# University Students' Preferences for a Teacher and Teaching Style: A Case Study of Moroccan Students

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 2000

## ABSTRACT

**University Students' Preferences for a Teacher and Teaching Style: A Case Study of Moroccan Students**

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This thesis presents an exploratory study that was conducted with Moroccan university students to examine a possible link between students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style, with an emphasis on the cultural components which may affect students' evaluation or perceptions of teaching and teachers.

Seven participants were interviewed and asked to describe their best and worst teacher according to questions designed around the PALS' (Principles of Adult Learning Scale) seven factors, a self- assessment tool designed to identify teaching styles. The "best" and "worst" teachers' teaching style was then evaluated, based on the students' perceptions of their chosen teachers. Best teachers chosen by the participants did appear to tend towards a learner-centered teaching style, although moderately, while worst teachers did not seem to manifest any of the traits and behaviours associated with learner-centeredness. However, it was evident that within the particular context of the Moroccan higher education system, teachers are constrained by state regulations that would limit the extent to which a teacher in Morocco *can* be learner-centered.

Other interesting factors that emerged from this study include: the importance of immediacy within the student-teacher relationship despite cultural norms around authority, and a possible gender-bias in students' choices of "best" and "worst" teachers.

*I dedicate this thesis to my daughters Joelle and Myriam: I am in awe of the respect, appreciation and admiration they held for the very thing that took me away from them from time to time.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although the process of writing this thesis was quite a solitary experience, I owe my strength and courage to the abundance of people who support, encourage, believe in me, and most of all, love me. And this is why I wish to take this opportunity to express my sincerest and heart-felt gratitude to them.

My family, who are always as close as they possibly can when the need arises, I will never thank enough. I am grateful that my father transmitted his courage and intellectual ambition, that my mother taught me some of her unsurpassed social mastery, and that my brother always pragmatically reminds me that I better not become one of those "boring and arrogant, highly educated intellectuals". I am ever so thankful that my grand-parents are playing such an important role in my life, and are such incredibly fantastic great-grand-parents. I want to acknowledge the dedication of my grand-mother, who has committed herself to washing my clothes for the entire duration of my studies; it has undoubtedly been a motivating factor in pursuing my higher education.

I hold such tremendous respect for the gift of true friendship, and such phenomenal affection for my dear and close friends, of which I am blessed to have so many, that I wish to thank them too. Special thanks to Chantal, my oldest and closest friend, who is the only one able to make me laugh at my shortcomings, and who so candidly admires my talents; to Hassen, my confidant and best pal, who never takes me too seriously and with whom I

enjoy an indefinably strange friendship; to Mohammad N.-S., a man whom I admire tremendously, and whose modesty, courage, persistence and commitment truly inspire me, and to Mohamed M., whose frank and straight talk always provides for stimulating thinking. To my good friends Christine, Lily and Joanna, who have time and time again patiently listened to me and shared their stories with me, I wish also to express my deep appreciation.

A great many thanks go to Mohammed H.-S., Tarik, and Nabil, who have made my stay in Morocco an unforgettable experience. Their assistance was undeniably helpful and intensely pleasant.

I wish also to thank all my cyber-friends: Azzedine, Sami, Adil, Adel, Mounir, Missoum, Djamel, Karim, and all the others. They were always just a few clicks away (although most of them thousands of kilometers away), when I needed to vent, complain and scream in the middle of a "thesis-crisis".

And last but not least, I wish to thank my thesis director, Joyce Barakett, who has guided me attentively and unobtrusively all along, allowing me to freely pursue my intellectual interests.

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*"And in truth, if he (the teacher) is wise, he does not invite you to enter the house of his wisdom, but guides you to the threshold of your own mind."*

*(Khalil Gibran; **The Prophet**)*

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The factors that contribute to the effective teaching of adults are numerous and multifaceted. They include dimensions such as classroom climate, quality of teaching tools, appropriateness of text-books, teacher personality traits, teaching methods and strategies, evaluation tactics, teacher communication skills, teacher-student relationship, and so on. One of the areas that has been studied in the past to evaluate a number of these factors in relationship to teaching effectiveness is teaching styles. A teaching style, as defined in this study, includes a teacher's way of communicating with the students, the choices s/he makes to create a desired classroom climate, the level of directiveness taken, and the choices s/he makes in tools, methods, strategies, and evaluation techniques. In other words, teaching style refers to the beliefs of a teacher that translate into their classroom behaviour and choices. Many education specialists have studied

teaching styles in relationship to either student preferences or achievement (e.g., Bujold & Saint-Pierre, 1996; Conti, 1985, 1989; Hilligross, 1992). Most of the researchers have agreed on a type of polarization of teaching styles, although they may have termed them differently (see Mohan & Hull, 1975; Ron, 1977). Even those who have delineated the styles into more than two categories did, in the end, place those numerous categories under one of two headings (Axelrod, 1980; Grasha, 1994; Ryans, 1975). From there, research has attempted to prove or evaluate which of the styles appeared to be more effective. One of the ways used to evaluate the effectiveness of these styles is to rely on students' perceptions of teacher effectiveness. Although an overwhelming amount of research supports the learner-centered teaching style (as opposed to the teacher-centered style) as the preferred one by students, very little research has been done to link culture with students' preferences for a teaching style.

## 1.1 Purpose of the Study

The aim of the thesis proposed here is to conduct a study in order to investigate the link (or lack of) between Moroccan university students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style. Why would such an inquiry be meaningful? Even if the phenomenon of globalization is well on its way, there still remains a gap in available resources between so-called developed and developing countries. Developing countries often resort to

professional resources stemming from developed countries, and higher education is no exception. In light of the opportunities for educators trained in North America to teach abroad and especially in developing countries, it is important to question assumptions deriving from the educational research conducted with students in North America and other 'developed' societies. We must be aware that the increasing popularity of one approach to education in North America, for example, might come into conflict with the philosophical stance and assumptions of a particularly different culture's educational system.

In order to investigate student preferences and teaching styles in a particular cultural context which differs considerably from a North American context , it seemed appropriate to focus on students in such a country, in this case: Morocco. From there, we may ask the question "what is the preferred teaching style of Moroccan adult students in Morocco?". To address this question, it appears adequate to ask Moroccans who are involved in post-secondary education in Morocco what they consider to be the traits and behaviours of a good teacher, and to contrast these perceptions with those traits and behaviours they attribute to bad teachers. From the descriptions given by the subjects, patterns may emerge, since different traits and behaviours are considered either teacher or student centered.

Briefly, the purpose of this study is in a way self-evident: I wish to explore Moroccan adult students' preferences for a teaching style. But moreover, I wish to question the generalizability of previous research on the

subject that was conducted mainly in the Western hemisphere of the world, and more often than not in North America. This may prove to be useful in questioning assumptions made about teaching and teaching effectiveness and what it is supposed to "look like". It may give educational researchers and teachers who plan to teach in an intercultural and/or multicultural context an incentive to become more aware of the effect of culture on students' perceptions of teaching and teachers. Therefore, this study intends to take a new look at an old subject: a cultural perspective on teaching effectiveness as it relates to students' preferences for a teacher and the teaching style this teacher displays in the classroom.

## 1.2 Outline

The following chapters will cover different aspects involved in this study. **Chapter 2** relates to the methods used to collect the data, including how the participants were found and who they are, the framework that was used to design the interview questions and to analyze the data, as well as the procedures and events surrounding the actual interviews with the participants, and limitations that relate to the method.

**Chapter 3** will address the particular historical and cultural context of the higher educational system in Morocco, its development through the years as well as the crisis it is presently considered to be undergoing, and the general public opinion about education in Morocco.

**Chapter 4** will cover the literature relating to different aspects involved in this thesis, such as studies conducted on student preferences for teachers, literature related to teaching styles, and literature that covers factors which are peripheral to the elements of this study.

