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Proper and Improper Behaviors/Conducts of EFL Instructors as Perceived by English-Majored Students

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Abstract

This research paper reports proper and improper behaviors/conducts of EFL instructors as perceived by the fourth-year English major students at a large Thai university in order to help enhance English learning success and avoid poor learning achievement. Creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere is clearly an important prerequisite to language learning success. The findings have serious implications for EFL instructors. It is expected that this information may be able to help EFL students and instructors to cope with existing difficulties and anxiety-provoking situations and endeavor to make the learning context less stressful and more pleasurable.

Introduction

Many research studies in foreign language education have enabled us to better understand the effects of psychological, social, and cultural contexts on the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL). Factors that are generally hypothesized by many scholars in the field of EFL to affect second language acquisition are concerned with strategic and socio-

psychological factors. They are cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, and communicative strategies, attitudes, anxiety, motivation, and effort (Saville, 2000).

Tittle (1997) states that foreign language and irrational beliefs are issues that need to be considered for a better understanding of what EFL students experience in the classroom. Rubenzer (1988) confirms that the emotional discomfort of worry, feelings of being overwhelmed, and the unpleasant physical sensations of anxiety distract attention from subtle cognitive tasks. Further, some related research findings indicate that there is a negative relationship between anxiety and English proficiency. That is, students with higher anxiety tend to do worse on English proficiency tests (Aida, 1994; Dixon, 1991; Horwitz, et al., 1986). Students with higher communication apprehension tend to score lower on English proficiency in all language skills (McCroskey et al., 1985). Aida (1994) and Kitano (2001), in addition, note that fear of negative evaluation affects foreign language learners, and the students with fear of negative evaluation might sit passively in the classroom. The most noticeable foreign language anxiety is generally caused by oral-oriented in-class activities and anticipated oral communication with other students. The findings related to this matter can be explained by the concepts of communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1977), social anxiety (Leary, 1982), and self esteem (Oxford, 1999). According to Price (1991), individuals with low self-esteem tend to have a high level of language anxiety, and low self-esteem can be particularly significant in a language class when students are expected to perform orally.

Among the aforementioned causes of English language learning difficulties, it is generally known that EFL instructors' behaviors and characteristics strongly affect students' anxiety in the classroom. According to Young, (1990; 1991), EFL instructors' characteristics, such as being friendly, having a sense of humor, being patient, and being relaxed, can reduce students' anxiety. On the contrary, instructors who correct student errors constantly have absolute class control, and do most teaching while letting the learners do most of the learning without realizing their roles may cause the learners language anxiety. Price (1991) agrees that

instructors play a significant role in the amount of anxiety each student had experienced in particular classes. Horwitz et al. (1986) and Koch & Terrell (1991) point out that instructors who have a harsh manner of correcting student errors frequently provoke anxiety.

In addition, Aida (1994) notes that many language instructors are concerned with the possibility that anxiety may function as an affective filter preventing students from achieving a high level of proficiency in the language. Students need to have attitudes and use strategies that encourage lowered anxiety, higher motivation, and confidence in their ability to convey what they want to say.

Syananondh et al. (2004) identify the qualifications of ideal M.A. in English instructors as perceived by the graduate students of a program in a university. To them, the instructors' qualifications are one of the most important factors in the teaching/ learning process, but these qualifications are evidently, mostly, and predominantly set forth by educators and scholars in the field of foreign language teaching. However, nowadays EFL instructors themselves may need to recognize that learners may have insights which should inform language teaching. Some EFL instructors may feel that by eliciting learners' opinions, they will be seen as pandering to students' desires (Cutrone, 2001 cited in Syananondh, et al.). Nevertheless, Syananondh et al also state that "several professionals in EFL, such as Aleamoni (1981), Couto & Towersey (1992), and Long (1997), strongly advocate having learners evaluate courses and teacher performance." Thus, students seem to be one of the most logical evaluators of the quality, effectiveness, and satisfaction of course elements, and their feedback can be used to encourage educational improvement. Furthermore, studies conducted by Hadley & Hadley (1996), Long (1997), Tsai (1999), and Cutrone, (2001) have pioneered a similar kind of research in relation to ideal EFL teachers. These previous studies, however, were mostly and specifically aimed at identifying the ideal qualities of the instructors in various educational sectors. Most foreign language anxiety research previously conducted tended to focus on only exploring the relationship between anxiety and learners' English

proficiency. This includes the sources of the students' language anxiety and how teacher characteristics might influence student anxiety in language classrooms.

