A Survey Of Teacher and Student Beliefs in Singapore's Polytechnics

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Abstract: Language teaching has been focused mainly on teachers' classroom actions and behaviours and their effects on learners. It is acknowledged that teacher knowledge and beliefs form the underlying framework guiding a teacher's classroom practices. However, not to be ignored are learners' beliefs about teaching and learning which influence how they approach learning. Thus, teachers need to be informed about learners' beliefs so that they can better understand and manage their teaching as well as their students' learning. The purpose of this study is to investigate similarities and differences between teachers' and students' beliefs. Sixty-two English language teachers and 164 students from the four polytechnics in Singapore participated in the study. Data for this study came from these teachers' and students' responses to a survey questionnaire designed to elicit information about some aspects of their beliefs. In this paper, we will report on some pedagogically interesting differences in certain areas of teachers' and students' beliefs (e.g., What constitutes good teachers/learners, why learners fail to learn English). We will also discuss the implications of these differences for language teaching and learning.

Key words: teacher, student, belief, learning, English

The purpose of this study was to investigate current trends in English language teaching (ELT) practices among Singapore's tertiary language teachers and the extent these were congruent with students' perceptions about English language teaching and learning. We were interested to see if Singapore's tertiary language teachers' instructional and assessment practices were in line with current ideas of language teaching and assessment as described in the professional literature of applied linguistics (e.g., Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991; Brown, 1994; Ellis, 1994; Genesee and Upshur, 1996; Tudor, 1996).

We begin with a brief literature review on developments in education and ELT. We then present the results of our study in which we asked teachers, or rather, lecturers, as they are called at tertiary institutions in Singapore, and students to respond to a set of questions designed to obtain information about their instructional and assessment practices and their perceptions about English language teaching and learning.

Developments in Education

Constructivism, learner-centredness, metacognition, cooperative learning, and process-oriented instruction are terms commonly referred to in the educational literature, which indicates that a new paradigm of teaching has evolved from the old paradigm (e.g., Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989). Research into the nature of knowledge acquisition and how the knowledge is best acquired has resulted in the development of this new paradigm. For example, for students to make the knowledge their own, they must actively construct, discover and transform information (Leinhart, 1992; Johnson and Johnson, 1994). Pivotal to this construction process is for students to connect the to be learned information to their existing background knowledge (Kuhara-Kojima and Hatano, 1991; Pressley et al., 1992). In addition, when new information is presented in a meaningful situation (Ausubel, 1963) and within a cooperative context (Palincsar, Brown and Martin, 1987; Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Jacobs, 1998), students' learning can be greatly facilitated. In the area of assessment, assessing knowledge in holistic and realistic contexts, rather than in disjointed artificial contexts has been gaining acceptance, resulting in greater use of more authentic assessment methods which are alternative, non-traditional, or continuous (Hamayan, 1995).

Some of the important differences between traditional and current thoughts on education are featured in the table below (adapted from the Hawaii State Department of Education, 1991).

Traditional Paradigm	Current Paradigm
◆ Student as passive recipient	◆ Student as active constructor of meaning
◆ Emphasis on parts	◆ Emphasis on the whole
◆ Isolated knowledge and skills	◆ Integrated knowledge and skills
◆ Emphasis on teaching	◆ Emphasis on learning
◆ Teacher as information giver	◆ Teacher as co-learner and facilitator
◆ Learning as an individual activity	◆ Learning also as a social activity
◆ Only teacher-directed learning	◆ Also, student-directed learning
◆ Emphasis on product	◆ Emphasis on process
◆ One answer, one way, correctness	◆ Open-ended, non-routine, multiple solutions
◆ Tests that test	◆ Tests that also teach

Developments in ELT

English language teaching has undergone changes over the last 40 to 50 years. It has moved from a traditional paradigm to a more current one (e.g., Hymes, 1972; Widdowson, 1978; Richards and Rogers, 1986; Larsen-Freeman, 1998). The advent of communicative language teaching in the 1960s challenged the prevalent trend in language teaching. Discontentment with the mainly code-based view of language teaching in approaches such as, the grammar translation and audiolingual methods resulted in this new approach. The difference between the code-based view of language teaching and communicative language teaching is that the former sees language as a system of grammatical patterns which students have to become proficient in regardless of their learning goals, whilst the latter sees language as a system for the expression of meaning and for communication. The major features of the communicative view of language are encapsulated by Richards and Rogers (1986, p.71):

◆ Language is a system for the expression of meaning.

