NLP and its Relationship with Teacher Success,

Gender, Teaching Experience, and Degree: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The major aims of this study were to examine the role of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) in teacher success and to investigate its relationship with teaching experience, gender, and degree in formal (public high schools) and informal (private language institutes) settings. To this end, 166 teachers and 1200 students were selected. The results of the correlational analysis and t-tests exhibited that except for gender, there was association between teacher success, teaching experience, degree, and NLP. Finally, the results were discussed in the context of language learning and some suggestions were made.

Keywords: NLP, Formal setting, Informal setting, Gender, Degree, Teacher success, Teaching experience

1. Introduction

From long ago, researchers and scholars have been seeking for improvement and excellence in language learning. They have proposed various methods, techniques, enriched educational environments, materials, and trained qualified teachers to enhance learning (e.g. Richards & Rogers). It seems that Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), as a form of modeling in humanistic psychology can open new horizons for language teachers to improve the quality of their teaching. The major aims of NLP are to stress relationships, personal developments, and modeling excellent people (Tosey & Mathison, 2003). According to O' Connor (2001) NLP studies brilliance, quality, and the way outstanding individuals and organizations get their outstanding results.

NLP as a school of thought in psychology was founded on the psycho-therapeutic ideas of Richard Bandler and John Grinder (Davies, 2009). NLP which gradually gained universal popularity was initially used as a tool for effective communication by counselors (Einspruch & Forman, 1985; Gumm, Walker, & Day, 1982; Sharply, 1984; Tosey & Mathison, 2003; Tosey, Mathison, & Michelli, 2005). Later on, its techniques were successfully applied to other fields such as management, medicine, sports, business, law, and education (Karunaratne, 2010; Tosey, Mathison, & Michelli, 2005).

It seems that due to the nature of NLP which is a great help in general education, this technique can also help language teachers to be more successful in the classroom. Moreover, since this concept has not been much researched in language

learning, we are of the view that we should delve into the concept, exploring it from different perspectives to enrich and deepen our understanding of NLP and its role in language learning and teaching. According to Helm (1989), today English teachers are engaged in the process of presenting the components of English, but they do not know how to effectively learn this process. He asserts that "teachers use a variety of instructional techniques, but again, not know how to comprehend what is thought" (p.1). He believes that English teachers must use "every possible tool" and NLP is one of the most useful tools which foster learning. Therefore employing NLP techniques in the realm of learning could be an essential step "forward in the arena of instruction that education has experienced in the last two hundred years" (Helm, 1989, p.2).

Similarly Yero (2001) believes that NLP is going to find a new way to education, "a shift of focus". She claims that most of the NLP principles are effectively used for psychology, health and business, and on the contrary applications to education are very few. She asserts that it is because most teachers know little about NLP or have never heard of it. Consequently, teachers do not have any idea about NLP and its effective results on their job. Therefore, there is less demand for NLP training on the part of teachers.

Most of the teachers are busy with their many overwhelming responsibilities (such as covering the required amount of the book in a limited time, fulfilling the administrators' demands and preparing the learners for the final exams); therefore, they do not have enough time to explore about NLP, finding its useful techniques to improve their work But as Yero (2002) claims, the time has come to give more opportunities to NLP and to think more about what it can bring to the field of education, due to the fact that NLP has a powerful potentiality to make positive changes in education.

In response to teachers not paying much attention to psychological needs of individual learners, in this study we attempt to examine the relationship between NLP, teacher success, teaching experience, gender, and degree in English language learning classes in Iran to make the most of NLP strategies in classes. Since we believe that there has always been a distinction between the learners who have gained English language knowledge in public schools (formal context) and the ones who have obtained the knowledge through private language schools (informal context) in Iran, and due to the fact that formal (public schools which are ruled by the government) and informal (private language schools governed by private sectors) settings have different orientations towards teaching and learning, we try to investigate these variables in these two contexts to lessen this widening gap. Besides, cognizing the role of the mentioned variables in NLP leads us to recruit and educate better qualified teachers.

1.1 Theoretical framework

NLP was first developed by Bandler and Grinder in 1970's. They asserted that NLP is an approach whose main goal is to foster the communication process affectively and to facilitate the learning process or individual development. According to Bandler and Grinder (1975) if people are able to understand how others can do something successfully, they can copy that action or process completely and successfully and then teach it to other people. In another similar view to NLP, O'Conner and Seymour (2002) introduced NLP as a model in which every individual builds his or her own unique experience of life, thoughts, and communication. According to them, NLP is "the art and science of personal excellence" (p.1). They mentioned "art" because each person has a unique personality type and a special style to what he does in his life. They mention "science" because for understanding and discovering each person's styles and patterns, we should use a method or process. Therefore, NLP is related to many kinds of professional practitioners including: "managers, trainers, sales people, market researchers, counselors, consultants, medics, lawyers, and more" (Tosey, Mathison, & Michelli, 2005, p.144).