Thus far, little attention has been paid to identifying the specific and proper or improper roles of EFL instructors and appropriate versus inappropriate teacher behaviors in the classroom; that is, what exactly the EFL instructors should do or should not do in the classroom as perceived by the learners. Research in this area may enable EFL students and instructors to better cope with existing anxiety-provoking situations and make the learning context less stressful. If creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere is an important prerequisite to language learning success, consideration on this matter is then valuable. In order to help enhance English learning success, a knowledge of the proper and improper behaviors/conducts of EFL instructors as perceived by learners can be crucial in successful EFL learning and teaching. The present study used fourth-year English-majored students at a Thai public university as its sample to gain insight on this matter and to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are EFL instructors' proper and improper general behaviors/conducts as perceived by the fourth-year English-majored students?
2. What are EFL instructors' proper and improper teaching behaviors/conducts as perceived by the fourth-year English-majored students?

It was anticipated that the findings obtained in the study would add further meaningful information into the knowledge of EFL classroom development and students' success in the EFL learning tasks.

Procedure, Research Tool, and Data Analysis

Prior to the collecting of the data for this study, one of the researchers gave a mini- lecture on the purpose of the research and the two research questions to 54 fourth-year English major students at Naresuan University in the academic year 2005. Twenty eight of them were in the B.A. in English program, and the

other 26 were in the B.Ed. in English program. Arrangements were also made for the students to be interviewed by the instructor either individually or in small groups of four or five students. Students were then asked to express their opinions freely about the kinds of actions their EFL instructors should do or should not do to help them succeed in English learning. The initial data obtained were then categorized into two major parts: teachers' proper and improper general behaviors/conducts and proper and improper teachers' teaching behaviors/ conducts. Based on this information, a questionnaire specifically designed for the present study was constructed (see appendix). The students were consequently asked to rate each item on the questionnaire by using the following criteria for weighted scores:

Strongly agree	weigh 5 points
Rather agree	weigh 4 points
Moderately agree	weigh 3 points
Rather disagree	weigh 2 points
Strongly disagree	weigh 1 points

Fifty students (87.72 % of all students) answered and returned the questionnaire. The data obtained were then quantitatively analyzed and classified as shown in the research findings.

Findings

To answer the research questions 1 and 2, the proposed lists of what EFL instructors should do or should not do in the classes in relation to their proper conducts and behaviors in the classroom as perceived by the English-major students were identified. After that, the data obtained were analyzed and classified into categories in terms of factors and their number of weighted scores and ranking. The data obtained are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Finding One

Table 1 shows the list of EFL teachers' proper conducts and behaviors in the classroom as perceived by the forth-year English-major students. It was found that teachers' being friendly with students both in and outside classes (item 1), being patient and diligent to work with students (item 3), together with being knowledgeable and fluent and literate in English (item 11) received the highest weighted scores. Second in rank order were items 9 and 13, showing that EFL teachers should accept the students' limitations or weaknesses and their individual differences and should be responsible, accountable, and self-disciplined.

Table 1: EFL Teachers' Proper General Behaviors and Conducts as Perceived by the English-Majored Students (N = 50)

A teacher should	Weighted scores	Rank
1. be friendly with students both in and outside class	235	1
2. be sweet and nice to students	205	13
3. be patient and diligent to work with students	235	1
4. devote time to teaching students	215	8
5. have proper manners	210	9
6. have a cheerful mind and stable emotion	205	13
7. not be too sensitive or emotional	210	9
8. be dressed properly	225	6
9. accept students' limitations or weaknesses and their individual differences	230	4
10. have a sense of how a teacher should think and behave	210	9
11. have direct training as an English teacher or an English major	210	9
12. be knowledgeable and proficient in English	235	1