◆ The main function of language is for interaction and communication.

◆ The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.

Behaviourism, the prevailing learning theory in the 1960s, was soon replaced by cognitivism (Richards and Rogers, 1986). The cognitivist view of learning saw language learners as active constructors of knowledge using whatever mental faculty they had available. The discovery of rules that allowed people to use the language creatively was the responsibility of the learners. Subsequent advancements saw learners not only as cognitive beings, but also as affective and social beings, in addition to being strategy users (Larsen-Freeman, 1998). These advancements gave rise to a view of learning that recognised the major roles that learners play in the learning process. Thus, the term learner-centredness was coined to reflect this view of learning (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996). Learner-centred methodologies that consider the needs, goals, interests, learning styles and strategies of learners are common attributes in many of today's ELT classrooms as a result of this view of learning.

Helping students become autonomous learners, that is, learners who can direct their own learning regardless of the learning context, is one of the most important goals of learning, which is fundamental to the concept of learner-centredness (Dickinson, 1992). Learner autonomy can be cultivated by way of instructional procedures that allow learners to partake in conscious planning, monitoring and evaluation of their learning. Research in the area of cognitive and metacognitive strategy training is full of ideas on how to help students become independent learners (see, for example, Wenden, 1997; Cohen and Weaver, 1998; Hall and Beggs, 1998).

Language teachers take on drastically different roles in the learner-centred classroom as they are seen as more of language facilitators, counsellors and collaborators rather than as lesson conductors or knowledge dispatchers. In taking on these new roles, it is imperative that teachers not view learners as hollow cavities waiting to be imbued with a plethora of knowledge. Learners should be encouraged to actively construct and reconstruct knowledge. Hence, the main focus of instruction in the classroom is directed towards not the lessons, the texts or the

syllabus, but the learners themselves (Freeman, 1999).

The area of language assessment has also seen parallel developments. It is increasingly normal to find in English language classrooms authentic forms of assessment, like portfolios, interviews, journals and self/peer-assessment (Penaflorida, 1998). Such forms of assessment, unlike traditional forms, e.g., multiple choice tests, are more student-centred as, apart from being an assessment tool, they "give students a sense of involvement in, control over, and enthusiasm for learning" (Genesee and Upshur, 1996, p. 116). A part from this, authentic assessment methods give teachers useful information that can help them improve their instructional plans and practices. Simply put, authentic assessment can bring positive effects on teaching (Hamayan, 1995).

The differences between the traditional and new paradigms can be summarised below (Richards and Rogers, 1986; Nunan, 1988; Genesee and Upshur, 1996; Tudor, 1996; Larsen-Freeman, 1998):

Traditional Paradigm	New Paradigm
◆ Focus on language	◆ Focus on communication
◆ Teacher-centred	◆ Learner-centred
◆ Isolated skills	◆ Integrated skills
◆ Focus on accuracy	◆ Focus on fluency
◆ Discrete point tests	◆ Also holistic tests
◆ Traditional tests (e.g., multiple choice)	◆ Also, authentic assessment (e.g., portfolios)
◆ Emphasis on product	◆ On process
◆ Individual learning	◆ Also, cooperative learning

Research Questions

Our research was inspired by an earlier study that looked at trends in English language teaching (ELT) in Asia. This study by Renandya, Lim, Leong and Jacobs (1999) sought to find out if the instructional and assessment practices of Asian teachers of English were in keeping with current notions of language teaching and assessment as reflected in the literature of applied linguistics. This study provided valuable information

about what teachers and students considered to be important factors in the teaching and learning of English as a second and foreign language. The present study sought to ascertain not only teachers' but also learners' views on certain factors known to be essential in the teaching and learning of English in the classroom. Specifically we were interested in learning more about the beliefs of English language lecturers and students in the four polytechnics in Singapore: Temasek Polytechnic, Singapore Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Nanyang Polytechnic.

