

Teaching Styles in the Eyes of Students: Teacher or Learner-Centered?

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Abstract – This study examined university students' perceptions of their instructors' teaching styles in three higher learning institutions in Ethiopia. Data were collected from 474 randomly students using Modified and Adapted Principles of Adult Learning Scale (MAPALS). Findings indicated that the students perceived their instructors as practicing the traditional teacher-centered style in facilitating learning. Field of study, institution, and year of study were significant on the summated scores of the Modified and Adapted Principles of Adult Learning Scale. Recommendations for administrators, the instructors and future research were forwarded.

Keywords – Adult, Adult Learners, Factor, Modified and Adapted Principles of Adult Learning Scale.

I. INTRODUCTION

In many parts of the world including Ethiopia, individuals over age of 18 years are considered as legally mature. Such mature persons are often ascribed the status of adulthood by their respective societies. According to [1] they can vote, get married, fight for their own country, hold property, obtain credit, drive vehicles, engage in paid labor, and attend various forms of entertainment. University students satisfy these criteria and therefore, in this study they are defined as formal adult learners.

Most adult education literature support the collaborative teaching-learning mode as the most effective when teaching persons designated as adults. In an adult education environment, learners' reaction to the role of instructors as the source and transmitter of knowledge may not always be positive. As adults are expected to have developed some life experiences including their previous learning, they usually want to be given place in the design, implementation, and evaluation of their own learning. Many educators define the role of teachers as facilitators of learning [1]. [2], [3], states that teachers no longer have monopoly on transmitting knowledge; nor do they exercise control over determining

matters of knowledge. Rather he suggests that teachers help learners acquire practical knowledge and build on the knowledge acquired by their learners.

Some other adult education leaders, such as [4] say that some teachers who are engaged in adult education do not consider themselves as facilitators due to many reasons some of which are associated with their own personality and/or their preferences for directive style. Still some others lack choice due to the nature of content they teach while a good number of them have no training in the methods and principles of adult learning.

According to Knowles and associates cited in Brookfield, 1990:101-102) teachers of adults should hold seven traits.

1. Establish both physical and psychological climates
2. Involve learners in mutual planning of methods and curricular decisions
3. Involve learners in diagnosing their own learning needs
4. Encourage learners to formulate their own learning objectives

5. Encourage learners to identify learning resources and to develop strategies for such resources to accomplish their objectives
6. Help learners to carryout their learning plans, and
7. Involve learners to evaluate their learning (cited [5])

Other scholars in the field such as [6] remind that instructors need to build instruction around the needs and goals of the participants; they must select and utilize methods and techniques suitable for teaching and learning; and that they need to relate the knowledge and skills to be taught to the daily lives of the learners, and provide the learners with appropriate learning experiences. Rogers on his part claims that instructors have to help their students exercise a climate of self-initiated experiential learning [7]. Students exposed to such learning, according to Rogers are not restricted to greater achievements, but that they exhibit significant learning by being independent, self-initiated and responsible for their learning. [5] asserts that flexibility helps to facilitate learning by better meeting the needs of adult learners.

Therefore, there is a need to assess whether these principles of adult learning are being applied by university instructors in teaching their students by considering them as adults. The researcher assumes that students are honest in providing balanced information concerning the teaching styles of their instructors in their respective departments and faculties because they have the experience of conducting performance appraisals of instructors at the end of every semester at both secondary and tertiary levels of education. In as far as this survey is not directed towards any specific instructor, students would be comfortable to give genuine and balanced judgment about the teaching styles practiced by their instructors.

1.1. Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine the teaching styles of university instructors by comparing the views of their students drawn from three different institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia.

1.2. Research Questions

The following research question was raised to guide the efforts of data collection and analysis.

How do Students Perceive the Teaching Styles of Their Instructors, Does Variation in the Field of Study, Institutional Background, Length of Study (level of Education), Age and

Gender of Students show differences on their Perceived teaching styles of Instructors as measured by the Modified and Adapted Principles of Adult Learning Scale?

II. METHOD

To analyze this research question, data on students' perceptions about their instructors' teaching styles were gathered using the Modified and Adapted Principles of Adult Learning Scale (MAPALS). The scale was modified and adapted from Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) [8]. The modified and adapted scale is a five point Likert type scale with scores of individual item ranging from 0 (Never) to 4 (Always).