The next chapter, **chapter 5**, will present the results of this study and discuss their implications. The findings will be presented in relation to each of the factors of the chosen framework which are said to constitute teaching styles, as well as bring to light other commonalties that arose from the analysis of the interviews with the participants. Attempts will be made to explain and/or raise questions in regards to those commonalties. A critique and limitations section follows, in order to look at possible alternative explanations for obtained results or potential pitfalls in the interpretation of the data.

The sixth and final chapter is entitled "Conclusions": it will cover a summary of the findings and how they may be significant, as well as raise important questions that this study has yielded and propose ways and/or areas to explore in future studies or research.

I have explained the purpose of this study, which is mainly to investigate students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style in a specific cultural context which differs from that of previous research on the subject. I have defined the concept of teaching styles and emphasized the lack of research that takes culture into account when dealing with studies

which rely on students' perceptions of teaching and teachers, and I have also exposed some of the reasons for which such a study might be useful. In the next chapter, I will present the method that I have chosen to investigate the link between students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style, as well as how I intend to allow other significant factors to emerge.

# CHAPTER 2

# METHOD

## 2.1 A Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach is appropriate here since the nature of this study is exploratory. Qualitative researchers begin, as I do, with a research question and "theory develops during the data collection process" (Neuman, 1997, p.334). This approach is useful in that it allows for the discovery and interpretation of unpredictable or unexpected data. While a relationship between Moroccan university students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style is sought, much of the data obtained allows for the emergence of other important factors.

Also, the goal of this study is to get an understanding of the participants' perceptions of what constitutes a "good" teacher, and this is in line with the goal of qualitative social research which is "to develop an understanding of social life and discover how people construct meaning in natural settings" (Neuman, 1997, pp.68-69).

Additionally, the interview as a research procedure has as its central value that it "allows *both* parties to explore the meaning of the questions and answers involved" (Brenner, Brown & Canter, 1985, p.3) and thus permits the interviewer to clarify or negotiate with the interviewee the meaning of a particular question, should it not appear clear to the participant.

This is crucial and all the more important in the context of cross-cultural interviews, where the interviewer's cultural background differs from that of the participants. In this case, not only does culture differ but the language used to interview the participants is not their "first" language.

## 2.2 Participants and Sampling

The participants for this study were four males and three females who had in the past attended or were presently attending a Moroccan university. They were all of Moroccan origin and were aged between 22 and 30 years. The extent of their involvement, in terms of years of attendance, ranged between 3 and 8 years (from 3rd year of first degree to completed doctorate). Most participants (6 out of 7) had or were attending a university whose educational system is based on the French educational model (see **Chapter 3**, p. 26, for details on the Moroccan educational system). The remaining participant had attended a private institution which is more influenced by the American educational system.

The initial contact for the purpose of finding volunteer participants was established through the Internet and cyber-chat rooms. This relationship developed through a regular exchange of e-mails over a period of several months. The participant was told about the nature of the research and eventually asked if he could extend the invitation to participate to other fellow students. Explanatory flyers where sent to him through the mail, both in

French and English, with attached "coupons" to hand back to the initial contact student. These coupons were never given back to him but he reported some interest among his group of university colleagues. Eventually, a trip to Morocco occurred and people were asked for their participation. However, some unexpected factors intervened with the intended sampling procedures.

Initially, it was intended to find all the participants in Morocco, all of which would be *presently* enrolled in university to ensure that the age range would not be too wide. One of the factors which made this difficult was that the trip occurred during Ramadan month (a month in which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset). During this part of Ramadan, students were on vacation and most were visiting family members out of the city (Rabat). On one hand, most of the before-contacted people were thus difficult or impossible to find. On the other hand, Moroccans tend not to engage in any activity during daylight time unless obligated to (by job-related activities for example), which reduced the window of opportunity time-wise. Nevertheless, all four male participants were interviewed individually during the span of the first few days of the trip, and participants who did not fulfill the original criteria (for example, age and present enrollment in university) were interviewed regardless, since the difficulties were becoming more evident and foreseeable.

Other factors, not all clear or objectively-definable, affected the opportunities (actually resulting in a lack of such) to interview female

participants. First, the interviews were conducted at one male participant's family's house, and young women are socially, culturally and traditionally discouraged from visiting young men's homes. Second, it was improper and socially unacceptable to invite "natives" into the researcher's hotel room. Even if a public place, as quiet as one could be found, was a possibility, there still remained other factors. These possible factors could be that young women's freedom is limited and/or, in this very particular case, that specific group dynamics were involved. The first hypothesis arose from the observation that fewer women than men are seen out during the evening (although I was told that women clearly out-number men in Morocco), and the second came from observing one participant (the so-called initial contact participant) phoning his closest female friend (within his group of university friends) and always coming back bearing the news that she could not come. As to the reason(s) why she refused to come to meet us, it was not made clear, except that this participant repeatedly said "she is too judgmental" throughout the following conversations. It was thus an intuitive interpretation on my part that the woman might have been voluntarily turning the invitation down.

During the trip, it was finally impossible to interview female participants. Upon reflection, it would probably have been more helpful to attempt contacting a potential female participant directly from the use of Internet before leaving for Morocco.

However, attempts were made, once back in Montreal, to find female Moroccan participants here who had in the past attended a Moroccan university. Through contacts here, I was able to locate and approach a Moroccan woman here who had in the recent past attended a Moroccan university. The most evident potential problem involved in interviewing participants such as this one is that their subsequent experiences, with this culture and the educational milieu here, might interfere with her recall and/or her interpretations of past experience.

Finally, two other female participants were located, one in France and one in Morocco through different contacts. These two women were interviewed through the use of Internet, thus in a live written interactive fashion. The potential pitfall in this case is that the participants appeared to volunteer less detailed information, since typing takes more time and effort than speaking. The questions were therefore answered, but additional information, if not probed for, was not as freely given.

**Table 1. Information relating to the participants**

| Gender | Age | Years of study | Field of study | Location |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| M | 22 | 3 | Economy | Morocco |
| M | 30 | 7 | Law | Morocco |
| M | 22 | 3 | Journalism/ Communication | Morocco |
| M | 25 | 3 | Finance | USA |
| F | 29 | 4 | Electrical eng./ Telecommunications | Canada |
| F | 30 | 8 | Biology | France |
| F | 25 | 6 | Economy | Morocco |

In **Table 1** (p.11), details pertaining to the participants are displayed, such as gender, age (at the time of the interview), years of higher education in Morocco, field of study and location, i.e. where the participant lived at the time of the interview.

## 2.3 Framework and Procedures

In order to attempt to establish the relationship between students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style, what was needed was an instrument that would enable us to evaluate the teaching style of both 'good' and 'bad' teachers. For this purpose, I refer to the PALS (Principles of Adult Learning Scale). The PALS was designed to be "a tool for instructors' personal assessment of teaching style" (Conti, 1989), but a questionnaire was designed from the PALS with questions addressing its seven factors, in order to assess the teachers' teaching style based on the perceptions of the students. These seven factors are:

1. Learner-centered activities;
2. Personalizing instruction;
3. Relating to experience;
4. Assessing student needs;
5. Climate building;
6. Participation in the learning process; and

7. Flexibility for personal development.

When used as a self-assessment tool, a low score on these factors indicates a teacher-centered style while a high score indicates a learner-centered teaching style. A score which is neither high or low indicates a combination of styles. For the purpose of this study, analysis was based mostly on whether or not a teacher fulfilled these criteria of "learner-centeredness", based on the mentioned seven factors. While the seven factors were used as a basis to identify criteria of teaching styles, the questions as proposed in the PALS itself were not used as a basis to construct the questions for the interviews hereby described.

Some of the reasons for this are that the PALS was designed for teachers' self-scoring and that the questionnaire is mostly aimed at teachers who are involved in continuing education, which is not the nature of the educational context of the participants interviewed for this study. The responses evidently were based on the student's perceptions of the teacher's teaching style.