Although NLP has been mostly used in clinical and business contexts, it is becoming more and more familiar and interesting in education. For instance, Tosey, Mathison, and Michelli (2005) stated that it is a field which brings innovation with its wide range of applied factors and techniques. They argued that learners and teachers can apply these techniques within both formal and informal education settings. In the same vein, Craft (2001) tried to explore the relationship between NLP and learning. She asserted that NLP is a set of practical strategies people use to achieve the desired outcomes in their lives to be successful. According to her views, NLP collects and gathers words, thoughts, and behaviors to achieve the goals.

NLP educators as Sharpley (1985), and Tosey and Mathison (2003), believed that all teachers influence their learners' responses by their way of using language. Many of them use NLP techniques to achieve educational objectives without being aware of it, or may unintentionally use language in its negative way. Therefore using NLP helps teachers to think about their behavior and be aware of what they are doing and saying in the classroom and then try to be more effective. In essence, based on NLP, teaching is a process of creating states which are conducive to learning, facilitating learners' exploration of their internal representations, which can lead to the desired goal. Helm (1989) stated that NLP techniques give a good chance to foster the learners' learning and communication skills. Therefore, every individual English learner

and teacher will be able to experience a true, complete, and appropriate learning environment.

Recently, NLP principles have proven to be notably influential in Second or Foreign Language Learning (ESL/EFL). Richards and Rodgers (2001) introduced NLP as a supplementary technique in teaching second language. Besides, Tosey and Mathison (2003) offered NLP strategies a solution to classroom problems. Millroad (2004) defined this technique as "An approach to language teaching which is claimed to help achieve excellence in learner performance" (p. 28). Kudliskis and Burden (2009) suggested NLP principles as "given away" to teachers and students facing exam anxiety and other related pressures.

Furthermore, Millroad (2004) conducted three workshops, for 16 experienced English teachers of at least five years of teaching experience, to enhance their awareness of NLP in their classroom discourse. The result was that teacher discourse could be considered as a tool of success or failure in learners through creating congruence via NLP strategies. In another attempt, Legall and Dondon (2006) mentioned the problem of recent student's behavior evolution and offered NLP as an instrument to motivate students and enrich the quality of teacher learner relationships. Additionally, Helm (1990), analyzing the data gathered from 200 male and 86 female students, reported that there is no significant difference between sexes or races regarding the distribution of visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning modalities. Subsequently, Helm (2009) conducted a further research and examined the impact of NLP modalities of eye movement, the use of predicates and posturing on English instruction for the learners to reach their full intellectual potential in the learning environment. Pishghadam, Shayesteh, and Shapoori (in press) by designing an NLP scale applied it to high school students, reporting a significant relationship between NLP principles and teacher success. A review of the literature on NLP reveals that, to our best knowledge, the influence of teacher quality characteristics has not been carefully examined yet. Besides, its role in the field of education, and particularly ESL/EFL has not received much practical attention. Due to the scarcity of research in this area, there seems to be a dire need for more research in this area.

1.2 Purpose of the study

As it was already mentioned, the basic intended function of NLP in most contexts and studies is psychological and clinical (Tosey, Mathison, & Michelli, 2005), but in this article, it has been tried to give a new dimension to the understanding of NLP related to the field of English learning. In fact, the major purpose of this article was to explore the application of NLP in the process of language learning, especially as a way to improve English instruction in formal and informal contexts. The relationship between NLP and different variables in English teaching including: gender, degree, experience, and success were studied in this article. The reasons behind choosing these variables were believed to be as the following. Based on the fact that females are more emotional than males, they were considered to establish more effective relationships with their learners which contribute to a better learning. Additionally, EFL teachers holding higher degrees in contrast to their colleagues owning B.A. have passed further psychology courses; therefore, they are believed to foster more effective interactions. Furthermore, teachers who are more experienced might be better at grasping and fulfilling psychological learner needs compared to their younger peers. To be more exact, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Does the use of NLP influence teacher success?

2. Do teaching experience, gender, and degree play any role in using NLP technique?

3. Is the use of NLP techniques different in formal and informal settings with respect to teacher success, teaching experience, gender, and degree?