Students (N=474) from nine different faculties or colleges belonging to Jimma, Hawassa and Bahir Dar Universities in Ethiopia were made to respond to the 37 items of the MAPALS instrument. The items in the scale were divided into seven themes known as factors. In this study, the factors include 1/ Learner-centered Activities (with 8 items); 2/ Personalizing Instruction (9 items); 3/ Relating to Experience (5 items); 4/ Assessing Student Needs (4 items); 5/ Climate Building (4 items); 6/ Participation in the Learning Process (4 items); and 7/ Flexibility for Personal development (3 items). According to Gary these factors are believed to represent teacher's behaviors as indicated in adult education literature [8]. The item scores and the factor mean values for each of the students were entered into the computer using the SPSS software that helped to compute the Mean, Standard deviation, Analysis of Variance and t-test. The effects of five independent variables like field of study, type of institution, year of study (level of education), age and gender on each of the seven factors were examined if the mean scores differed significantly.

Depending on the total number of items included under one factor, if the students' mean score is above 50% of the maximum score for any particular factor, the teaching styles of instructors is said to be learner-centered (collaborative mode) while a value less than this expected average is to be classified as teacher centered, non-collaborative mode. The expected average is determined by multiplying an item mean $(0+1+2+3+4 \div 5 = 2)$ by the number of items in a particular factor.

III. ANALYSIS

The effects of major fields of study on each of the seven factors are presented in Table 1. Column 3 of the table shows the influence of the various fields of study on Factor 1 scores.

Table 1: Students' Scores by Fields of Study

Field of Study		Learner-Centered Activities	Personalizing Instruction	Relating to Experience	Assessing Student Needs	Climate Building	Participation in the Learning Process	Flexibility for Personal development
Education	Mean	12.41	17.66	11.71	8.93	9.13	10.10	4.76
	SD	5.13	4.61	4.19	3.31	3.13	3.51	2.52
Agriculture	Mean	11.71	16.61	11.13	8.93	9.36	9.78	4.43
	SD	4.99	4.23	4.34	6.33	2.94	3.51	2.37
Health Sciences	Mean	13.38	15.82	10.16	7.46	8.88	8.38	4.84
	SD	5.55	4.29	3.96	3.45	2.93	3.37	2.35
Total	Mean	12.48	16.71	11.02	8.46	9.13	9.44	4.67
	SD	5.26	4.43	4.21	4.65	3.00	3.55	2.35
	F						10.65	
		4.00	6.996	5.467	5.273	.988		1.329
	Sig.	.019*	.001*	.004*	.005*	.373	.000*	.266

As can be observed from the table, students of all fields of study perceived their instructors as practicing the teacher-centered, non collaborative style by scoring a composite mean (12.48) which is less than the expected average mean (16.00) for this factor.

The analysis of variance computed for this factor produced F-value of 4.00 at $P=.019$ which is significant at the .05 level. Although the students in all the fields of study witnessed the prevalence of teacher-centered practice among the university instructors, the ability to critically evaluate teaching styles rest with students of agriculture than those in other fields of study.

As it is evident from the table, the students of all faculties again perceived their instructors as demonstrating teacher-centered instructional practice. The composite mean score (16.71, $SD=4.43$) of all students taken together for this factor witnesses that the instructors, as perceived by the students, are in the marginally low teacher-centered style. Based on this result, it would be easy to conclude that instructors in the three fields of study do not employ a number of techniques to personalize learning to meet the unique needs of each student.

The instructors, according to the views of the students, tend to emphasize competition rather than cooperation among the students.

The F test computed for the analysis of variance yielded a value of 6.996 at $p=.001$. This value was found to be significant at the alpha level of .05. The students of health faculty consider their instructors as exercising more teacher-centered style than those in education.

Students' MAPALS scores for factor 3, Relating to Experience, are compared in the fifth column of the table. As it can be observed from the table, students of all faculties witnessed that their instructors relate learning activities to the prior experiences of the students. But it can be said that instructors of education faculty are relatively better at emphasizing learning activities that consider prior experiences of students and encourage students to make learning more relevant to current experiences comparable to those in other fields of study.

The F value obtained was 5.467 at $p=.004$, which was significant at the .05 level of alpha. The mean difference is

attributed to students of education faculty comparable to those in agriculture and health.

The students' mean scores for Factor 4, Assessing student Needs, were also compared in the sixth column of Table 1. The composite mean value of 8.4599 indicated that most instructors lean towards learner-centeredness for Factor 4. Thus it can be concluded that most instructors of the three faculties conduct individual conferences and informal counseling to find out what learners want and need to know.