A teacher should	Weighted scores	Rank
13. be responsible, accountable, and self-disciplined	230	4
14. be punctual	220	7

Finding Two

Table 2, on the other hand, shows the list of improper general behaviors/ conducts of EFL teachers as perceived by the English-majored students. Obviously, the students thought that EFL teachers should not be aggressive or furious, or biased, as seen in how items (14 and 2) were ranked the first and the second respectively. Also, among the top five improper general conducts/behaviors as perceived by these students were that EFL teachers should not come to class late and leave the class too early (item 11), should not pay attention to only good learners (item 15), and should not teach as the teacher feels like without caring about students' feelings (item 19).

Table 2: EFL Teachers' Improper General Behaviors and Conducts as Perceived by the English-Majored Students (N=50)

A teacher should not	Weighted scores	Rank
1. be too much self important	190	16
2. be biased	240	2
3. be overly familiar with a particular student (s)	210	8
4. look or be too serious	180	19
5. be ego-centric or too proud of their ability	210	8
6. talk behind the students' back	180	19
7. be too strict/ inflexible	175	21

A teacher should not	Weighted scores	Rank
<hr/>		
8. look down upon the students or their families	195	14
9. discredit, discourage, or blame the students in front of the class	210	8
10. show any preference or favor towards some particular students or make other students feel jealous	190	16
11. come to class late and leave the class early	225	3
12. compare the students by their ability	190	16
13. blames students for their failures	210	8
14. be aggressive or furious	245	1
15. pay attention to only good learners	225	3
16. be too close to or intimate with students	205	13
17. use a mobile phone in class	175	21
18. bring food to eat in class	220	6
19. teach as the teacher feels like (does not care about the students' feelings)	225	3
20. be absent from class with no reason	215	7
21. look for personal benefits, e.g. selling sheets and books	210	8
22. be too rapport with some particular students	195	14

Finding Three

Tables 3 and 4 provide information concerning teachers' proper and improper teaching behaviors/conducts as perceived by the English-majored students. Table 3 lists proper teaching behaviors/conducts. Among the 34 items, the top five items are items 3, 17, 21, 5, and 31 respectively. That is, EFL teachers, when teaching, should first make the lessons enjoyable. In

addition, they should be ready to teach and teach with full knowledge, and meanwhile they should teach the students how to think. Moreover, EFL teachers should realize the students' basic background knowledge of English and then teach them with care, share, love, and rapport.

Table 3: EFL Teachers' Proper Teaching Behaviors/Conducts as Perceived by the English-Majored Students (N = 50)

A teacher should	Weighted scores	Rank
1. require the students to answer in English	220	9
2. use several teaching techniques	220	9
3. make the lessons enjoyable	245	1
4. apply more psychological knowledge when teaching	215	14
5. realize the student's basic background knowledge of English	235	4
6. review the previous lesson(s) before beginning a new one	210	21
7. encourage the students to use/speak English as much as possible with no worry about grammatical correctness	220	9
8. motivate the students to learn by using various teaching techniques	225	8
9. check the students understanding of the lessons periodically to know whether the students can follow the lessons or not	215	14
10. be confident in whatever he/she teaches	215	14
11. allow and encourage all students to take part in class activities	215	14
12. teach with lesson plans	210	21
13. be eager or enthusiastic in their teaching	220	9

A teacher should	Weighted scores	Rank
<hr/>		
14. promote group learning so that the students can share and exchange ideas through group discussion	195	27
15. provide a lot of exercises	160	32
16. use a two-way communication approach	210	21
17. be ready to teach and teach with full knowledge and attention	240	2
18. use only English in class	190	29
19. teach everyday English	215	14
20. teach how to debate	190	29
21. teach how to think	240	2
22. insert some interesting knowledge or experience while teaching when appropriate	215	14
23. also teach morals and ethics	220	9
24. teach English/foreign culture	205	26
25. give some job guidance	195	27
26. teach the students to know themselves	210	21
27. test only what he/she has taught	180	31
28. create a desirable teaching atmosphere	215	14
29. frequently assess himself/herself to see whether the students still like the teacher or not, and why	210	21
30. prepare the teaching materials that best suit and motivate the students to learn	230	6
31. teach with care, share, love, and rapport	235	4
32. be aware of the needs of poor learners	230	6