Probably the most important reason for taking the PALS factors' essential meaning, rather than basing the interview questions directly from the PALS self-scoring questionnaire, is that considering the lack of academic freedom present in the Moroccan educational system, it is simply impossible for teachers to display some of the learner-centered characteristics proposed in the PALS questionnaire. You may refer to

**Chapter 3** (p.25) to understand the elements that contribute to the constraints Moroccan teachers face within their educational system. For instance, it would be impossible for a science teacher to allow students to determine, in any way, the matter in which they would wish to be evaluated, since examinations are regulated by governmental bodies which impose the same exams for all science faculties in Moroccan universities.

The definitions, or rather the degree of possible "learner-centeredness" have been slightly "reduced" to accommodate the cultural, educational context in which this study is taking place. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the following are definitions and/or explanations of the seven factors, as they are perceived in their basic "philosophy", derived from an interpretation of the essence behind the PALS' original questions:

*Learner-centered activities* promote the development of students' own perspectives in regards to knowledge, allowing students' to develop and state their own values regarding a taught subject, and they allow students to pursue their own personal interests regarding the course material presented. Learner-centered activities imply that a teacher relies on the students also for the choice of activities, and proposes activities that will focus on the students as key elements in the learning process. For example, a teacher who uses lecturing and exclusively lecturing as a teaching method would tend towards the extreme "teacher-centered" end of the continuum, while a teacher who asks the students to research and

present their own findings and opinions to cooperatively teach the rest of the class would be considered "learner-centered".

*Personalizing instruction;* A learner-centered teaching style is one where the teacher adapts his/her objectives, methods, techniques, assignments, etc. to the students' level, learning pace, needs, and who gives special attention to students with particular needs and/or problems. A teacher who "personalizes instruction" would adapt to the students as a group, as well as to the students as individuals. A teacher with a teacher-centered style would teach in the same manner to different groups of students and to individual students, regardless of the specificities of his/her students.

*Relating to experience*; Teachers with a learner-oriented teaching style make links between their subject matter or course material and the students' previous experience. These links can relate to the students' personal experience, to their experience as students or to their experience as citizens or observers (past and future). I will consider all these types of experiences as such because of the different nature of the taught subjects involved in the participants describing their best and worse teachers, as well as because the students interviewed did not have past professional experience. At the other end of the teaching style spectrum, a teacher displaying a teacher-oriented style would give little or no regard to the students' experience, perspective or to the practical applications (possible and future experiences) of the subject he/she is teaching.

*Assessing student needs* is a central element in the learner-centered teaching style. Learner-centered teachers adapt their learning objectives and teaching methods to the particular needs of the students. There might, however, be a difference in the degree of learner-centeredness of teachers: in its "extreme" form, these teachers will let the students define their needs. But some learner-centered teachers might also elicit information from the students and then themselves identify those needs. Teachers who are teacher-centered would not adapt to the needs of students, self-defined or not; they would respect a curriculum which does not take into account the needs of specific students or groups of students. At best, the needs of students would be defined by what they expect them to be.

*Climate building;* In the context of this study, the climate will refer to the overall learning atmosphere present and felt by students in class. A climate typical of a classroom where the teacher is learner-centered would allow students to interact together, make them feel free to state their opinions, values or feelings, and would essentially be described as "pleasurable" or "warm". Teachers who are teacher-centered would encourage discipline and silence from their students, in order to ensure minimal distractions and to enable better "absorption" of the delivered information.

*Participation in the learning process*; In a learner-centered classroom, students participate in decision-making concerning a variety of factors. They might be given freedom to choose topics to be discussed,

material to be covered, ways and criteria by which they will be evaluated, etc. In a teacher-centered classroom, the teacher makes all these decisions.

*Flexibility for personal development*; The essence of the meaning intended by Conti when he referred to this factor is that in a learner-centered learning environment, students have opportunities to "develop personally", i.e. to confront personal issues if they wish to do so, to develop socially and relate to others in the classroom, and tend to view the teacher as a resource rather than a provider of knowledge. A teacher who is teacher-centered would exert control and discipline in the classroom, limiting the contacts between students, act as a provider of knowledge and stick to his/her planned objectives with special focus on the subject "to learn" rather than the students and their own personal development.

The participants were asked, in a one-on-one interview (In French as they preferred to be interviewed in French) the following questions about both their 'best' and 'worse' teacher, hereby translated in English:

1. Can you describe this teacher in general terms?
2. What did you like best (and what did you like least for the 'worse' teacher) about this teacher?
3. Can you describe this teacher's teaching methods?
4. What kind of relationship did this teacher have with his/her students?
    - Did s/he treat all the student in the same manner?

5. Did you have the impression that s/he knew the needs of his/her students?

- Did s/he ask what the students wanted?

6. Did s/he present the students with choices?

- If so, in what regards (in which aspects)? Can you give an example?

7. Did s/he present the subject matter in such a way that you had an idea of how to use this information?

8. Did s/he make a link between the subject matter and the students' experience?

9. Did s/he encourage the students' participation in class?

10. Did s/he put some efforts in creating a pleasurable learning climate?

- If so, how?

11. Did you have the impression that s/he had the personal and general development of the students at heart?

- If so, can you give an example of how that manifested itself?

12. What type of evaluation methods did s/he use?

13. Did the students have a say in regards to their evaluation?

14. Compared to other courses, would you say you performed better, as well or worse?

15. Compared to other courses, would you say you have learned more, as much or less in this course?

16. Do you think that most of the students had an opinion similar to yours in regards to that teacher?

17. What is the main reason why you chose this teacher?

As is evident in the questionnaire, some questions were added to obtain information about the personal characteristics of the teacher (question #1), others to test for possible biasing factors, such as performance (question #14) or personal conflict (question #16), and one to assess the motives students had for choosing a teacher (question #17). When the participant's response was not clear or did not answer the question, additional questions were improvised to provide further clarity.

Prior to being asked to answer this questionnaire, participants were also asked questions about themselves, such as: country of origin, age, years of schooling, system in which they were schooled as adults in Morocco as well as their field of study. They were also asked to identify the country of origin of the teachers, their field of study, the teacher's approximate age and their gender, and the country where the teacher was trained in his/her field, if it was known. This information was used to better understand some of the motives they might have consciously or unconsciously had for choosing those teachers, as well as to offer possible alternative explanations for their assessment of those teachers' effectiveness or to identify patterns in the chosen "best" and "worse" teachers.

Three of the interviews were conducted in the evening, at one of the participants' family residence in Rabat, a fourth in a hotel lobby in Marrakech. One of the three female participants was interviewed in a university library in Montreal. The two other female participants were interviewed through the Internet.

While the PALS' instructions indicates that it seeks to assess a teacher's behaviour in the classroom (see Conti, 1989, p.7), the questions designed here around the seven factors of the PALS offered an insight into how those teachers might act outside of the classroom. For example, to assess whether a teacher would be likely to personalize his/her instruction, the follow-up question to question #4 "Did s/he treat all the students in the same manner" as well as further improvised probing, attempted to address this factor, but answers might be indicative, in addition to or in place of "personalizing instruction", of the teacher's behaviour with students outside of the classroom. To better understand to which factors the different questions might refer, see **Table 2** (p.21). In some cases, some questions could address more than one factor, or, incidentally, the participants' responses might not have given insight into such targeted factors, but instead information that is valuable in other ways. Also, remember that some questions not mentioned in **Table 2** were questions designed to control for other variables, as mentioned above.

**Table 2. Interview questions as they relate to the PALS' seven factors**

| Question * | Factor(s) * |
|---|---|
| 1 | Any, all, or other factors not relating to the PALS. |
| 2 | Any, all. |
| 3 | 1, mainly; could be any other factor. |
| 4 | 2, 4, 5, 6 and/or 7. |
| 5 | 4 |
| 6 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and/or 7. |
| 7 | 3, 4, 6, and/or 7. |
| 8 | 3 |
| 9 | 1 and/or 6. |
| 10 | 5 |
| 11 | 6 and/or 7 |
| 12 | 1, 2, and/or 6 |
| 13 | 2 and/or 6 |

* Numbers refer to those indicated in the lists of questions and PALS factors.