Significance of difference was also noted among the mean scores of the students witnessing that the instructors of education faculty comparable to those in health are best assessors of students' needs by using varieties of techniques such as informal counseling and/or individual conferences.

Climate Building measures students' perceptions as to whether instructors set a friendly and favorable physical, social and psychological learning climate in the classroom.; Basing our conclusion on the over all mean of the students on the factor scores it can be inferred that students of all faculties unanimously witnessed that instructors are good at building learning climates conducive to encouraging dialogue and interaction among students.

Participation in the learning process was also compared in the table for effects of fields of study. The composite mean score (9.44) of students of the three faculties confirms that the instructional practices of the teachers were entirely learner-centered, though the magnitude is marginally high. Based on this result, we may conclude that most instructors of the various fields of study allow their students to identify and solve some problems of their interests and let them take part in making some decisions relating to developing criteria for evaluation of their performances. The ANOVA result yielded

a value ($F=10.652$, $p=.000$) which was significant at the .05 level. Education faculty students had better perceptions of instructors as being learner-centered by allowing the involvement of students in identifying and solving problems and setting criteria of their evaluation than did students of agriculture or health.

Items categorized under Flexibility for Personal Development measure the extent to which students perceive their instructors as facilitators of the knowledge acquisition process, or providers of knowledge themselves. The overall mean score (4.67) indicated that instructors were sources and providers of knowledge rather than guiding them as facilitators of the knowledge acquisition process.

In general, fields of study as independent variable exercised significance of differences on five out of the seven MAPALS factors.

Table 2 compares the scores of students for all the seven Factors by controlling for institutional variation. As indicated by the data in this table, students of all institutions witness that most instructors stick to the teacher-centered, non-collaborative mode of teaching and learning when their views on Learner-centered Activities, Personalizing Instruction, and Flexibility for Personal Development are examined against the academic institutions involved. Based on this fact it is easy to say that instructors of the three institutions do not support a more collaborative mode that encourages students to take responsibilities for their own learning. They also tend to favor formal testing over other informal techniques of evaluation. In addition, instructors failed to meet the unique needs of each student. The instructors were thus found to emphasize competition rather than cooperation among their students.

Table 2: Comparison of Students' Scores By Academic Institutions

Academic Institution		Learner-Centered Activities	Personalizing Instruction	Relating to Experience	Assessing Student Needs	Climate Building	Participation in the Learning Process	Flexibility for Personal development
Jimma	Mean	11.949	17.344	11.858	9.4237	9.5932	9.7966	4.2712
	SD	5.0613	4.6697	3.9811	6.1437	3.1304	3.45645	2.20920
Hawassa	Mean	13.769	15.107	9.6462	7.2077	8.5358	7.9154	5.1923
	SD	5.9955	4.0409	4.3417	3.3635	3.1304	3.58082	2.52460

Bahir Dar	Mean	12.041	17.287	11.19	8.4132	9.0898	10.2455	4.6946
	SD	4.6793	4.1755	4.09	3.2305	2.9428	3.58082	2.48
	F	5.491	4.43401	11.037	8.827	4.719	18.409	5.556
	P ≤	.004*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.009*	.000*	.004*
	P ≤ .05	.004*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.009*	.000*	.004*

Relating to Experience, measures the extent to which instructors emphasize learning activities that consider prior experiences of learners. The students of the three institutions are in agreement that instructors relate learning to the students' prior experiences. Jimma university students perceived their instructors as demonstrating more learner-centered practices by relating learning to the prior experiences of their students.

A generic look at the data in table 2 indicates that most of the students assert that instructors are in a better position in assessing student needs, as well as building supportive physical and psychological climate in the classrooms. Concerning students' participation in the learning process, the instructors were perceived by most students as exercising collaborative mode or learner-centered style for the fact that the mean scores of the students of two out of the three institutions fall above the expected average (8.00) for factor 6.

Table 3: Students MAPALS Scores by year of Study

Year of Study	Learner-Centered Activities	Personalizing Instruction	Relating to Experience	Assessing Student Needs	Climate Building	Participation in the Learning Process	Flexibility for Personal development	
1 st	Mean	13.05	15.73	10.27	8.11	8.56	8.97	4.91
	SD	5.99	4.23	4.26	6.28	2.98	3.59	2.34
	Mean	12.67	17.35	11.23	8.67	9.47	9.83	4.67
2 nd	SD	4.87	4.21	3.75	3.10	2.88	3.38	2.41
	Mean	11.51	17.76	12.22	9.02	9.66	10.14	4.31
	SD	4.61	4.67	4.09	3.63	3.15	3.55	2.25
3 rd	F	2.122	7.570	6.541	1.606	4.27	5.90	1.53
	P ≤ .05	.097	.000*	.000*	.187	.005*	.001*	.207

Overall, although the students' perceptions of their instructors' teaching styles were divided among the different factors (i.e., teacher-centered for Factors 1, 2, and 7; and learner-centered for Factors 3, 4, 5, and 6), institutional variation as an independent variable had influence on all the seven factors of MAPALS instrument.