The following questions guided our study:

1. What is Singapore's tertiary English language lecturers' preferred teaching methodology?
2. What are their perceptions regarding
   - the role of language teachers in the classrooms?
   - the role of pre-course needs assessment?
   - the characteristics of good language teachers and good language learners?
   - the causes of learners' failure to reach a high level of English proficiency?
3. What are the functions of traditional and non-traditional modes of assessment?
4. What are students' perceptions regarding
   - the role of language teachers in the classrooms?
   - the characteristics of good language teachers and good language learners?
   - the causes of learners' failure to reach a high level of English proficiency?
5. Do polytechnic students and polytechnic lecturers hold the same or different views with respect to items in question 4?

Answers to questions 1 to 3 above would enable us to get an idea of these polytechnic lecturers' views regarding their teaching (#1 and #2) and assessment (#3) practices. Answers to number 4 would inform us about polytechnic students' views regarding language teachers and learners. An analysis to #5 would help us see if there are differences between polytechnic students' and polytechnic lecturers' views about language teaching and learning. We now describe the methodology of our study.

METHOD

Participants

A sample comprising a total of 62 lecturers and 154 students from four polytechnics, all publicly funded, participated in the survey. Table 1 presents the breakdown of the participants by polytechnic.

Table 1. Participants by Polytechnic

Polytechnic	Lecturer	Student
Temasek	31	48
Singapore	18	58
Ngee Ann	10	29
Nanyang	3	19
TOTAL	62	154

Female lecturers constituted 75.8 % of the participants. The majority of the lecturers (62.9 %) had an MA in language education as their highest degree, with the rest holding BA degrees (32.3 %), doctorates (3.2 %) and diplomas (1.6 %). The respondents varied greatly in terms of the length of their teaching experience. The mean years of teaching experience was 11.3, with a standard deviation of 8.1.

There was a slightly higher number of female students (54.5 %) than male students (45.5 %). The majority of the students (87 %) had a Singapore-Cambridge GCE 'O' Level Certificate or its equivalent, with the rest holding diplomas (7.8 %), Singapore-Cambridge GCE 'A' Level certificates or equivalent (1.9 %) and Institute of Technical Education certificates (1.9 %). The rest of the respondents (1.3 %) held other qualifications.

Materials

Two questionnaires, one for the lecturers and one for the students, comprising a combination of both closed and open ended question formats were used. The questionnaire for the lecturers had two parts: Part I asked respondents for some basic biographical data; Part II asked respondents to characterise their teaching and assessment practices and what influenced

these. Some of the questions in this questionnaire were adapted from Renandya, Lim, Leong and Jacobs (1999). The questionnaire for students also had two parts: Part I asked respondents for some biographical data; Part II asked respondents for their views on what makes a good English language teacher and learner.

Items in Part I of the Lecturer Questionnaire asked respondents to state their sex, highest academic or professional qualifications, teaching experience and the educational level of their students. Items in Part II asked respondents to describe their teaching approaches and styles; what they considered to be the qualities of a good teacher in general and the main role of the English language teacher in particular; the extent to which they had carried out needs assessment among their students; the kinds of assessment they usually used and the primary functions of these assessments; the extent to which they had included authentic (alternative) assessment procedures in their instruction; and what they considered to be the learning behaviours of a good language learner, as well as the factors that contributed to learners' failure to reach a high level of proficiency in English. Some of the items provided the respondents with a list of options to choose from; others required respondents to evaluate items on a likert-type scale. For each item, a space was provided for respondents to write their comments.

Items in Part I of the Student Questionnaire asked respondents to state their sex, highest academic or professional qualifications, and the type of institution they are studying in. Items in Part II asked respondents to describe what they considered to be the qualities and main role of a good English language teacher; and what they considered to be the learning behaviours of a good language learner, as well as the factors that contributed to learners' failure to reach a high level of proficiency in English. Some of the items provided respondents with a list of options to choose from, whilst one required respondents to evaluate items on a likert-type scale. For each item, a space was provided for respondents to write their comments.

