009). On the contrary, American teachers were perceived lowest on both dimensions while Bruneian teachers were conversely perceived highest on the influence dimension as cited in (Liberante, 2012, & Wubbels, 2009). Concerning to the sub scales, the major persuading interpersonal behaviors of university teachers in Iran, Singapore and Brunei as perceived by students were found to be friendly, understanding and leadership Abeir (2014) as cited in Ward (2011).

Also, Tale and Zhou (2009) pointed out that understanding behavior of teachers' was perceived most frequent while uncertain was the least from the other teachers' behavior by students at secondary schools in Chinese EFL classes. Apart from the studies described before, all eight types of teachers interpersonal behaviors (i.e. strict, understanding, constant, leadership, student freedom, influence, uncertain, and proximity) were found with similar rate of occurrences of took place in Australia and American EFL classes (Charalambos, 2013). In line with the relationship between English teachers' interpersonal behavior and their students' performance, studies have been looked over again. Thus, Charalambos, (2013) & Wubbels (2004) justified that students' perception of teachers' influence related positively with their test results. The other studies, on the other hand, found that there was associations between proximity and cognitive achievements (Henderson, 2017, & Delaney, 2010).

On the contrary, not corporate with studies stated in the above that there is no significant correlation between the two dimensions and cognitive outcomes (Wubbels, Tale, & Zhou, 2009). Specific to the sub-scales, according to some researches, leadership, strict, understanding and friendly behaviors were positively related to students' achievement while dissatisfied, uncertain, admonishing, and student freedom behaviors were found negatively related to the students' achievement (Wubbels, 2006; Ramos, & Fisher, 2013, & Smith, 2011). Unexpectedly, the study which was done by Liya (2012), only uncertainty was correlated negatively and significantly with students' English achievement in Middle East Technical University. Studies have shown that empiric justifications of teachers' interpersonal behaviors, relationships between these behaviors and students' English achievement, and the extent to which teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors predicted students' English achievement at all.

Although various researches have been carried out elsewhere on teachers' interpersonal behavior, as far as the knowledge of this researcher is concerned, no local studies have been conducted on EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior in Ethiopia. Consequently, English language teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior is still unknown. Moreover, the findings made elsewhere may not be discernible to Ethiopia as perception and communication are sensitive to the perceivers' cultural and education backgrounds (Morganfield, 2009). Accordingly, it seems important to see if Ethiopian EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior is shared due cultural differences as compared to other nations. Furthermore, the relationship between students perceptions of EFL teachers interpersonal teaching behavior and their English achievement were not as such computed statistically to see whether there is significant differences or not on the views of EFL students. This appeared as that empirical explanation on English as a foreign language teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors and its relation to the students' English achievement is deficient. It is worthwhile, therefore, this study sought to examine students' perceptions pertaining to English language teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors and their English achievement at some selected Amhara state Universities in Ethiopia. Hence, it intended to:

(1) See how students perceive their current EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors;

(2) Explore the relationship between students' perception of EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors and their English achievement;

(3) Look into the extent to which EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors foretell the students' English language achievement;

Method

Research Design

In this study, correlational research design, and analysis was employed because it is applicable to obtain important information about the relationship between students' perceptions of EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors and their English language achievement. Moreover, it is used to examine if EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors could predict students' English achievement without necessarily manipulating the independent variables. A quantitative study with correlational research design is useful in finding relationships among variables and describing a phenomenon (Cook, 2008). According to Crews (2007), the quantitative survey design used to gather numerical data on students' perceptions of teachers' interactional teaching behavior in language classrooms. Overall, the other reason why quantitative approach was employed is that it enabled the researcher to see the issue under study from quantitative perspectives. It is the most suitable for answering the research objectives of the current study since it was cost effective. Also, the nature of the problem and research objectives invited the researcher to use this research method.

Population and Sampling Techniques

In Ethiopia particularly, in the Amhara National regional state, there were ten government universities in 2019/2020 academic year. From which, the researcher selected four universities (i.e. Debre Tabor university, Bahir Dar university, Gondar university, and Injibara university) purposively to make the study more manageable and complete within the available time. There were more than seventy English major first year students in each university since 2019/2020 academic year. The Universities were selected based on their convenience for data collection as they are located in the lives of the researcher. First year students were chosen for the study purposively because they were new to the universities' environment, and community, at all. Accordingly, the researcher expected that these students perception of students-teachers relationship and its felt effect with English achievement may give different picture than those who already rectified to the situations.