The study also tried to investigate the effects of years of study on the students MAPALS scores. The results for the influence of this independent variable are presented in Table 3.

Close observation of data in this table indicate that Students' scores for factor 1, 2, and 7 fall below their respective expected averages. From this result one can

conclude that the instructors of the three universities favor teacher-centered instructional practices in conveying course contents to their students. On the rest of the four factors that means, relating to experience, assessing student needs, climate building, and participation in the learning process, most instructors were perceived as supporting the learner-centered style or the collaborative mode of teaching and learning. The analysis of variance conducted on the seven factor scores indicated the prevalence of significant differences on personalizing instruction, relating to experience, climate building and participation in the learning process. Students of the third year are credited for the difference comparable to those in different years of study. As these students have spent considerably longer period of time in the university compared to those in junior classes, their witnesses might be considered acceptable and true. Those in the 4th year are the most teacher-centered in their perceptions of instructors on factor 2, personalizing instruction.

Table 4 presents the F-test and t-test of the various independent variables as measured by the summated

MAPALS scores of students. The table compared the effects of all the five student variables on overall scores of the instrument. The instrument requires the respondents to show the degree of their agreement to each particular item (by saying either Never = 0, Almost Never = 1, Seldom = 2, Almost Always = 3, or Always = 4). The scores of the students range from 0 to 148 on the 37 items of the instrument. The expected average for the summated MAPALS is 74.00. Any score falling below this average would mean the teaching style is teacher-centered or non-collaborative. A slight rise above this value indicates support for learner-centered style or collaborative mode of teaching and learning.

Age and gender as independent variables did not indicate any significance of difference on all the seven factors. Thus, it can be concluded that these variables have no relation with students' perceptions as measured by the Modified and Adapted Principles of Adult Learning Scale.

Table 4: Comparison of Students Scores on Summated MAPALS

Variables	Group	Mean	SD	Test	P≤ .05
Field of Study	Education	75.4313	10.08618	F=14.121	.000*
	Agriculture	71.5247	11.44156		
	Health	68.9868	10.85240		
Institution	Jimma University	74.0791	11.79823	F=12.633	.000*
	Hawassa University	68.0308	10.35864		
	Bahir Dar University	72.9701	10.12716		
Age	18-25	72.2222	11.01184	F=2.461	.045
	26-30	71.7714	9.94916		
	31-35	69.0000	11.89713		
	36-40	73.1667	12.63632		
	≥ 41	79.1429	13.95519		
Year of Study	1 st	69.4884	10.63619	F=11.318	.000*

	2 nd	73.9653	9.90755		
	3 rd	75.0579	11.63708		
Gender	Male	71.6257	11.19263	$t=1.533$	.126
	Female	73.5400	10.69260		

When the mean scores are examined, only those in the age of 41 or more years appear to be learner-centered as their mean (79.14) is above the expected average. Students of both sexes scored below the average and remained to be teacher-centered in their perceptions about the teaching styles of instructors.

Field of study, Institutional variation, and Year of study produced significance of differences on the summated scores of students as measured by the Modified and Adapted Principles of Adult Learning Scale. Students of education faculty are the only group who perceived their instructors as exercising learner-centered instructional practices. Jimma university students appear to witness that their instructors are in support of the collaborative or learner-centered style by scoring slightly above the expected average. Third year students are the only and most pioneering in their scores to develop positive perceptions of their instructors' learner-centered instructional practices. The overall mean of the participating students was found to be 72.03 with the standard deviation of 11.11. Thus the instructors were perceived as generally experiencing teacher-centered teaching style.

IV. RESULTS

Students' perceptions of teaching styles of their instructors seem divided across the various subscales known as factors. Factor level studies failed to show the overall position of instructors as practicing either learner-centered or teacher-centered style. Despite this failure, however, instructors were found to be weak in incorporating learner-centered activities, in personalizing instruction to meet the learning needs of each individual student, and in being flexible to promote personal development by exposing their learners to the knowledge acquisition process.