Procedure

The survey was conducted between December 1998 and April 1999. Before participants filled out the questionnaire, they were first informed

about the purpose of the study. We administered the questionnaire to the heads of the language and communication skills department of each polytechnic for dissemination to their respective staff. Once the questionnaires were completed, they were returned to us. The returned rate of the questionnaire was 73 %. With regards to the collection of student data, we also administered the questionnaire to the heads of the language and communication skills department of each polytechnic for dissemination to their students. Again, once the questionnaires were completed, they were returned to us. The returned rate of the questionnaire was 96%.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teaching Styles and Methods

When asked about their teaching approaches or methods (Item 2.1), 95 % of respondents indicated their teaching methods to be between five to ten. Of this 95 %, 61.7 % clustered around seven to eight on the scale, with a mean of 7.10 (refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Teaching Method
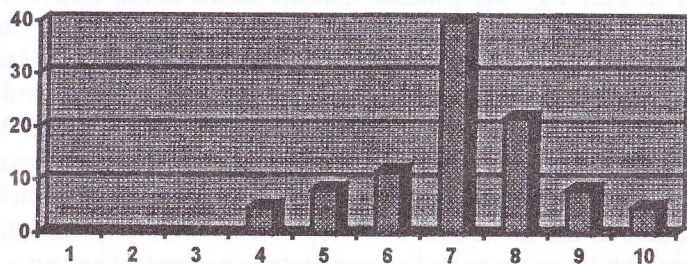
=Structural   10=Communicative

The respondents' answers to the question of whether or not their teaching tended to be teacher-centred or learner-centred (Item 2.4) showed that 95 % of respondents indicated their teaching styles to be between five to ten. Of this 95 %, 70 % clustered around seven to nine on the scale,

with a mean of 7.26 (refer to Table 2).

Table 2. Teaching Style
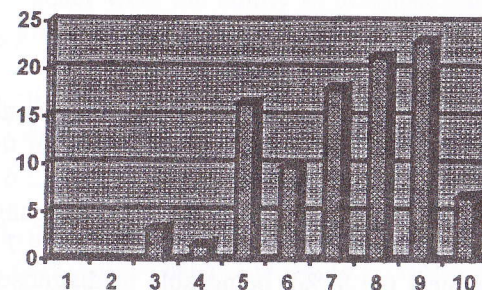
1=Teacher-Centred   10=Learner-Centred

It should be noted that the means for method and style are very similar in that it is 7.10 for method and 7.26 for style. It can be concluded that lecturers are of the opinion that a more communicative method of teaching is one that involves a more learner-centred style of teaching.

Needs Assessment

What kinds of needs assessment did teachers carry out (Item 2.5)? As can be seen from Table 2, on a scale of one to five, teachers carried out needs analysis mostly to find out about learners' communicative needs (mean=3.58), followed by goals and objectives (mean=3.50), interests and preferred activities in the classroom (mean=3.45), and learning styles (mean=3.24).

Table 2. Needs Assessment

Item	Lecturers (Mean)
Communicative Needs	3.58
Goals and Objectives	3.46
Interests	3.45
Preferred Activities	3.45
Learning styles	3.24

Again, here we see that to an extent most lecturers conduct needs assessment to assess learners' communicative needs.
This concurs with the earlier result that lecturers are adopting a more communicative method of teaching.

Lecturer's Views on the Qualities of a Good Teacher

When asked about what they considered to be three qualities of a good teacher (Item 2.2), the majority of the lecturers were of the opinion that a good teacher should be able to motivate students (72.6 %). The other qualities that they felt were important in a good language teacher were helping students become more autonomous learners (59.7 %), being knowledgeable in the subject (41.9 %), being able to diagnose students' weaknesses (38.7 %), being willing to experiment and learn (38.7 %), being well-organised (33.9 %), being proficient in the language (12.9 %), and being hardworking (3.2 %). Interestingly, none of the respondents felt that giving enough assignments was a quality of a good language teacher. Table 3 presents a summary of lecturers' view regarding the qualities of a good teacher.

Table 3. Qualities of Good Language Teachers (%)

| Item	Lecturers (n=62)	Students (n=154)
Able to motivate students	72.6	78.6
Help students become autonomous	59.7	22.1
Knows his/her subject matter well	41.9	35.1
Able to diagnose students' weaknesses	38.7	58.4
Willing to experiment	38.7	18.2
Well-organised	33.9	34.4
Proficient in English	12.9	39.6
Hardworking	3.2	4.5
Give enough assignment	0	7.8

Students' Views on the Qualities of a Good Teacher

When asked about what they considered to be three qualities of a

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good teacher (Item 2.1), the majority of the students, like lecturers, were of the opinion that a good teacher should be able to motivate students (78.6 %). The other two qualities that they felt were important in a good language teacher were the ability to diagnose students' weaknesses (58.4 %), being proficient in the language (39.6 %). Table 3 presents a summary of students' view regarding the qualities of a good teacher.