The total number of students' population at selected universities were 354 in 2019/2020 academic year. Here, the researcher took 50% (i.e.354/2= 177) of students as the participants of this study among the total number of students those who were studying at selected universities. Since it is difficult to take all the students of this year (n = 354), forty four first year English major students were taken through systematic random sampling technique from each university as this technique can give all students equal probability of selection. Hence, the total sample of the study constituted 177 students. Therefore, the study was carried out with data from 177 students on the interpersonal teaching behaviors of first year English as a foreign language teachers. Overall, the target population of this current study was first year English major students at selected Amhara state universities in 2019/2020 academic year.

Variables

The independent variable in the study was EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior as perceived by their students. The interpersonal behavior has proximity (degree of teachers cooperation with their students), and influence (degree of teachers amount of control) as major dimensions with eight subscales as measured through questionnaire on teacher interaction. The subscales are understanding, student freedom, leadership, helping/friendly, uncertain, dissatisfied,

admonishing, strict behaviors. The dependent variable is English as a foreign language achievement mean score of the students that was obtained through English test.

Instruments

EFL Achievement Test

So as to get the students' English achievement, a test consists of 35 multiple choice items on listening comprehension to test listening skill, vocabulary comprehension to test vocabulary skill, reading comprehension to test reading skill, and writing section regarding to paragraph writing to test their writing skill. In addition, grammar sections were designed from chapters covered. The test was piloted on students which were not included in the sample universities to determine the internal consistency of the items. Accordingly, an acceptable Cronbach alpha value of 0.83 was found for multiple choice items.

Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction

Students spend much amount of time in university English language classes. Furthermore, their perceptions is often based on a number of lessons they took. As a result, they seem quite able to understand and weigh classrooms stimuli and render valid judgments on characteristics of their classrooms (den Brok, 2012). To this effect, data on English as a foreign language teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior was gathered through using the standardized questionnaire on teacher interaction (QTI) (Wubbels et.al, 2006). The questionnaire (Wubbels et al., 2006) consisted of fifty six items. The items were divided into eight sub dimensions which acquiesce to the eight sections of the model. The eight domains are: understanding, student freedom, leadership, helping/friendly, uncertain, dissatisfied, admonishing, and strict. Each domain contained seven items with a five-point liker scale type (one-five) ranging from Never to Always. The questionnaire has been shown to be a valid and reliable instrument (Allvar, 2010, Bosker, 2011, & Wubbels et al., 2006).

Furthermore, to allow the students fill the questionnaire without difficulty, and to retain its original meaning, the English version of the questionnaire was translated into Amharic language by the researcher. This is because, Amharic language is an official language that fits all the students in the country. In addition, the reliability of the questionnaire was carried out for this current study. As a result, it has been found out that the reliabilities ranged from 0.66-0.88: (0.86) understanding, (0.66) student responsibility/ freedom, (0.83) leadership, (0.75) uncertain, and (0.73) strict. The 3 scales, namely admonishing, helpful/friendly and dissatisfied behaviors were omitted owing to their high correlations with their respective adjacent behavior. The omitting of these 3 variables diminish the result of multi-collinear on regression model.

To analyze and interpret the data that were acquired through questionnaire and English achievement test, inferential statistics was used. Besides, so as to sketch EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior, descriptive statistics like, mean and standard deviations of the questionnaire on teacher interaction dimensions were employed. In order to explore correlations between EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior and students' English as a foreign language achievement test, multiple regression was employed at a 0.05 significant level.

Moreover, to ascertain the degree to which teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors affected the students' English achievement, multiple regression was employed. In addition, standardized multiple regression coefficients (Beta) were exploited to examine the scales which assisted uniquely and significantly to the clarifications of the variances in the dependent variable. It had to be recalled that data were checked against the assumptions of regression after computing Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

Findings and Discussion

This part deals with the findings and discussion of the data collected from subjects to seek answers for the basic research questions raised in the introduction section. The primary purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between students perception of EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors and students' English language achievement. The data collected from all the subjects of the study were analyzed through using inferential statistics & descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviations.