Field of study, institution, and year of study were significant on the summated scores of the Modified and Adapted Principles of Adult Learning Scale. Overall, the students perceived instructors as generally teacher-centered in their teaching styles.

V. DISCUSSION

In this study, the findings relating to students' perceptions of teaching styles stood in direct agreement with previous studies[9], [10] in which the students perceived their instructors as more teacher centered in their teaching practices

On the other hand, findings of the current study concerning age and gender contradict with other previous studies [11], due to the fact that gender did not indicate evidence of significance on any of the factors. In addition, the study challenges the findings by Daughenbaugh, McCarthy, and Spoon studies where students' preferences of teaching styles were related to both age group and gender[12], [13], [14]. Findings about age and gender partly contradict with the work of Dorsey and Pierson who claim that age influenced the learning styles of adults facing career obsolescence [15]. Age and gender, however, had no impact on any of the seven factor scores in my study.

VI. CONCLUSION

Factor level analyses of students' perceptions helped to identify both strong and weak areas of instructors' teaching practices. Although instructors were perceived demonstrating learner-centered instructional practices in four areas, they were teacher-centered in promoting learner-centered activities, personalizing instruction and meeting individual learner needs. Overall, the university instructors were perceived teacher-centered in their teaching styles. The study has implications for administrators, instructors themselves as well as future research. Administrators may arrange professional development opportunities towards learner-centered styles. After getting feedback through the findings of this research, instructors may take measures to work for betterment. Future research may establish the truth of this study by using alternate instruments including classroom observation check-lists, video recordings and transcriptions.

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Modified and Adapted Principles of Adult Learning Scale (MAPALS)

Always = 1; Almost Always = 2 ; Seldom = 3;

Almost Never = 4; and Never = 5

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	Instructors allow students to participate in developing the criteria for evaluating their performance in class.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Instructors use disciplinary action when it is needed.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Instructors allow older students more time to complete assignments when they need it.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Instructors help students diagnose the gaps between their goals and their present level of performance.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Instructors provide knowledge rather than serve as resource persons.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Instructors participate in the informal counseling of students.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Instructors use lecturing as the best method for presenting their subject material to adult students.	1	2	3	4	5

8	Instructors arrange the classroom so that it is easy for students to interact.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Instructors determine the educational objectives for each of their students.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Instructors get a student to motivate himself/herself by confronting him/her in the presence of classmates during group discussions.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Instructors plan learning events based on their students' prior experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Instructors allow students to participate in making decisions about the topics that will be covered in class.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Instructors use one basic teaching method with all students	1	2	3	4	5
14	Instructors use different techniques depending on the students being taught	1	2	3	4	5
15	Instructors encourage dialogue among their students.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Instructors use written tests to assess the degree of academic growth rather than to indicate new directions for learning.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Instructors utilize the many competencies that most adults already possess to achieve educational objectives.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Instructors accept students' errors as natural part of the learning process.	1	2	3	4	5
19	Instructors have individual conferences (meetings) to help students identify their educational needs.	1	2	3	4	5
20	Instructors let each student work at his/her own rate to learn a new concept.	1	2	3	4	5
21	Instructors help their students develop short-range as well as long-range objectives.	1	2	3	4	5
22	Instructors maintain a well disciplined classroom to reduce interference to learning.	1	2	3	4	5
23	Instructors allow their students to take periodic breaks during class.	1	2	3	4	5
24	Instructors use methods that foster productive desk work.	1	2	3	4	5
25	Instructors use tests as their chief method of evaluating students.	1	2	3	4	5
26	Instructors plan activities that will encourage each student's growth from dependence on others to greater independence.	1	2	3	4	5
27	Instructors gear their instructional objectives to match the individual abilities and needs of the students.	1	2	3	4	5
28	Instructors avoid issues that relate to the student's self-concept.	1	2	3	4	5
29	Instructors allow a student's motives for participating in continuing education to be a major determinant in the planning of learning objectives.	1	2	3	4	5
30	Instructors allow students identify their own problems that need to be solved.	1	2	3	4	5

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31	Instructors give all their students in their class the same assignment on a given topic.	1	2	3	4	5
32	Instructors use materials that were originally designed for students in secondary schools.	1	2	3	4	5
33	Instructors organize adult learning events according to the problems that their students encounter in everyday life.	1	2	3	4	5
34	Instructors encourage competition among their students.	1	2	3	4	5
35	Instructors use different materials with different students.	1	2	3	4	5
36	Instructors help students relate new learning to their prior experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
37	Instructors teach units about problems of everyday living.	1	2	3	4	5