

Teaching Persian Literature to Students through a Cognitive View

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Abstract

As it is believed, the assumption exists that questions relating to three higher levels of taxonomy should start to dominate the higher academic levels in education, with a corresponding reduction in questions requiring retention skills. It means that in the beginning levels teachers had better use of verbs for assessing the retention and recalling information. But if we disregard the higher level processes it is impossible to make students as a critical learner and they are not able to reason effectively and to solve problems creatively. According to Bloom et al. (1956), as teachers we tend to ask questions in the "knowledge" category 80% to 90% of the time. While these questions are not bad in themselves, using them all the time is not good practice. These lower-order questions do not allow for the discussion of problem-solving strategies and mental activities necessary to respond to more complex questions. It is preferable to try to utilize higher order level of questions. Using these questions help students have the opportunity to explain, justify, and rationalize within the social context of the classroom (Chin 2007). These questions require much more "brain power" and more extensive and elaborate answers (Quellmalz, 1987).

Keywords: Persian, teaching, method, literature

1. Introduction

There have been various definitions for learning throughout the history of language teaching. Most people and many teachers define learning as gaining knowledge or information (Sha'bani, 2005). Educators sometime equate learning with transferring information from one person, who is usually the teacher, to another one who is the student. In this unidirectional process, the teacher plays an important role without him/her, there would be no learning. Wang and Farmer (2008) were eager to find the adult teaching methods in China and they tried to analyze teachers' teaching methods using an author-designed survey instrument called Lower-Order Thinking Skills and Higher-Order Thinking Skills (LOTSHOTS). It is used to determine whether knowledge, comprehension and application drove adult teaching methods or analysis, synthesis and evaluation drove adult teaching methods in China. They based Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives and asked 359 teachers to complete the questionnaire. The findings showed that Chinese teachers of adults were not accustomed to teaching higher order thinking skills associated with the three higher levels of Bloom's original taxonomy as characterized by analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Researchers concluded that Chinese teachers of adults almost unanimously taught lower order thinking skills. Chinese instructors of adults were used to teaching lower thinking skills associated

with the first three levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, namely, knowledge, comprehension and application. The study proposes some possible reasons and implications of such practices, and suggests that teaching higher order thinking skills to Chinese adult students might widen their horizon in engaging more openly in learning.

In a related study Horner, Zavodska, and Rushing (2005), did a study on the consistency of learning objectives with the course level in philosophy classes. Using Blooms Taxonomy as the criteria, learning objectives were subjected to content analysis. The results showed that lower-level cognitive skill, was the most emphasized of the cognitive skills and higher-level processes which have the utmost importance in philosophy was least emphasized. As a result of the study, the school conducted faculty training sessions emphasizing the importance of developing higher level cognitive skills in students by offering appropriate cognitive challenges in the learning objectives and in the course content and assessment associated with those objectives.

Bibi Khan et al (2011) did a study based on investigation of quality of questions in secondary level based on Bloom's taxonomy. Twenty teachers of different subjects teaching at secondary level were randomly selected as sample of the study. Teachers were observed using an observational guide and audio recording were conducted. The result of the study showed that most of

the questions were low-level cognitive questions. Among 267 questions 67 percent were knowledge based, 23 percent were comprehension based, 7 percent were application based, 2 percent were analysis based and 1 percent was synthesis based. However the ratio of evaluation based questions was zero. Although this was an informative study it didn't analyze teachers' gender, and also the level of learners' proficiency and just take into account intermediate level.

Another study using Bloom's taxonomy is by Ghabanchi and colleagues (2011). They regarded the analysis of reading skill during classroom time. Taking some notions regarding Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) which has its basis on growing a concern for the effectiveness of communication and the undeniable influence that individuals can exercise on each other through verbal interaction and discovering influential features of language used between interlocutors their investigation was mainly conducted to analyze the *quality of talk* between two persons. They analyze teacher discourse according to Bloom's cognitive model, especially the action verbs, while teaching reading in EFL context. The researchers studied the transcriptions of audio-recorded observations to discover the quality of teacher talk while presenting reading activities and its relation to learners various levels of proficiency. The results in this study revealed that teachers, especially in intermediate and upper-intermediate levels, use action verbs that are mostly related to knowledge and comprehension. At advanced level, while teaching reading, teachers have established a balance between using knowledge verbs and more high-level thinking processes such as evaluation. In the conclusion researchers believe teachers should be concerned to increase learners' *insight*. When learners just receive knowledge, they turn to consumers; however, when their insight increases, they become producers of knowledge and from this insight they would be able to solve their own as well as the others' problems. This study has some deficits such as it did not show a clear distinction between different levels of students, it also did not show the difference between teachers' genders and how it could be different in these two.