Overall, motivation helping students become autonomous learners, knowing his/her subject matter well and the ability to diagnose students' weaknesses are considered important. From Figure 3, a majority of students (78.6 %) and lecturers (72.6 %) rated the most important quality of a good teacher as one who should be able to motivate students. Our result concurs with earlier studies (e.g. Bress, 2000; Renandya et al, 1999), which found that both students and teachers, affirmed the importance of the teacher's role in enthusing the class.

Table 3. Lecturer vs. Student on Qualities of Good Language Teachers
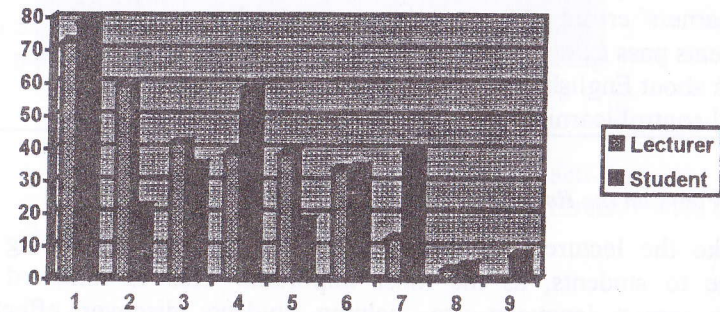
1 = Motivation; 2 = Autonomous; 3 = Subject Matter; 4 = Diagnose Weaknesses;
5 = Experiment; 6 = Organised; 7 = Proficient; 8 = Hardworking; 9 = Assignment

The ability to conduct independent learning is not rated as important by the students (22.1 %) compared to the lecturers' beliefs (59.7 %).

Also, lecturers are perceived by students as individuals who tell students of their areas of weaknesses in the language (58.4 %) compared to only 38.7 % of the lecturers in the survey who believed this to be so.

Perhaps the concept of self-assessment is still not sold yet and this is an ability that ties in with independent learning.

Lecturer's Views on the Roles of Teachers

Table 4 shows that lecturers rated Role 1, that is, providing useful learning experiences, as the most important role. This is followed by helping students discover effective strategies, helping students become self-directed learners, passing on knowledge to students and etc.

Table 4. Roles of Teachers

Item	Lecturers (Mean)	Students (Mean)
Provide useful learning experiences	4.40	3.97
Help students discover effective strategies	4.27	4.05
Help students become self-directed	4.27	3.79
Pass on knowledge to students	4.18	4.19
Model correct language use	3.93	4.07
Correct learners' errors	3.56	3.99
Help students pass exam	3.43	3.43
Give rules about English	3.33	3.73
Direct and control learning	3.15	3.47

### Students' Views on the Roles of Teachers

Unlike the lecturers, students rated Role 4, that is, passing on knowledge to students, as the most important. This is followed by modelling correct language use, helping students discover effective strategies, correcting learners' errors and etc (refer to Table 4).

Overall, providing useful learning experiences, helping students discover effective learning strategies, helping students become self-directed learners, and passing on knowledge and language skills are considered important.

From Table 4, it is interesting to note that there seems to be greater contrasts between the perceptions of lecturers and students for items 1, 3, 6, 8, and 9. Lecturers rate helping students become self-directed learners

and providing useful learning experiences to be more important than the students. Students, on the other hand, rate directing and controlling learning, correcting learners' errors and giving rules and explanations about English to be more important than the lecturers. Once again, we see that whilst qualities related to independent learning are considered to be important by lecturers they are not considered to be of great importance by the students.