Finding Four

Unlike Table 3, Table 4 listed improper teaching behaviors/conducts. The first six improper teaching behaviors/conducts perceived by the students in this study include the following. First, EFL teachers should not be in the bad mood when teaching (item 3), make students lose their confidence when they make mistakes (item 8), and teach without caring about the students' feelings (item 9). In addition, the students thought that teachers should not assign a lot of homework to avoid in-class teaching (item 2). Finally, teachers should not pressure students with scores (item 4), teach like a robot or be lifeless (item 6), and talk about something else too much (item 10).

Table 4: EFL Teachers' Improper Teach in Behaviors Conducts as Perceived by the English-Majored Students (N = 50)

A teacher should not	Weighted scores	Rank
1. just teach for the sake of teaching	190	8
2. assign a lot of homework to avoid in-class teaching	200	4
3. be in a bad mood when teaching	225	1
4. pressure students with scores	195	5
5. use unfashionable teaching methods	175	9
6. teach like a robot or be lifeless	195	5
7. just read and translate the text (have the students do it sometimes)	175	9
8. make the students lose their confidence when they make mistakes	225	1
9. teach as the teacher feels like (does not care about the students' feelings)	225	1
10. talk about something else too much	195	5

Discussion

It is rather noticeable that, in both Tables 1 and 2, most of the items were rated with fairly high weighted scores (If each student rates all the items at the level of 5, the total weighted scores will be equal to 250 weighted scores.) Two further interpretations can be drawn from the findings One and Two. First, besides knowing what proper general behaviors/conducts EFL teachers should possess, these findings may also imply that some of these expected proper behaviors/conducts of the EFL teachers have been lacking from EFL classrooms, and the students are calling (may be crying) for them. Second, it is possible that some EFL teachers have been showing behaviors/conducts which are unacceptable to students, and the students could not stand them any longer, so they are making a request for EFL teachers to abandon these behaviors/ conducts.

Tables 3 and 4 provide information concerning teachers' proper and improper teaching behaviors/conducts as perceived by these English-majored students. Table 3 reveals proper teaching behaviors/conducts of EFL teachers, while Table 4 reveals teaching behaviors/conducts that EFL teachers should not have. Nevertheless, some interpretations and inferences which can be made or derived from Tables 3 and 4 are as follows: First, the students might have already faced those kinds of improper teaching behaviors/conducts (see the list in Table 4); as a result, they were not happy with them. Second, the students may have expected the teachers to have better teaching behaviors/conducts than was the case in their experience .

In fact, from Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4, only the information from the top five items of each table has been intentionally discussed. Actually, many other items, though lower in weighted scores, can also convey a lot of meaningful and significant recommendations or proper actions to which the teachers should pay additional attention in order to implement them in their teaching career. The items in the four tables of this study were actually drawn from the students themselves and were not anticipated by any teacher or scholar. Hence, they can be considered original in themselves and can provide additional insights into this aspect of classroom dynamics. In other words, instead of asking the students

hypothetical items about teachers' behaviors/conducts proposed by scholars or teachers themselves, this study drew the information from students, who are supposed to be the main stakeholders in the teaching/learning process. The items in the questionnaires can, therefore, be beneficial as good teaching/teacher checklists, or teacher guides. With proper implementation, EFL teachers may use such checklists to improve their in-class behaviors. English language teachers and educators may also take the findings of the present study to heart as they review their teacher training programs.

To comply with the learner-centered approach to EFL learning/teaching, it may be about time we EFL teachers listened to and incorporated our learners' opinions or feelings into our actual teaching tasks. Actually, we, perhaps, have been waiting for some time to be told what we really have to do in classes by some students in order to help them do the better learning. If we are to fully implement a "learner-centered approach," learners' insights related to learning and teaching cannot be ignored. If the findings of this study can be properly implemented, ideal EFL teachers tailored to the Thai cultural context may be developed.