Originally, a group interview or discussion was intended to explore students' opinions and perceptions about education in Morocco as a whole, educational methods used in universities, changes that have been occurring in the educational system, as well as to get an understanding of the

participants' perspectives on the meaning of different terms used in the interview.

For reasons mentioned above, it was impossible to formally arrange for a group interview. However, as a few participants had repetitive contacts with the researcher, and showed some genuine interest in the research topic, they volunteered information about their opinions concerning education in Morocco in general. These fragments of information arose in social conversations, and while they did provide some insight into the students' opinions, they were not recorded through the use of a tape recorder, as were the individual interviews.

## 2.4 Limitations

Inherent to any procedures of collecting data are some limitations. Some may be due to the nature of the tool chosen, others to the sample of participants chosen (which were discussed above), to the wording of questions, to language or cultural obstacles, to the implied meanings and definitions of key terms, and so on. All of these were present in this study, some of which appeared only after conducting the interview, others occurring while attempting to collect the data. Becoming aware of these limitations, even if they cannot be eliminated because they were encountered too late in the process, can at least allow us to be especially prudent about the analysis and interpretation of data, as well as the possible conclusions

which will follow. In exerting caution due to known and recognized limitations, they may even serve to hypothesize about alternative explanations for specific findings.

One of the most important limitations of this study concerns the use of key-terms, such as "teacher-centered" and "learner-centered". These teaching styles are generally agreed upon in their essential meaning, but by looking closely at the criteria defined by different educational specialists and researchers, we can see differences in definitions. For the purpose of this study, I have used Conti's (1989) seven factors from the Principles of Adult Learning Scale to delineate the criteria which define the two teaching styles. It could be argued that the PALS is not the best tool to measure teaching styles, since it may appear that the criteria defining "learner-centeredness" are "positive" in their wording and that those defining "teacher-centeredness" are "negatively" worded. Unfortunately, no study has been found which attempts to validate or contradict the effectiveness of the PALS as a tool to measure teaching styles. Nevertheless, since Conti is a recognized specialist in the field, the PALS was hereby used as a basis to conduct a framework for collecting data.

Limitations in regards to language also presented difficulties. Through interviewing the participants individually, it became obvious, because of repetitive misunderstandings, that certain terms in French might not have their exact equivalent in Arabic (the first language of the participants). Questions #14 and #15, which used terms of comparison

"better than, as well as and worse than" (in French "mieux, aussi bien et moins bien que"), repeatedly triggered answers that suggest an obstacle linked with language and meaning, such as, for example "yes" ("oui"). The questions had to be re-formulated in different ways, more than once, for participants to understand the meaning. And despite that, by comparing their final answers to these questions with answers to other questions, there still remained contradictions which could suggest continued misunderstanding of terminology. Once they understood that the questions were related to comparisons (they were asked if they performed as well as, better than or worse in those courses than in other courses), they tended to answer, by comparing their grade to the average grade of the other students in that class. An other possible explanation could also be that the students did not wish to reveal elements linked to their performance, although this seems less likely since they shared about their performance at other times, even directly reporting their grades.

Perhaps the most important limitation encountered in using the initial PALS questionnaire has been avoided by slightly modifying the extent to which each question addressed a learner-centered characteristic, to allow for Moroccan teachers to be evaluated by the students as having a learner-centered tendency. I have tried by doing so to reduce the cultural bias inherent to the PALS questionnaire as it is. We will see in the discussion section how that affects the interpretation of the data obtained through the students' reports of their perceptions of the teachers they describe.

In this chapter, the method used in this study has been addressed, and a description of how the participants were found was given. The procedures of developing a questionnaire based on a basic understanding of the PALS factors has been explained, and the limitations concerning the method have been provided. The next chapter will present an overview of the historical developments in higher education in Morocco, as well as some of the particularities inherent to the management of the educational system and their implications for this study.

# CHAPTER 3

# MOROCCAN HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

As it was mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, it is important to be aware that the philosophical and cultural bases of one educational system may affect students' perceptions of teachers and teaching, teaching methods, and students' preferences. It may also affect the opportunities to be exposed to the teaching styles seen and evaluated in other cultural educational contexts. Therefore, it is appropriate to look at the history and development of education, particularly higher education in Morocco, in order to understand some of the students' motives and/or perspectives. This is why an "historical and cultural context" section has been included here.

## 3.1 History and Moroccan System of Higher Education

The first Moroccan university was founded in 859 AD, in Fès (Qattab, 1999), the city which is still considered by Moroccans as the country's "cultural capital". This university was essentially religion-oriented, although it did offer the delivery of knowledge in the fields of mathematics, medicine, philosophy and law. At that time, and before the French-Spanish colonization, the Moroccan educational system was based on Muslim traditions. As Szyliowicz (1973) reported, "Freedom of thought was never a central value of Muslim society and culture; rather, the emphasis lay upon acquiring as much of the

accepted wisdom as possible (...) The very origins and character of the educational system reflected this point" (p.71).

From 1912 to 1956, Morocco was a French-Spanish protectorate and the French invested considerable resources in the modernization of the educational system (Berlitz, 1995), mostly with the intentions of educating people to administrate the state within a French system. At that point, the focus shifted from a Muslim educational system that was religion-oriented to a more contemporary educational system with more emphasis on "inquiry and meaning" (Manzoor, 1990, p.37). In 1956, Morocco regained its independence and in 1957, the first independent Moroccan university was created in Rabat. Although the Moroccan government sought to "arabicize" and modernize the educational system, Moroccan universities as they are known at present still are greatly influenced by the French system of higher education (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Formation des Cadres et de la Recherche Scientifique, 1999; Bourqia, El Harras & Bensaïd, 1995).

Morocco now has 14 universities, with a total enrollment of 256 000 students, taught by approximately 10 000 teachers, 25 per cent of which are females (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Formation des Cadres et de la Recherche Scientifique, 1999; Sabour, 1996). Additionally, Morocco has 62 establishments designed to train people who will work primarily in the public sector (their enrollment represents only 5 per cent of the total number of students enrolled), and 80 private establishments of

higher education offering specific programs (Qattab, 1999). Aside from Al Akhawayn University, whose system is "American" system-based, Morocco's educational system, as seen before, still remains highly influenced by the French system of education.

The French system remains mostly theory-oriented, and most Moroccan teachers have obtained their doctorate degrees in France. It should be known that in public universities, the courses are often given in French, which is not the students' first language, and that oral exams are a wide-spread evaluation technique- some subject matters and courses are even known as "oral subjects". Oral exams mostly take place in a teacher's office, where the teacher asks questions to one student at a time and grades accordingly. The decisions regarding the language used and the evaluation procedures in place are in theory determined by the governmental body responsible for establishing national norms and regulations of university programs, leaving little freedom for the teachers to adapt these to their students, if they wished to do so (Mekouar, 1996). Bourqia, El Harras, and Bensaïd (1995) report that the language of use in universities depends on the programs; in Mohammed V University, in Rabat, French is the language used for teaching in the departments of Medicine and Science, Arabic and French are used in the faculty of Law and at the INSEA (*Institut National des Statistiques et d'Economie Appliquées*; National Institute of Applied Statistics and Economy). In the faculty of *Lettres* (which includes literature, humanities and social sciences), Bourqia, El Harras, and Bensaïd (1995) state that

since 1974, the social sciences departments have been "arabicized" completely (meaning Arabic is the only language used to teach in those departments).

Academic freedom is know to be very limited in Morocco, as all public universities must comply with rules and regulations coming from the Government Department responsible for higher education. Referring to Moroccan universities, Mekouar (1996) states that "it is quite evident that Universities and their constituent parts enjoy little or no autonomy at the three levels of pedagogy, administration, and budget" (p.304). However, he also says that while this is true in theory, some degree of academic freedom is observable to a certain degree and in some faculties, in practice (Mekouar, 1996).