Table 4. Lecturer vs. Student on Roles of Teachers
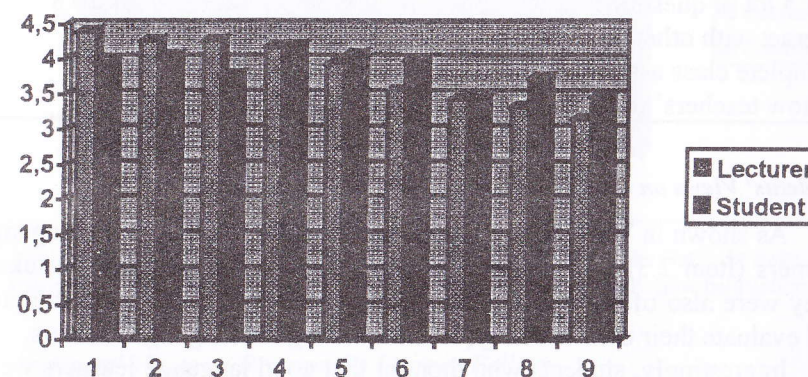
1=Learning Experiences; 2=Effective Strategies; 3=Self-Directed;
4=Pass Knowledge; 5=Model Language; 6=Correct Errors; 7=Pass Exam;
8=English Rules; 9=Control Learning

Lecturers' Views on the Characteristics of a Good Language Learner

As shown in Table 5, most lecturers (79 %) felt that good language learners (Item 2.9) were those who were motivated. They were also of the opinion that those who were able to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning (77.4 %) were good language learners. The number of respondents who thought that good language learners were those who completed class assignments and those who followed teacher's instructions were small—9.7 % and 6.5 % respectively. This suggests that the old paradigm has relatively little support among lecturers in our study.

Table 5. Qualities of Good Language Learners (%)

Item	Lecturers (n=62)	Students (n=154)
Motivated	79	54.5
Able to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning	77.4	61.7
Not afraid of making mistakes	62.9	77.3
Active and speak out	29	54.5
Ask a lot of questions	19.4	16.2
Interact with other students	12.9	20.8
Complete class assignment	9.7	8.4
Follow teachers' instructions	6.5	3.9

Students' Views on the Characteristics of a Good Language Learner

As shown in Table 5, most students (77.3 %) felt that good language learners (Item 2.3) were those who were not afraid of making mistakes. They were also of the opinion that those who were able to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning (61.7 %) were good language learners.

Interestingly, students who thought that good language learners were those who completed class assignments and those who followed teacher's instructions were small—8.4 % and 3.9 % respectively. This suggests that the old paradigm also has relatively little support even among students in our study.

Overall, learners who are motivated, who self-monitor, who have no fear of making mistakes and who are active and speak out are considered important.

From Table 5, it is interesting to note that there seems to be greater contrasts between the perceptions of lecturers and students for items 1, 2, 3, 4. More lecturers than students rated learners who are motivated and learners who can plan, monitor, and evaluate his/her learning to be important characteristics of good language learners. On the other hand, more students than lecturers rate learners who are not afraid of making mistakes and learners who are active and speak out to be important

characteristics of good language learners. Again, here we see that more lecturers than students perceive that good language learners are those who have qualities of independent learners.

Table 5. Lecturer vs. Student on Qualities of Good Language Learners
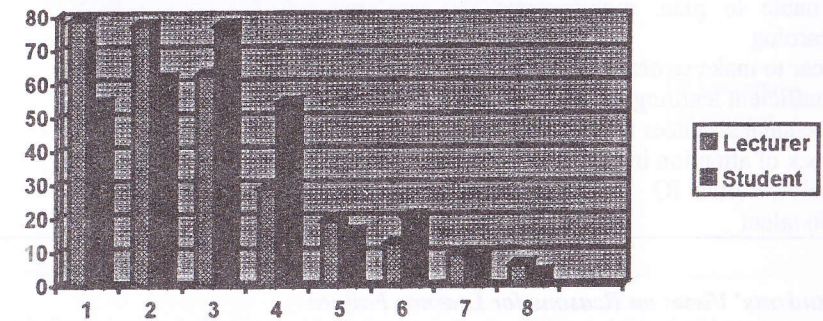
1=Motivated; 2=Self-Monitor; 3=No Fear of Mistakes; 4=Speaks Out; 5=Asks Questions; 6=Interact with Peers; 7=Complete Assignment; 8=Follow Instructions

Lecturers' Views on Reasons for Learner Failure

Table 6 summarises what lecturers thought to be factors that contributed to learners' failure to learn English language (Item 2.10). Not having enough opportunity to use the language in real life was perceived by lecturers to be the main factor. Other reasons which lecturers considered important were unfavourable attitude towards the language (51.6 %), lack of effort (45.2 %), unable to plan, monitor and evaluate own learning (37.1 %), fear to make errors (35.5 %), and inefficient learning strategy (32.3 %). Only a very small percentage of lecturers are of the opinion that low IQ (1.6 %) and lack of talent (1.6 %) are reasons for learner failure to learn English.