Findings

So as to establish the relationship between students' perceptions of their teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors and their English as a foreign language achievement, first the demographic characteristics along with their age and sex level (in table 1) was described. Second the mean score and standard deviation analyses (in table 2) were performed. Third, the relationship of questionnaire on teacher interaction dimensions with students' English as a foreign language achievement (EFL (in table 3) was discussed. Fourth, the combined prognosis of students' English language achievement by the independent variables (in table 4) was explained. Finally, contribution of the independent variables to the students' English language achievement (in table 5) can be stated as well. Depending on this, the results are drawn as follows.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Students. It mainly focuses on their sex and age level

Variables	Categories	F	%
Sex 57.06	Male	101	
	Female	76	42.93
	Total	177	100
Age 12.99	19-21	23	
28.81	20-24	51	
38.41	25-27	68	
18.07	28-30	32	
	≥ 30	3	1.69
	Total	177	100

Table 2**:** EFL Teachers Interpersonal Teaching Behavior as Perceived by the Students (n = 177)

Sub Scales	M	SD
Strict	2.32	1.92
Understanding	3.98	0.42
Leadership	3.96	1.01
Students Freedom	3.02	0.74
Uncertain	2.81	1.02
Influence	0.41	0.43

Proximity	1.31	0.71

Table 3**:** The relationship of questionnaire on teacher interaction dimensions with students' English achievement

Sub Scales	R	P
Strict	-0.012	0.53
Leadership	1.42	0.0002
Understanding	1.67	0.000
Students Freedom	0.023	0.42
Uncertain	0.54	0.21
Influence	0.114	0.024
Proximity	0.079	0.014

Table 4**:** The combined prognosis of students' English language Achievement by the independent variables

Source Sig	SS	Df	MS	F
Regression 0.000	18.143	7	4.021	6.201
Residual	217.043	361	0.601	
Total	235.186	368		
Multiple correlation = 0.302, Adjusted Correlation (R) ^{2} $_{= 0.071}$				

Table 5: Contribution of the independent variables to the students' English as a foreign language Achievement

Prognosticator Variables p	Weight(β)	t
Strict 0.23	-0.291	-1.171
Constant 0.43	-	-2.031
Leadership 0.014	0.398	1.98
Understanding 0.000	0.841	2.728
Student Freedom 0.604	-0.038	-0.179
Uncertain 0.521	-0.034	-0.154
Influence 0.018	0.114	0.908
Proximity 0.102	0.079	1.635

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between students' perception of EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors and students' English achievement, and to determine if interpersonal teaching behavior could suppose students' English achievement. Before discussing the results of this current study, it is important to confess that the small samples used in the current study only allows some preliminary conclusions with respect to teachers–students interpersonal relationships in the Ethiopian context. As a result of the small samples, the analysis could only be conducted at the class level and the statistical power was limited for establishing relationships between variables. Moreover, it remains insufficient whether results can be generalized to Ethiopian higher education at all. The results from the analysis of data from questionnaire is discussed in line with some empirical findings.

As far as the first research question is concerned and based on the information obtained, teachers understanding, followed by leadership was kenned as an interpersonal teaching behavior which occurred most often in EFL classrooms. Next to this, the English language students perceived strict and student freedom/responsibility as other behaviors of their English as a foreign language teachers reveals that EFL teachers display strict behavior on one hand and give freedom for independent work or responsibility to their students at all. On the other hand, uncertain behavior was found to be least perceived which means that EFL teachers plain such kind of behavior in rarely manner. This finding is consistent with the findings of Tale, & Zhou (2009) where understanding behavior of English as a foreign language teachers was perceived most while uncertain was the least by Singapore students at teachers colleges.

However, this result is not consistent with the findings of Charalambos (2013), a study which was done in Iran and Australian secondary classrooms where all eight types of teachers' interpersonal behaviors were found with similar rate of occurrences. Concerning to the major dimensions of teachers interpersonal teaching behavior, the mean results of the two dimensions betoken that English as a foreign language students perceived their teachers more cooperative than dominant in their behaviors though both characterized university EFL teachers as temperately dominant and very cooperative. This finding is corporate with previously done researches that students generally perceive teachers more cooperative than dominant (Aregbeyen, 2010, Tale, & Zhou, 2009, & Wubbels et al., 2006).