The faculty of science offers the least freedom because course content is defined minutely by the government, but teachers may choose to emphasize parts of the curriculum if they wish to do so in the classroom, keeping in mind that examinations are standard nation-wide. In the faculties of Letters and Humanities, academic freedom is more evident; because of the lack of consensus within the council of decision-makers regarding which content matter is most important, the courses decided upon leave much more freedom as the titles are vague (for example, courses entitled "*littérature 1*" and "*philosophie*"). Teachers in such faculties must submit to the types of evaluation and the weighing imposed by the government as well,

but exam questions are not standardized and uniform across all universities (Mekouar, 1996).

## 3.2 Moroccans' Views on Higher Education

Some of the reported educational problems in Moroccan higher education are: an inefficient educational system, a low rate of scientific research, a lack of communication and exchange between institutions, and a lack of consideration for special Moroccan regional needs in relation to the geographical situation of educational establishments (Qattab, 1999). And although private institutions claim to offer better-suited training and education, some of them do not deliver, and others are financially out-of-reach to the vast majority (Qattab, 1999).

The result is, according to Qattab's (1999) article, that public opinion of Moroccan higher education is becoming more and more negative, and students in general are pessimistic about the quality of education and their future. In a survey conducted with 500 university students in Morocco, 60.2% of respondents declared being unsatisfied with university, 24.2% said they did not have an opinion on the matter, leaving only 13.8% who were reportedly satisfied with their university (Bourqia, El Harras & Bensaïd, 1995). This was also confirmed by the interviewed participants, most of which reported there is too much emphasis on theory, that the theories are

out-dated and that there is a considerable lack of opportunities to gain practical, hands-on knowledge in Moroccan universities.

After listening to the participants and other Moroccans' views on education in Morocco, it would appear that few, if any of them, would agree with Manzoor's (1990) contentions that "in the Islamic system, there is equality of opportunities irrespective of class or economic status" and that "the Islamic system gives a great deal of freedom to students to choose their field of interest and has no rigid examination system" (p.5). According to Bourqia, El Harras, and Bensaïd (1995), the access to higher education remains an enormous privilege destined to a minority of young Moroccans who have in one way or another succeeded in overcoming the obstacles inherent to such an educational system. They further state that the fourth year university student is a survivor of school and university elimination, and should he come from a modest socioeconomic background, he is also a "miracle" (Bourqia, El Harras & Bensaïd, 1995).

Perhaps because the French system of education has been adopted, some of the basic Islamic traditions and philosophies have been lost in the construction and organization of education and educational institutions. As Manzoor (1990) states:

> In developing a curriculum, besides other considerations, one has also to take into account the traditions, culture and the value system of the community concerned. Further, one has to go by long term requirements of the trained manpower for the community and the country. (p.35)

A lack of attention given to such considerations was underlined by Qattab (1999) as one of the major reasons for the educational crisis in Morocco.

## 3.3 Implications

The implications of an educational system such as Morocco's for this research have been eluded to earlier. In an educational system that is essentially controlled by the government, where elements such as course content and/or examination procedures and grade-weight are determined by forces external to the teacher, it would be difficult to encounter teachers who show evidence of a learner-centered teaching style to the same or a similar extent than teachers may be able to in North America. If teachers' freedom is constrained, students' freedom will thus be as well. If a teacher can not choose particular material or specific examination strategies, how can he or she present his/her students with a choice in such matters?

Also, it should be noted that student evaluation of teachers is never mentioned in the literature pertaining to Morocco and it's higher education system. Students appear to have no part in any decisions made by teachers, faculties or the state in regards to *their* education.

We have seen in this chapter how higher education in Morocco developed through the different historical periods, how this educational

system functions, and how this may affect the concepts reviewed and concerned in this study. The next section will look at the literature pertaining to the subject of the study as well as related and relevant elements.

# CHAPTER 4

# LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed will be presented in four parts. The first part relates to research findings as they pertain to student's preferences for a teacher in general. It will outline the overall teacher traits and behaviours which have been most highly rated by students at different levels of schooling, as well as those traits and behaviours least favourably rated by students. The second part will address teaching styles and the research that was conducted to determine 1) what are the different teaching styles that arise and 2) how do teaching styles relate to student achievement and preferences. The third part of the literature review will refer to opposing views on the subject of teaching style and teaching effectiveness. The fourth and final part will refer to other variables that may affect students' preferences for a teacher and serve as a backdrop to what can be expected from the present exploration if the results confirm or oppose the most often agreed-upon contentions about the generally most preferred teaching style. The research reviewed will mostly be presented in chronological order within each part.

## *Student preferences*

The interest expressed in research on effective teaching as defined, perceived and described by students is not a new one. In 1934, Hart asked senior high-school students to describe the characteristics of good and bad

teachers (Mohan & Hull, 1975). Students overall described good teachers as being helpful in their school work, able to explain lessons and assignments clearly, using examples and having a sense of humour (Mohan and Hull, 1975). On the other hand, this study revealed that students described bad teachers as unable to explain clearly, partial to brighter students, and as having a superior, aloof and overbearing attitude (Mohan & Hull, 1975). Mohan and Hull (1975) also report that studies by Witty (1947) and Bousfield (1940) tended to support Hart's conclusions at both the high-school and college levels. McCombs and Whisler (1997) reported that the Michigan studies of the 1950s (described in Pintrich, Brown & Weinstein, 1994) "show that students believe that good teachers put across material in interesting ways, stimulate intellectual curiosity, give clear explanations, are skillful in observing student reactions, are friendly, and provide clear structure and organization to the materials presented" (p.37). Those same studies found that good teachers, as perceived by students, gave quality feedback, were available and fair and had a genuine concern for students, and "were enthusiastic about their subject matter and teaching" (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, p.29).

Mohan and Hull (1975) report on Stern's claims that good teachers show evidence of patterns such as: flexibility in directedness, ability to empathize with students, ability to personalize their teaching, willingness to take risks and experiment, skilled in asking questions as opposed to answering all questions, knowledge of subject matter, providing well-

established examination procedures, providing study help, having an appreciative attitude towards the students, and use of conversational manner in teaching through an informal, easy style. Tennyson, Boutwell, and Frey (1978) concluded by their study "that college students "have an overwhelming preferences for a professor who sees himself, and is seen, as a teacher rather than researcher, administrator, or socialite (1978, p.196)" (Eble, 1980, p.2).

McCombs and Whisler (1997) also reported a study conducted by Bernieri in 1991, which supports student preferences for teachers who are empathetic, genuinely interested in and concerned for the students, person-centered and involving, who were responsible and valued order. Murray and Renaud (1995)'s research on good teachers showed that they "speak expressively, move around, use humour, are enthusiastic and clear [...], call their students by name, are respectful of students, ask questions of students, and have a rapport with them" (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, p.29). Furthermore, McCombs and Whisler contend that

> when asked what they remember about positive learning experience in school, most people also recall being able to pursue things they were interested in and being given reasons for why they were being asked to learn something or trusted to make other learning choices. (1997, p.40)

Most authors have linked the above-mentioned overall personal teacher traits with a learner-centered approach to teaching or a collaborative

teaching style. We will, however, remain aware that some mentioned traits can be displayed by a teacher with a teacher-centered teaching style, such as: use of humour, speaking expressively, respectful of students, stimulating intellectual curiosity, and so on. Therefore, I am conscious of some authors making a leap in defining the traits as being indeed learner-centered.