Table 6. Reasons for Learner Failure (%)

| Item	Lecturers (n=62)	Students (n=154)
Not enough opportunity to use the language	56.5	48.7
Unfavourable attitude towards the language	51.6	51.3
Lack of effort	45.2	38.3
Unable to plan, monitor and evaluate own learning	37.1	29.2
	35.5	52.6
Fear to make errors	32.3	32.5
Inefficient learning strategy	25.8	26.6
Frequent absences from class	6.5	13
Lack of attention in class	1.6	3.9
Below normal IQ	1.6	3.9
No talent		

Students' Views on Reasons for Learner Failure

Table 6 summarises what students thought to be factors that contributed to learners' failure to learn English language (Item 2.4). Fear to make errors was perceived by students to be the main factor. Other reasons which students considered to be important were unfavourable attitude towards the language (51.3 %), not getting enough opportunity to use the language (48.7 %), lack of effort (38.3 %) and inefficient learning strategy (32.5 %). Only a small percentage of students felt that a low IQ (3.9 %) and lack of talent (3.9 %) are reasons for learner failure to learn English.

Overall, lack of opportunity, unfavourable attitude, lack of effort, no self-monitoring and fear of errors are considered to be of importance when it comes to reasons for learner failure.

From Table 6, the biggest contrast between lecturers' and students' perceptions is that more lecturers than students feel that not having enough opportunity to use the language in real life, lack of effort, and lack of self-monitoring cause learner failure to learn English. However, almost the same percentage of lecturers and students are of the opinion that unfavourable attitude and inefficient learning strategy contribute to learner failure to learn English.

Table 6. Lecturer vs. Student on Reasons for Learner Failure
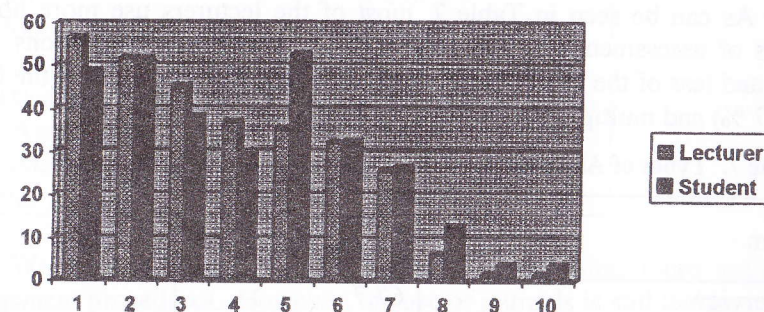
1=Lack Opportunity; 2=Unfavourable Attitude; 3=Lack of Effort; 4=No Self-Monitoring; 5=Fear of Errors; 6=Inefficient Strategy; 7=Absences; 8=No Attention; 9=Low IQ; 10=No Talent

We can see that there is a big contrast between lecturers' and students in that more students feel that the fear of making errors contribute to a learner's failure to learn English. Perhaps this could be a cultural factor where *saving one's face* is more important than being corrected for one's errors, even though not having the fear of making errors is an important quality of good language learners as we found earlier. So we see a correlation here. Therefore, lecturers should be more sensitive to this issue in that error correction should be done in a more subtle manner. They should create a classroom atmosphere that is not threatening so that students would be more forthcoming and not be afraid to make mistakes.

Here again we see that relatively more lecturers than students are of the opinion that the ability to self-monitor, a quality of an independent learner, is one that contributes to a learner's success in learning English.

Traditional Assessment Procedures

Table 1 and 2 suggest that lecturers in the polytechnics in Singapore generally favour a more communicative approach to teaching and learning

the English language. An important question to ask then would be whether the assessment procedures they use support their communicative, learner-centred classrooms, or, instead, constrain what the lecturers are trying to do and achieve (Item 2.6).

As can be seen in Table 7, most of the lecturers use more holistic types of assessment [e.g., interview (67.7 %) and essay questions (64.5 %)] and less of the more discrete type of assessment [e.g., fill in the blank (17.7 %) and multiple choice (12.9 %)].