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Appendix

A Questionnaire on Proper and Improper Behaviors/Conducts of EFL Instructors as Perceived by English-Majored Students

Directions: Please weigh your perception on the following items by using the following criteria:

5=strongly agree; 4=rather agree; 3=moderately agree; 4=rather disagree;
1=strongly disagree

Part One. EFL teachers' proper general **conducts** and **behaviors** in classroom as perceived by English major students

In class,	Weighted scores
-----------	-----------------

I. A teacher should:

1. be friendly with students both in and outside class.....
2. be sweet and nice with student.....
3. be patient and diligent to work with students.....
4. devote time to teaching students.....
5. have proper manners.....
6. have a cheerful mind and stable emotions.....
7. not too sensitive or emotional.....
8. be dressed properly.....
9. be accept students' limitations or weaknesses, and their individual difference.....
10. have a sense of how a teacher should think and behave.....
11. have direct training as an English teacher, major in English.....
12. be knowledgeable and proficient in English literacy.....
13. be responsible, accountable, and self-discipline.....
14. be punctual.....

II. A teacher should not

1. be too much self-important.....
2. be biased.....
3. be too overly familiar with particular students(s).....
4. look or be too serious.....
5. be ego-centric/ too proud of oneself capacity.....
6. talk behind a student's back.....
7. be too strict/ not flexible.....
8. look down upon students or their families.....
9. discredit, discourage, or blame the students in front of the class.....
10. show any preference or favor towards some particular students, or make
others feel jealous
11. come to class late and leave the class earlier.....
12. compare the students by their ability.....
13. blame students for their failures.....
14. be aggressive or furious.....
15. pay attention to good learners only.....
16. be too close to or intimate with students.....
17. use a mobile phone in class.....
18. bring food to eat in class.....
19. teach as the teacher feels like (does not care about students' feelings).....
20. be absent from class with no reason.....
21. look for personal benefit, e.g. selling sheets and books.....
22. be overly familiar with particular students.....

Part Two: EFL teachers' proper teaching behaviors and conducts in classroom as perceived by English major students

A Teacher should do/ or not do this in class	Weighted scores
--	-----------------

I. A teacher should:

1. require students to answer in English.....
2. use several teaching techniques.....
3. make the lessons enjoyable.....
4. apply more psychological knowledge when teaching.....
5. realize student's basic background knowledge of English.....
6. review the previous lesson(s) before the beginning the new one.....
7. encourage students to use /speak English as much as possible with no worry about grammatical correctness.....
8. motivate students to learn by using various teaching techniques.....
9. check students understanding of the lessons periodically to know whether students can follow the teaching or not.....
10. be confident in whatever he/she teaches.....
11. allow and encourage all students to take part in class activities.....
12. teach with lesson plans.....
13. be eager or enthusiastic in their teaching.....
14. promote group learning so that students can share and exchange ideas through group discussion.....
15. provide a lot of exercises.....
16. use two way communication approach.....
17. be ready to teach and teach with full knowledge and attention.....
18. use only English in class.....
19. teach everyday English.....
20. teach how to debate.....
21. teach how to think.....
22. insert some interesting knowledge or experience during teaching when appropriate.....

A Teacher should do/ or not do this in class	Weighted scores
<hr/>	
23. teach also morals and ethics.....	
24. teach English/ foreign cultures.....	
25. give some job guidance.....	
26. teach students to know themselves.....	
27. test only what they have taught.....	
28. create a desirable teaching atmosphere.....	
29. frequently assess himself/herself to see whether students still like the teacher or not, and why.....	
30. prepare the teaching materials that best suit and motivate students to learn	
31. teach with care, share, love, and rapport.....	
32. be aware of the needs of poor learners.....	

A Teacher should not:

1. just teach for the sake of teaching.....
 2. assign more homework to avoid in-class teaching.....
 4. be in a bad mood when teaching.....
 5. pressure students with scores.....
 6. use unfashionable teaching methods.....
 7. teach like a robot teacher-lifeless.....
 8. just read and translate the text (have students do it sometimes).....
 9. make students lose their confidence when they make (some) mistakes.....
 10. teach as the teacher feels like (does not care about students' feelings).....
 11. talk about something else too much.....
-