In fact, Waters, Kemp, and Pucci (1988), who asked students what characteristics they gave to faculty whom they rated highest and lowest, found that students did not rate 'poor' teachers and 'good' teachers in opposite terms: they found that while teachers who rated highest were described in terms of personal and interpersonal terms, lowest rated teachers were described in terms of classroom behaviour. Of course, while the traits described by students in this study might appear not to be opposites, they could be perceived as describing different teaching styles, since establishing personal relationships with students could be argued as being typical of a student-centered teaching style, and "lecturing without variation in class routine" (Waters, Kemp & Pucci, 1988, p.204), which was attributed to lowest rated faculty, is definitely attributable to a teacher-centered style.

*Teaching styles*

In order to come to a better understanding of what constitutes a learner-centered or a teacher-centered teaching style, I now take a look at the literature pertaining to teaching styles. Teaching styles have been

defined, described and categorized in different ways. In general, and for the purpose of this study, the definition of teaching style which will be used is one that agrees with Bujold and Saint-Pierre's (1996) definition, which includes a teacher's way of being, of behaving as a teacher, his/her way of communicating and making decisions, the way he/she organizes his thoughts and presents the subject matter, and his/her way to interact with the students. Similarly, Grasha (1994) has defined a teaching style as representing "a pattern of needs, beliefs, and behaviours that staff displays in their classroom", and that affects "how people present information, interact with students, manage classroom tasks, supervise coursework, socialize students to the field, and mentor students" (p.142).

Most authors and educational researchers would agree that teaching styles can be divided into two main and opposite categories. Ryans (1975) analyzed the research done on teaching styles and developed a typology of 5 styles (X, Y, Z, E, and DI) but consequently divided those 5 categories into two major categories called "academic-centered" and "permissive child-centered" (Mohan & Hull, 1975). Mohan and Hull also mention that these same polarized categories were termed by Kerlinger as "traditional" and "progressive" (1975). Ron (1977) termed his two categories of teachers as "actors" and "directors", the first referring to teachers who teach in a direct manner and want to be "center stage", while the second refers to teachers who teach in an indirect manner and take a "back stage" position (Stahl, 1992). As for Axelrod (1980), he distinguishes between three styles

according to the way the teachers perceive the purpose of their teaching: one focuses on the subject matter and aims at the students acquiring the principles and theories standard to the field; the second focuses on himself, the teacher, and attempts to teach his own approach to the same standards of the field; and the third focuses on the student, helping them develop autonomous thinking in regards to concepts and applications in the field. However, once again, Axelrod (1980) puts the first two categories in one major category which is concerned with the standards of the field and aims at delivering knowledge which the teacher deems appropriate for the students, whereas the third category, student-centered, has a different outlook on teaching altogether. Grasha (1994), another author and researcher in the field of teaching styles, talks about five teaching styles being pervasive in college classrooms: "expert, formal authority, personal model, facilitator, and delegator" (p.142). Then, he states that none of these styles exist in a pure form and that, consequently, four different combinations of styles arise (Grasha, 1994, p.142). And finally, he positions those clusters on a teacher-centered/student-centered continuum (Grasha, 1994, p.145).

For a variety of reasons, some of which will be elaborated here, most authors support the student or learner-centered (also called collaborative) teaching style in adult or higher education. Conti (1985) states that

> Despite the existence of divergent teaching styles, a significantly large portion of the adult education literature supports the collaborative mode as the most effective and appropriate style for teaching adults.

> In this regard, the writings of Lindeman, Bergevin, Kidd, Houle, Knowles, and Freire exhibit many commonalties in the basic assumptions of adult teaching-learning. Collectively, they argue that the curriculum should be learner-centered, that learning episodes should capitalize on the learner's experience, that adults are self-directed, that the learner should participate in needs diagnosis, goals formation, and outcome evaluations, that adults are problem-centered, and that the teacher should serve as a facilitator rather than as a repository of facts. (p.221)

Rogers (1980, in Biehler & Snowman, 1993) supports the learner-centered teaching style and argues that the results of learner-centered teaching are comparable with those of client-centered therapy in that students develop an ability to educate themselves without the aid of teachers. Hertz-Lazarowitz and Shachar (1990, in Stahl, 1992) state that the research shows that the reduction in physical distance between teacher and pupils and the change in verbal behaviour of the teacher as a result of a shift towards a student-centered style favourably affect the behaviour of the students who increase their behaviour of helping fellow-students understanding materials with which they had difficulty . Hilligross (1992) who conducted a comparative study to evaluate an interactive teaching style compared to a traditional lecture-style of teaching, concluded that the interactive style (which can also be associated with a student-centered teaching style) positively affected student performance, attendance, turning in of optional assignments and relationships with other students, and further

stated that interactive learning makes education more meaningful for students and more compelling for teachers. She also mentions that "the combination of a personalized teaching style and opportunities for interaction help motivate students who have not achieved academic success in the past" (Hilligross, 1992, p.12).

According to Vatterott (1995), students benefit from a learner-centered teaching style by being empowered through being given opportunities to have a voice and a choice and thus they become "more willing to learn and be involved in their own learning" (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, p.48). Bujold and Saint-Pierre (1996), who studied the relationship between teaching style, teacher/student relationship and commitment to the subject matter in Laval university, concluded that the student-centered approach contributes to a more positive relationship between teacher and student, and that it is strongly linked to the students' commitment to learning the subject matter. Similarly, McCombs and Whisler (1997) found that teachers who are more learner-centered were "more successful in engaging more students in an effective learning process" (p.24). They also state that "the research is abundant and cumulating that motivation, learning, and achievement are enhanced where learner-centered principles are in place (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, p.48).

While the research on "good teachers" and the research on teaching style are considerably abundant, research linking teaching style and student preferences is less abundant- although existing. Assar (1980) conducted a

study in which he asked the students which type of teachers they would consider choosing for a second course. This study revealed that the preferred teachers were those who gave the students feedback and gave priority to the students before the subject matter, which are traits consistent with a learner-centered approach to teaching (Bujold & Saint-Pierre, 1996). Ross (1989) conducted a study with adult students and determined that the students' perceptions of a good teacher were in line with the characteristics of the learner-centered approach; the most important and highly rated traits of a good teacher, according to the students, were the consideration they give their students, their availability to help outside of class time, and their ability to create a warm learning environment (Bujold & Saint-Pierre, 1996).

Grasha (1994) also linked student satisfaction with the student-centered teaching style, along with other factors such as a higher content mastery, higher level of enthusiasm and morale and a lower rate of absenteeism and tardiness.

*Opposing views*

Despite the considerable support for the student-centered teaching style in adult education, some authors disagree with certain aspects of this style. Conti (1985), in one of his studies, found that a teacher-centered style might be more appropriate for specific situations such as in the context of the students having to perform a specific examination following the acquirement of a specific body of knowledge. Brookfield (1992) argues that

"it is a myth that good teachers try to meet the needs of learners as they themselves express them" (p.13), and believes that good teachers in fact should evaluate their students' need in order to "move them beyond where they are, by prompting their exploration of unfamiliar cognitive, affective, and political terrains" (p.13). Heimlich and Norland (1994) argue that congruency is more important than the nature of the teaching style and that learning outcomes increase if the teachers' behaviours are in line with their beliefs, no matter what that set of beliefs.

*Other considerations*

Additional consideration was given to possible confounding variables as I tried to evaluate Moroccan students' perceptions of 'good' and 'bad' teachers, and hence explore the relationship (or lack of) between their preferences for a teacher and teaching style. First, much of the limited available literature on education in Islamic societies suggests that it is teacher-centered in nature (Alghamedy, 1986; Ashraf, 1985; Manzoor, 1990; Qubain, 1966; Szyliowicz, 1973). Therefore, it was possible that none of the subjects that were to be interviewed had been in contact with a student-centered teaching style. I thought it might be possible that I would be faced with differences in lecturing styles rather than in teaching style per se. As the student-centered teaching style is being more and more supported in adult education these days, less attention is given to lecturing style. Hull and Hull (1988) have conducted research to examine the relationship between lecture

style and student preferences for a teacher. They have found that the supportive style of lecturing was preferred over the demanding style, which they respectively associate with a feminine and a masculine style. Also, it is possible that the gender of the teacher affects the perceptions of the students rating teacher effectiveness (see Martin & Smith, 1990).