2. Results and Discussion

One of the most helpful studies related to Bloom's cognitive taxonomy and its objectives is the one by Ziff, (2011) in his article named "Helpful Hints Series #11". He defined a new objective for using Blooms' cognitive taxonomy in Curriculum development. He believed this model provides a structure that allows teachers to present a lesson to a group of students who have varied needs and abilities. As he stated "This model supports the need to *differentiate* the curriculum so all students are able to participate in the same content area during a lesson. The structure allows the teacher to accommodate

a variety of students' needs by applying the appropriate questions and activities for children so that they may equally participate in the lesson". Ziff provide an example for making his theory more crystal clear:

If the class is studying domesticated animals as part of a science unit, the teacher can develop activities at each level of Bloom's Taxonomy to involve students related to their assessed needs and abilities. The model allows a lower functioning student to respond to one group of questions and activities, while higher functioning students are responding to another set of questions and activities which are all related to the same topic of study (p.1).

Ziff supposed that if the teacher uses these action verbs in the structure of a question regarding the content area it automatically involves the student thinking at that level in which the verb word appears. Therefore, if we ask a student to "invent" something we are asking them to perform at the synthesis level of thinking (the fifth level in Bloom's taxonomy). By asking a student to probe or inquire the teacher is requiring the student to think at the analysis level (it is again a higher level, the forth level). As a conclusion he planned a lesson plan based on his studies and stated that:

The teacher must plan a lesson, which includes a variety of activities and questions, forcing the students to think and function at each level of the taxonomy. This is the teacher's opportunity to be creative. The teacher prepares questions and activities related to all levels of the taxonomy directly related to the content of study" (p. 2).

Below is an example of some questions and activities related to the study of domesticated animals utilizing the Bloom's Taxonomy. Notice the use of the verbs in each sentence (Ziff, 2011).

Domesticated Animals

Level I and II: Knowledge/Comprehension

1. Locate and list the animals that live on your block.
2. Identify the different breeds of dogs in your neighborhood.
3. Observe a dog while it is at play and rest. Explain how different dogs sit and lay.

Level III: Application

1. Teach your dog a new trick.
2. Interview people who own pets. Make a survey of people who own pets in your neighborhood.
3. Construct a mobile or draw a collage about dog care and grooming.

Level IV: Analysis

1. Compare and contrast the physical and social characteristics of dogs and cats.

2. Develop a survey comparing and contrasting the different types of foods available for dogs or cats.
3. Make a chart comparing the anatomy of dogs and cats.

Level V: Synthesis

1. Develop a cartoon based on the relationship between an animal and a child.
2. Invent a toy or machine that would help dogs or cats live a healthier and happier life.
3. Create a TV game show about domesticated animals.

Level VI: Evaluation

1. Lead a panel discussion on the values of pets.
2. Write an editorial about the advantages and disadvantages of having a pet animal.
3. Have a dog and cat show. Present winner awards and ribbons.

Ziff (2011) believed for the sake of better understanding for the students, they can be grouped according to need or ability so the teacher can provide prerequisites skills and knowledge.

Although the writer believes this method takes much time and effort on the part of the teacher to organize and implement this strategy, he states once teachers is comfortable using different levels of activities and questioning, he will find the time well spent and can make the class more interesting and exciting. At the end he stated: it is time consuming to gather data and material and suggested teachers can begin the process with one subject area. When they feel more confident for utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy with the students they may use the strategy in other subject areas. Setting up a chart in classroom for referring to taxonomy verbs is a useful way to teach a lesson.

The role of teachers experience in teachers discourse is an unknown era in the fields of Bloom's cognitive taxonomy. Knapp (2003) points out that professional development is a critical link to improved teaching. But how the teacher experience can affect teachers discourse is a question which needs to be considered.

According to Rodríguez and McKay (2010) there are many differences between experienced and novice teachers.