In comparison with similar researches elsewhere, the mean value of influence (Mean=0.41, & Standard deviation=0.43) of the current study was found to be smaller than the mean in Singapore, Australian, and Iran (Tale & Zhou, 2009). Proximity, on the other hand, the mean value (Mean=1.31, & Standard deviation=0.71) of this study was found to be bigger than the values of the three countries stated above. This point conveyed that Ethiopian EFL teachers in the sample universities are less dominant but more cooperative over the communication process with their English students as compared to teachers in the three countries stated above.

Concerning to the second research question, there is a positive and significant correlations between students' English as a foreign language achievement and their EFL teachers' leadership and understanding behaviors. This finding suggests that the students' English achievements increase as their perceptions of their EFL teachers leadership and understanding behaviors increase accordingly.

On the contrary, there is no significant correlations between university students' English language achievement, and their EFL teachers' strict, student freedom, & uncertain behaviors. This is, on the other hand, corporate with den Brok, (2012), Horton, (2010), & Wubbels et al (2006) where leadership and understanding behaviors were correlated significantly with the students' English achievement. Nevertheless, it is not consistent with Tale, & Zhou (2009) where only uncertainty was correlated negatively and significantly with students' English achievement. With regard to the two dimensions, both proximity and influence were correlated positively and significantly with students' English achievement. This finding, on the other hand, tends to agree with previous

studies (Delaney, 2010, Horton, 2010; Mahle, 2011, 2010, & Rodger, 2016). Nonetheless, it is not corporate with some other studies where no significant correlations were found between the two dimensions and students' cognitive achievement (Zewudu, Van Took, 2018, & Tale, & Zhou, 2009).

Moreover, the five predictor variables in connection correlated positively and significantly with the university students' English achievement (R=0.302, p<0.001). Also, the behaviors in combined predicted students' English achievement significantly (R2=0.071, p=0.000). This shows EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors all together explained 7.1% of the variances in the students' English language achievement results (see table 3).The effect observed in this current study is almost terminated to the eight percent (F=12.101, p<0.005) of the variances in chemistry achievement of the students in Middle East Technical university (Aliya, 2012).

Concerning to the contribution of each independent variable, understanding, followed by EFL teachers leadership interpersonal behavior was found to be the most powerful and significant predictor of the students' English achievement. In line with this, Aliya (2012) study stated that understanding and leadership interpersonal behaviors were suggesting students' English language achievement significantly though they were not the only one. On the contrary, Fraser, Monas, Mikel (2010) found that only strict scale was contributing significant amount of variance to the students' EFL achievement result. Here, the results of the study strengthen that only influence was revealed examining students' foreign language achievement significantly. The finding is in consistent with research which were done by Francis, Levy, and Wubbels (2006). However, this is not tends to agree with the finding identified by Tale and Zhou (2009) in which influence was found examining students' overall performance in all courses significantly even though the degree of variance is insignificant.

Conclusions

Based on the results and discussions of the findings of the study, the English as a foreign language teachers in Ethiopian government universities shows that high understanding and leadership behaviors followed by strict, student responsibility/freedom and low uncertain behaviors. Accordingly, the EFL teachers were more cooperative (understanding, leadership and student freedom) and less dominant (strict behavior) though uncertain behavior was also pointed to some extent.

Even if there are vast amount of complications responsible for EFL students' English as a foreign language achievement, this study showed that English as a foreign language teachers' interpersonal teaching behaviors at all instance significantly stated 7.1 percent of differences on the students' English foreign language achievement (see table 3). In spite of the fact that the effect is not large, proper attention ought to be given to it as it has potential in examining the students' EFL achievement which has been diminishing at all levels of academic issues. Of the five sub dimensions of teachers' interpersonal behavior, the current study explained that EFL teachers understanding and leadership behaviors were found to be significant prognosticators of the EFL students' English language achievement. The findings, in addition, revealed that influence was found to be a significant prognosticator of the students' English achievement while proximity was not exhibited as well.

All in all, the current study pointed out that English as a foreign language students' perception of their EFL teachers' interpersonal teaching behavior has ability to examine their English language achievement to some range of values. As a result, this current study supposes that English teachers ought to examine their connection with their students to improve teachers–students associations so as to create suitable atmosphere of English as a foreign language classes at all levels in order to promote students' learning. Finally, it is recommended that universities should provide trainings for all teachers continuously about theoretical and practical orientations on their

interpersonal teaching behaviors and its relationship to students' learning as well.

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