Finally, Ross-Gordon (1991) claims that "an emerging body of literature is establishing or examining empirical support for assumptions regarding adult learners preferences of instructors" but "minority adults (the author is speaking from a North American stand point, in which case a Moroccan student here would be considered a minority) have not heretofore been examined as either the targeted population or part of a stratified sample" (pp.7-8). Among the questions she suggests for further research is the following: "what behaviours or characteristics of teachers (i.e. teaching style) are most preferred by minority adult learners?" (Ross-Gordon, 1991, p.8). Indeed, Moroccan university students here, although growing in numbers, have not been the target of such a study as of yet.

This chapter presented an overview of the literature pertaining to key-concepts and related factors in this study, such as student preferences, teaching styles and other possible biasing factors. It sought to expose, on one hand, the importance and abundance of literature that supports the learner-centered teaching style, and on the other, some of the findings that contradict the effectiveness of that teaching style across all situations. Also

an important emphasis was put, in this chapter, on the lack of research on students' preferences for teachers and teaching style with consideration for the students' culture.

**Chapter 5** will relate the findings that came out of this exploratory study, offer interpretations of those findings, and address the limitations in regards to possible explanations for the patterns that emerged.

# CHAPTER 5

# FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected through the interviews was analyzed in two ways. First, the answers were coded in regards to criteria which were based on interpretations of the PALS' seven factors, and second, commonalties between the responses of participants were collated to examine other factors (other than those of the PALS which indicate teaching style) that potentially influenced the participants' choices of "best" and "worst" teachers.

## 5.1 Teaching Style

*Factor 1: Learner-centered activities*

"Best" teachers all reportedly used more than one type of teaching method, and thus different types of activities, such as lectures and discussions (in all cases), cooperative learning methods and experiential learning based activities (in 2 out of 7 cases). None of the best teachers were described as lecturing exclusively, and all participants reported feeling free to state their opinions, ask questions and respond to the subject matter with their chosen "best" teachers. As for given choices, all reported being given opportunities to choose discussion topics, some of them were given

choices in topics for assignments (4 out of 7) but none of them reported having a say in the criteria by which their performance was evaluated.

Most "worst" teachers used lecturing as their sole way of delivering information (6 out of 7). One "worst" teacher used a combination of exercises and theory, but the participant complained that she would give exercises first, and explain after.

*Factor 2: Personalizing instruction*

"Best" teachers all adapted to their students as a group. That is, they would implement changes in their teaching methods or make any other change they perceived as helpful, but on the basis of the majority of students. For some decisions, some of these teachers would proceed to a class vote, therefore clearly adapting to the majority in a democratic fashion. However, only two of the "best" teachers were described as offering personalized individualized instruction and/or help. In one of those situations, the context was different from other participants' context in that it was in a private institution. Private institutions have smaller classes, fewer students; they might have 30 to 40 students per class, while public universities courses often are given in amphitheatres to groups of hundreds of students. In the other reported case of individualized instruction, the teacher assigned field work to students according to their skills and abilities (as reported by the participant). Overall, most "best" teachers personalized

their instruction according to the group of students as a whole, but few actually offered individualized instruction.

As for "worst" teachers, they were all reported as being "set in their ways" and as showing a lack of consideration for their students. None of them was perceived as trying to adapt to the students' specific level, needs or expectations.

*Factor 3: Relating to experience*

In attempting to verify if teachers would relate their subject matter to the students' experience, what constitutes the actual "students' experience" becomes crucial in making such a judgment. About half the "best" teachers related to the students' experience on a personal or professional level (as students), but all of these teachers were reported as giving clear, understandable, simple examples to which the students could relate. Examples, in their very nature, have to relate to experience at some level to be understood. Examples relate to concepts, ideas, images, situations or feelings that the people who are receptors must understand, i.e. must have prior experience of, at the very least on a perception or imaginative level. In all these cases, the participants recalled useful examples of either hypothetical situations they might encounter in their future professional experience, or of everyday-life examples.

When asked if their "worst" teacher related their subject matter to the students' experience, only one participant reported that his teacher referred

to a past course in the field that the students had to have taken as a pre-requisite to the one she was teaching. She reportedly referred to the previous subject matter as "things you should already have learned". This, of course, hardly constitutes a link between the subject being taught and the students' experience, as it is more of a recrimination than an actual "relating to experience".

*Factor 4: Assessing student needs*

All participants reported having a sense that their "best" teachers were aware of the needs of their students. However, few of them could explain how they gathered information to assess those needs. Some of them said that their teacher knew what to expect in the future field of work of his/her students and that they understood the level at which their students were; therefore, if the educational needs can be defined as the gap between present abilities and the necessary abilities to work in the field, this is how those teachers could be assessing student needs. Within the original PALS, it is implied that needs are assessed, in a learner-centered manner, with the direct involvement of students. In the cases of the "best" teachers described by participants, those needs seemed to be inferred by the teachers, through their knowledge and relationship with the students. According to Brookfield (1992), the PALS way of defining the assessment of student needs might be referred to as assessing the needs of students as "they themselves express them" (p.13), and this may condemn the learners to stay "in their own

familiar and comfortable, but narrow, paradigms of thinking and acting" (p.13). Brookfield (1992) further argues that good teachers should aim at "prompting [learners'] exploration of unfamiliar cognitive, affective, and political terrains" (p.13). Perhaps students are not aware of their own needs, and can in fact express expectations and interests rather than needs, from which teachers may be able to derive their students' needs. Even McCombs and Whisler (1997), adamant proponents of learner-centered teaching, state that there should be a balance between individual learner considerations and a concern for the knowledge and skills defined by the needs of society. This could extend to needs as they are defined by professionals in the field, for example.

As for "worse" teachers, they were all reported as not having a sense of their students' needs. This conclusion is evidently based on the students' perceptions, but the lack of rapport between these teachers and their students implies that no information is elicited from the students, and that if there is needs assessment involved for the teachers, it is essentially based on the needs of students in the field in general and not on the needs of particular groups of students or individual students.

*Factor 5: Climate building*

When questioned about the classroom climate and how teachers attempted to create a positive and pleasurable environment, all "best" teachers were said to use humour as the main way to ensure that students

felt comfortable and motivated. Humour is not an element mentioned in the PALS as a measure of a learner-centered way to build a positive classroom climate. Nevertheless, this was the recurring comment made by the participants.

As for "worst" teachers, their classroom climate was described as "heavy" and "boring". One participant reported seeing his "worst" teacher "trying to use humour to create a more positive learning environment, but failing at it".

*Factor 6: Participation in the learning process*

All participants reported having had options or choices at some level, and thus had some freedom in terms of what they could concentrate on within the curriculum proposed. The level of freedom of choice did vary from participant to participant. At the lowest form of participation, students were given choices of topics for assignments. At the highest form of participation, one student stated that "the students gave the course", but this student was referring to a course given at the higher level of education (doctorate), a level at which the structure of educational programs is designed to enable students to conduct their own research. Another student reported that in this particular class, there was "a minimum of theory and a maximum of practice", which would indicate a higher level of student participation in the learning process. This student was only in his third year of university

education, which apparently would constitute an exception to what is normally seen at such a level.

As almost all (6 out of 7) "worst" teachers were described as "only lecturing" or even "only reading theoretical material", the participants felt they had no involvement in the learning process whatsoever. In the one case where a "worst" teacher was seen giving exercises to students, the student said that his participation was deterred by the fact that he had no idea how to proceed ( this is the teacher who would give exercises to beginner students before she gave explanations of how to complete those exercises).

*Factor 7: Flexibility for personal development*

To address this factor, students were asked : "Did you have the impression that this teacher had the personal development of the students' at heart, and not just a concern for teaching the course material?", and consequently: "How did this manifest itself?". All participants emphatically said "yes", when asked about their "best" teacher's interest in the students as persons. However, few knew how to describe a manifestation of this. Comments heard were "he/she really cared about the students", or "he/she really wanted us to succeed".