As it is clear it is also important to take into account the youth privileges in comparison with the experienced teachers. They may be more energetic, with more patience and be up-to-date and can be more flexible against the new methods. But who is novice and who is experienced?! What is the rationale for categorizing these two groups?

As Rodríguez and McKay (2010), stated novice teachers are relatively easily defined as those with little or no classroom experience. For categorizing these teachers from experienced teachers we use the study have done by Gatbonton, 1999. He did a study and categorized experienced teachers as the teachers who have at least

more than four years of teaching experience (Gatbonton, 1999). This theory have adopted by many researchers thereafter.

In a study done by Akyel, (1997) he concluded that experienced teachers use wider and more varied range of instructional options in response to student cues. They welcome student initiations (i.e., student questions or comments that prompt a change in the direction or topic of a lesson) because they believed this would lead to meaningful communication in the class.

In another study Richards and Farrell (2005, p. 7) identified the following characteristics that expert teachers tend to share, make them separate from novice teachers.

The differences between expert and novice teachers have taken into account by Iranian researchers. As Zarei and Ashrafi (2012) stated, experienced teachers have a tendency to use strategies which are approved based on their experience. Novice teachers with less experience in teaching think differently. They may be eager to apply new strategies which could be contrary to others' way of teaching, such as the innovation of modern strategies based on their personal thought and creation of methods that help them to progress.

There are other studies which compared expert and novice teachers and concluded that expert teachers could be more effective teachers. As Dunkin (2002) expressed, experts have a tendency to be more analytical, more aware of complexity and have more enriched conceptual repertoires regarding teaching than novices. As stated by Brillinger (2004), the main novice teachers' characteristics are direct teaching of curriculum, not regulating the amount of content, covering sufficient curriculum, and ignoring or not paying attention to the learners' prior knowledge. Experienced teachers, on the other hand learn to "bait and switch", move to the direct teaching of curriculum, regulate the amount of content but do not adjust the flow to allow more/less when possible, and use recall questions to uncover prior learning of students. Hogan, Rabinowitz, and Craven (2003) believed the strategies that are planned by expert teachers to teach specific skills are more than the ones used by novice teachers. Unlike expert teachers who perceive of the class as comprised of unique individuals, novice teachers see the class as a whole. Student achievement is very important for expert teachers, while novice teachers' pay more attention to class interest (Hogan et al, 2003; Mainemelis, 2001; Tsui, 2003).

3. Research on Cognition

Some researchers use Bloom's taxonomy in other areas of study. Philip Machanick did a study regarding computer science fields. The first course is a Higher Diploma course, Data and Data Structures (DDS). The second is a third-year course, Algorithms and Artificial Intelligence (AAE). Machanick believed to propose a curriculum which starts

from lower-order cognitive skills, while working up to higher-order skills in later years. As he believed Bloom's Taxonomy is widely recognized in school education as a basis for ordering material. Straight factual knowledge comes before comprehension. Application of knowledge comes next. Finally, analysis and synthesis (words which have a specific meaning in Bloom's work) are the most advanced cognitive skills. know functionality of a range of programs; know how user requirements are specified; know the purpose and use of user-level documentation; given a complexity result, measure a program's speed in a lab, and verify that a graph of run time matches the predicted speed. The learning concepts in the first year mostly focus on knowledge and comprehension phase, the lowest part in the Bloom's taxonomy. The contents in the second year of learning have some features. As an example for *formal languages and databases* teachers put some requirements like: understand Turing machines, finite automata and pushdown automata; prove simple results for each model; construct simple programs in Turing machines, and simple recognizers in the other two (using supplied tools); understand the value of relations as a data representation; given unnormalized relations, perform normalization; understand the application of these concepts to databases; understand the general value and applicability of these formal approaches. These are regarding the two middle levels of Bloom's taxonomy which is application and analysis. The third year of studying in this curriculum regards the top two levels of learning, synthesis and evaluation. For instance in the subject of *network and operating system projects* consider some needed information like implement software using operating system calls, including use of pipes or other higher-level models of inter-application communication, multithreaded applications, use of low-level networking protocols such as UDP to implement higher-level protocols; simulation. Results from the DDS courses suggest that the Bloom's Taxonomy-based approach works at least as well as conventional approaches.

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