Table 7. Types of Assessment (%)

Item	Lecturers (n=62)
Interview	67.7
Essay Questions	64.5
Composition	24.2
Fill in the blank	17.7
Multiple Choice	12.9
Cloze	12.9
Matching	3.2
True/False	1.6
Dictation	0

When asked about the functions of assessment (Item 2.7), the respondents reported that they used assessment to find out how much students have learned (82.3 %), assess learning difficulty (67.7 %) and identify areas for re-teaching (45.2 %). Other functions of assessment were to motivate students (43.5 %), assess students' progress (33.9 %) and place students into groups (11.3 %).

Authentic Assessment Procedures

To what extent do teachers include authentic assessment procedures such as project work, portfolios, journals, etc. (Item 2.8)? As shown in Table 8, lecturers use projects to a large extent, whilst portfolios, interviews, observations, peer assessment and self-assessment are used to some extent. Journals are used only to a small extent.

Table 8. Alternative Assessment (%)

Item	Lecturers (Mean)
Project	4.08
Portfolio	3.77
Interview	3.73
Observation	3.32
Peer Assessment	3.18
Self-Assessment	3.07
Journal	2.59

We can see that there is a move towards using more authentic assessment procedures. However, the use of journals is still lacking. This could be due to the lecturers' lack of knowledge or training on how to use journals as a means of assessment. Perhaps, there needs to be more resources and training provided on using journals as a means of assessment.

A similar study, by Renandya, Lim, Leong and Jacobs (1999), also found that journals were less frequently used by teachers from the ten Asian countries that were surveyed. However, these teachers also used less frequently peer assessment and portfolios as assessment procedures compared to Singapore teachers. This could be due to the teachers' lack of knowledge or training on how to use peer assessment and portfolios as means of assessment. Teachers in Singapore, compared to those from other Asian countries, are more fortunate in that substantial resources are allocated to teacher training.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we hoped to get a brief overview of whether a sample of Singapore's tertiary language teachers' perceptions of English language teaching and learning corresponds with those of students and whether they are implementing approaches to teaching and assessment that are consistent with trends in the field of language teaching and assessment internationally. Before we comment on our results, we must first acknowledge the chief deficiency in our study. Essentially, we relied on

self-report questionnaire data from both lecturers and students without triangulation through other data sources, such as classroom observations, interviews, lesson plans, etc.

With this deficiency acknowledged but not discounted, what we see is that tertiary language teachers in Singapore have moved towards a more communicative, learner-centred teaching methods (Items 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.9, 2.10) with some change in assessment techniques (Items 2.6 and 2.8). Why has not there been more change in the area of assessment? Several possible reasons are discussed below.

Due to the fact that the students in tertiary institutions in Singapore do not have to sit for national exams, the lecturers' instruction is not determined by such examinations. This lack of restriction enables the lecturers to favour the use of more holistic type of traditional assessment procedures. However, alternative forms of assessment are not used to a greater extent considering that the teachers' instruction is not bound by national examinations. So, even though the lecturers employ communicative language teaching to quite a large extent, alternative forms of assessment are still not used as much. This could be because of the fact that alternative forms of assessment, which tend to be more communicative, are more difficult to design and implement (Bowler and Parminter 1997). The other reason could be that the area of alternative assessment is a fairly recent development and teacher-training courses have only begun to include it in their curriculum. Much more needs to be done with regards to educating and training lecturers in tertiary institutions in Singapore to facilitate more use of alternative forms of assessment. Recommended works done on alternative assessment that can be referred to include Peyton and Reed (1990), Hamayan (1995), Genesee and Upshur (1996), Puhl (1997), Brown (1998) and Penaflorida (1998).

This study has shown that most of the students' perceptions of English language teaching and learning are not completely congruent with those of the lecturers, in particular perceptions that tie in with the concept of independent learning. A lot more has to be done to raise students' awareness of the benefits of being autonomous learners. By having more alternative forms of assessment, like projects, portfolios, journals, etc. lecturers would create a learning environment that help students in becoming more autonomous learners.

It can be concluded that Singapore's tertiary English language lecturers at the four polytechnics have responded positively to the challenges of the new paradigm in language teaching and just as we assist our students to become life-long learners, we too must become life-long learners ourselves to respond to future challenges.

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