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 166 EFL teachers along with 1200 of their students. The sample of 166 EFL teachers comprised two groups of 83 teachers teaching at different *private language institutes* (informal context) and *high schools* (formal context) in Mashhad, a city in the northeast of Iran. Teachers at institutes aged between 18 and 48 years old (Mean = 24.6) with a range of between 1 and 17 years of teaching experience (Mean = 13.3). They were 54 females and 29 males. Whereas, teachers at high schools ranged between 24 and 56 years old (Mean = 39.5) with 3 to 22 years of teaching experience (mean=14.2). They were 58 females and 25 males. All the teachers had different fields of study; however, the majority of them had majored in the various branches of English like English teaching, English literature, and English translation. Some, however, had degrees in majors other than English. It is worth mentioning that in Iran, English teachers are recruited based on having a satisfactory level of English language knowledge especially in speaking. Consequently, holding EFL degree does not play a crucial role in selecting teachers.

Concerning students of the mentioned teachers, approximately 8 pupils were selected randomly from each class. They were all EFL learners ranging from 15 to 18 years old (Mean = 16.3) with Farsi as their mother tongue. Their language proficiency varied from the elementary to advanced level.

2.2 Instruments

In order to measure teachers' use of NLP techniques in the classroom the NLP scale, designed by Pishghadam, Shayesteh, and Shapoori (in press), was conducted. The questionnaire comprises 38 items ranging from (5) "always" to (1) "never", requiring 20 minutes to take the items. Factor analysis has been used to substantiate the construct validity of the scale, and its overall reliability has been high (r=.82). This scale includes 8 factors: flexibility, anchoring, elicitation, modeling, individual differences, leading, establishing a rapport and emotional and cognitive boosters. The overall reliability using the Cronbach alpha in this study was high (r=.89).

The second questionnaire employed to investigate teachers' success in the classroom was 'Characteristics of successful EFL teachers' (Moafian & Pishghadam, 2009). This questionnaire consists of 47 multiple choice items varying from (5) "strongly agree" to (1) "strongly disagree". It takes 30 minutes to attempt all of the items. Exploratory factor analysis has revealed its construct validity and the total reliability of the questionnaire has been 0.94. This scale is composed of 12 constructs: teaching accountability, interpersonal relationships, attention to all, examination, commitment, learning boosters, creating a sense of competence, teaching boosters, physical and emotional acceptance, empathy, class attendance, and dynamism. Using the Cronbach alpha, the researchers in the current study have found a high reliability (r=.95).

2.3 Procedure

The study was undertaken in several private language institutes and high schools in Mashhad, Iran. Near the end of the term, the teachers were asked to fill out the NLP scale, while the 'Characteristics of successful EFL teachers' questionnaire was given to the teachers' students. . It must be stated that there are further ways of measuring teachers' success and effectiveness such as school administrators' evaluations and performance of pupils on standardized tests; yet, researchers preferred learners' ideas due to its practicality of gathering the data.

The data was entered into and processed with SPSS 16 program. To compare the influence of teachers' gender, degree, teaching experience and teaching success on NLP in each of the two settings i.e. private language institutes (informal context) and high schools (formal context), independent t-test was conducted. Additionally, Pearson product–moment correlation was applied to the data to investigate the overall relationship between teacher success, experience, and NLP.

3. Results

In order to investigate the relationship between NLP and teacher success, Pearson product moment correlation was conducted. As Table 1 shows, there is a significant relationship between NLP and teacher success (r= 0.21, p>0.05). It means that the more teachers employ NLP techniques, the more successful they are in teaching.

Furthermore, to examine the differences between the two settings, t-test was run. As Table 2 demonstrates, there is a significant difference between NLP and settings (formal and informal) in general (t= - 2.2, p<0.05). It means that the teachers in informal settings (language institutes) have made more use of NLP techniques, having been more successful ($\overline{x}$= 1.47) than teachers in schools ($\overline{x}$= 1.43).

According to Table 3, the role of experience is different in formal and informal settings. In formal settings, there is a significant negative relationship between experience and NLP (r= -0.12, p<0.05). This implies that the more experienced teachers are, the less they are willing to employ NLP techniques. However, it was found that in informal settings, there is no significant relationship between experience and using NLP techniques (r= 0.01, p>0.05).

Then, the researchers analyzed the differences between NLP and the teachers' gender in formal and informal settings. They examined the role of gender in using NLP techniques. As Table 4 shows, there is no significant difference between male and female teachers in amount of using NLP in both settings. Male teachers in schools use as many NLP techniques as female teachers do (t = 1.17, p>.05).

Moreover, it was found that this is true for language institutes. As Table 5 exhibits male teachers in language institutes do not show any significant difference in using NLP than female teachers in the same setting (t = 1.2, p>.05). It means that gender does not play any role in employing NLP techniques.

Another variable in this study which was examined was degree. As Table 6 demonstrates, there is a significant difference between degree and NLP in language institutes (t = - 1.61, p<.05). It means that teachers with MA degrees utilize more NLP techniques than teachers with BA degrees.

Moreover, as the results of Table 7 shows, there is no significant difference between NLP and degree in formal settings (t = - 0.7, p>.05). It means that degree does not play any significant role in the use of NLP techniques.

4. Discussion

As the results of this study exhibited, there is a significant relationship between NLP and teacher success. This finding confirmed that of pishghadam, shayesteh, and shapoori (in press), in which they showed that NLP factors have a positive correlation with teacher success. Since NLP deals with empathy, monitoring, modeling, rapport, and giving feedback, it is quite fair to claim that teachers using more NLP techniques are more successful than those who do not employ NLP techniques. Moreover, our findings substantiate the fact that teachers in language institutes (informal settings) are more successful in their career than their colleagues in public schools (formal settings). It is maybe due to the nature of informal settings in which teachers have more freedom how to teach and what to teach, while teachers in formal settings are more restricted and controlled by authorities.

Moreover, based on the analysis of the data gathered from teachers and learners in the formal context, and contrary to the popular belief that "practice makes perfect", it was found that there was a negative relationship between teaching experience and the use of NLP techniques. This indicates that as teachers become more experienced, they employ less NLP techniques. This finding is quite justifiable if we look into the formal setting of teaching language in Iran. Teachers in public schools are permanently employed in Iran, not having any fear of losing their jobs, but teachers in private language schools are temporality employed. Moreover, since education in public schools is free of charge, there is no competition among these schools to attract more students, while there is a tough competition between private language schools to take more students. In addition, system of education is centralized in Iran`s public schools; all decisions are made by the government, teachers just do and teach the books and the materials provided by the authorities in charge, while system of education in private language schools is decentralized; teachers have more options and freedom to select their own materials. The above-mentioned situations in public schools make teachers experience burnout syndrome. Burnout is a psychological problem which brings about negative attitudes among teachers, making them inflexible, bored, nervous, and demotivated (Evers, Tomic, & Brouwers, 2004). Therefore, it is not unexpected that these unmotivated teachers in spite of their enough amount of experience do not use NLP techniques. On the other hand, it seems that teachers in language institutes are more eager to use NLP techniques even if they are not so experienced in the realm of teaching. It might be due to the nature of these institutes which were already depicted.

The results of this study also demonstrated that there was no significant difference between gender and the use of NLP techniques. It implies that males and females are equal in employing NLP techniques in class, and difference in gender does not make any important difference in teachers' views towards class management and establishing rapport with their learners.

Finally, according to the results obtained from this study, teachers in schools with different degrees (BA and MA) were found not to show any significant difference in using NLP techniques. It might be due to burnout which was already discussed. When teachers feel emotionally exhausted and depersonalized, it does not make any difference that what their degree is. Covell, MCNeil, and Howe (2009) asserted that the boring and disruptive environment with forcing too much pressure on the part of teachers can cause burnout even in higher educated teachers. But this is not the case in informal settings. The teachers with MA degree are more successful users of NLP. Of course, teachers with higher degrees are more familiar with NLP techniques due to the fact that they take some psychology courses during their education; therefore, this is quite natural to expect them to employ more NLP techniques.

All in all, this study took a step of comparing Iranian formal and informal educational settings with regard to NLP. Further studies can be conducted to examine additional discrepancies between the two contexts as well as the impact of other variables including teachers' personality types, emotional intelligence and IQ with regard to NLP.

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Table 1. Correlation of NLP and teacher success

Variables	N	r	Sig(2tailed)
Teacher Success & NLP	166	0.219	0.005

Table 2. Independent samples t-test for NLP in formal and informal settings

Variables	N	Mean	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)
Formal	83	1.43	164	-2.2	0.02
Informal	83	1.47			

Table 3. Correlation of NLP and teacher experience in formal and informal settings

Contexts	N	r	Sig (2-tailed)
Formal	83	- 0.12	0.05
Informal	83	0.01	0.35

Table 4. T-test for NLP and gender in formal settings

Variables	N	Mean	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)
Male	25	1.44	81	-2.2	0.17
Female	58	1.42			

Table 5. T-test for NLP and gender in informal settings

Variables	N	Mean	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)
Male	29	1.50	81	-1.2	0.23
Female	54	1.46			

Table 6. T-test for NLP and degree in informal settings

Variables	N	Mean	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)
BA	59	1.45	81	-1.61	0.04
MA	24	1.61			

Table 7. T-test for NLP and degree in formal settings

Variables	N	Mean	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)
BA	65	1.43	81	-.70	0.48
MA	18	1.45			