Accordingly, almost all (6 out of 7) participants said that they did not have a sense that the students' personal development was a concern for "worst" teachers. The remaining one participant said that he thought his

"worst" teacher did have a concern for students but did not know how to demonstrate it or help the students develop personally.

This factor was perhaps the one most problematic to verify, since personal development as a concept is more closely related to adult continuing education, as the questions in the PALS imply.

*Overall teaching style*

It would appear from analyzing and interpreting the data, that there was in this study a relationship between teaching style and students' preferences for a teacher. Although "best" teachers would probably not all score extremely high on the learner-centered side of the teaching style continuum, they seemingly would score on the learner-centered side of it nonetheless, according to a majority of positive responses to questions related to the essence and principles of the seven factors of the PALS. The chosen "worst" teachers would seemingly score high in teacher-centeredness, as they demonstrated, in the opinions of the participants, none of the learner-centered characteristics.

When it comes to the research done in regards to teaching style, this study's results also appear to be in agreement with other researchers' claims: Hilligross (1992) also found that the interactive style (another appellation of student-centered teaching style as opposed to traditional lecture-style which refers to teacher-centered) positively affected students' performance. Bujold and Saint-Pierre (1996) stated that the student-centered

teaching style contributes to a more positive relationship between teacher and student, although one has to wonder if the second is not simply a characteristic of the first. The student-centered style may strongly be linked to the student's commitment to learning the subject matter, which can be observed in this study if one considers that preferences for a teacher and good performance are indicative of that commitment. Assar (1980)'s study also revealed that students preferred teachers who gave priority to the students rather than to the subject matter (student-centered rather than teacher-centered). Ross (1989, reported by Bujold & Saint-Pierre, 1996) also concluded that characteristics of the learner-centered approach coincided with student perceptions of good teachers, those characteristics including consideration for the students, availability to help students outside of class time and the ability to create a warm learning environment. And finally, Grasha (1994)'s claim that student satisfaction is linked with a student-centered teaching style is also found to be true in this study, if it is reasonable to assume that preferences for a teacher implies his satisfaction as well.

## 5.2 Other Common Factors of Teacher Preferences

*Motives for choosing a teacher*

When asked why they chose their "best" teacher, 5 out of 7 participants' answers related specifically to the closeness in the teacher-

student relationship. The two participants who did not refer to the teacher-student relationship as a motive for choosing a "best" teacher still mentioned this closeness in relationship as "something they liked the most" about that teacher.

Accordingly, the teacher-student relationship between the participants' "worst" teacher and themselves was described as distant or non-existing. When asked why they chose this teacher, about half referred to the distance in teacher-student relationship ( "doesn't care", "lack of interest in his/her students"), and all simply considered this teacher incompetent. This incompetence was described mostly in terms of "teaching incompetence", with the exception of one teacher who was plainly described as incompetent in her field, that is, not having the appropriate knowledge in the subject matter.

Throughout this study, even more significant than links to teaching style, was the irrefutable link between students' preferences for a teacher and the proximity of the student-teacher relationship, which is also termed "immediacy". Immediacy was conceptualized by Mehrabian as a physical and/or psychological closeness (Bekelja Wanzer and Bainbridge Frymier, 1999, p.56).

This preference for "immediate" teachers is all the more interesting a finding since much has been said about the relationship between culture and "Low versus High Power Distance". This Power Distance refers to the psychological distance between people in position of power/authority and

their subordinates, or "the degree to which a society views the distribution and display of personal power" (Brislin, 1991, in Brislin & Yoshida, 1994, p.143). High versus Low Power Distance is one of the five dimensions of culture, as delineated by Hofstede (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994).

Arab countries are said to score moderately high in Power Distance. This would mean, for example, that in Arab societies like Morocco, there is an emphasis on the importance of respecting authority figures, such as parents and teachers. For example, obeying parents and addressing teachers by their title and last name would be typical behaviours associated with High Power Distance. Hofstede has researched how differences in Power Distance can impact on student-teacher interactions; he found that in High Power Distance societies,

> "there is an expectation that the professor is the expert who deserves significant deference. Academic titles are always used in public and private conversations and communication is mostly in one direction, from the professor to the student. In classroom settings, the students are expected to sit dutifully and respectfully at their desks as they take notes, which they will be expected to repeat back as close as possible to the original" (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994, p.143).

Participants in this study referred to such a distance when talking in general about teachers in university. To illustrate this, one of the participants said : "You know, in Moroccan schools, you are expected to respect the teacher as the one who knows everything...you sit there, listen to what he

says and take it in. You can't contradict what he says. You just shut up and listen". While descriptions of cultural aspects agree with what "is happening" in universities, participants nevertheless chose teachers who were "different" in the way they related to the students. If a Low Power Distance is not associated with Moroccan culture, it was associated with preferred teachers. Brislin and Yoshida (1994), in training teachers to teach in intercultural and cross-cultural contexts, warn teachers about assumptions that "our way of teaching is more advanced" (i.e. teaching in a Low Power Distance fashion): "We may lecture about "Low versus High Power Distance" cultures, while insisting on treating students from High Power Distance cultures as "equals". The assumption that "our" way of teaching is more advanced seems to be a hard one to discard" (p.129). If this study reflects the views of Moroccan university students at large, perhaps we should not discard the idea that teaching with Low Power Distance *is*, if not more advanced, preferred by students, even in High Power Distance cultures. If making assumptions based on ethnocentrism is wrong, perhaps adopting an attitude of "treating students as equals" is not.

*Student reactions to teachers*

The interviewed students all mentioned being highly motivated by their "best" teachers. They mentioned developing a passion for the subject matter, being genuinely interested and wanting to learn, provide efforts (working hard) and attend classes. They all reported learning more in those

courses than in other courses and retaining the knowledge they had acquired. Most of them reported taking pleasure, having fun in those courses, even if all of them considered their "best" teacher as being demanding of the students. They reported being encouraged by their teachers to push their own limits and develop their abilities. This type of student reaction is in line with one of Bujold and St-Pierre's (1996) findings that there is a positive relationship with a learner-centered teaching style and student engagement in the subject matter taught.

As for the students' reaction to "worst" teachers, three out of seven participants reported not showing up for class most of the time, and staying at home to read the reading material for the course as a way to ensure they could pass examinations. All participants reported being bored if and when they attended class. Two of the participants recalled having strong negative feelings for their teacher ("hated him"). Students reported "going through the motions", memorizing for exam purposes, learning less than in other courses and forgetting the course material as soon as the course was over.

Apparently, absenteeism is not exceptional for Moroccan university students: according to Bourqia, El Harras, and Bensaïd's (1995) survey, 42% of students reported not attending class on a regular basis, and 12.6% rarely attend. Considering that 60% of those surveyed, students reported being unsatisfied with university as a whole, a high level of absenteeism could indicate that absenteeism is a way to show their lack of interest. However, it should be noted that absenteeism differs along the lines of field

of study: students in literature and the social sciences rate highest in terms of absenteeism, while students in science show the highest rate of attendance. This is interesting, considering that students in literature and social science were the most satisfied with university, while the students in science were the least satisfied (Bourqia, El Harras & Bensaïd, 1995). The explanation given in the report, in regards to the lowest rate of absenteeism for students in science, is that these students are obliged to attend classes that include activities where the manipulation of equipment is mandatory, and not attending could result in these students failing.

Students interviewed in the present study who did attend classes despite not liking their teachers did report grade-related incentives, for example, receiving part of their course grade based on attendance. It would seem that in the absence of these extrinsic rewards or punitive devices, the students would indeed not attend classes taught by teachers they disliked.

*Student performance and attribution*

Of the seven participants, one had not yet received a grade for his performance in the course as he chose a "best" teacher he presently had, one student reported obtaining an average grade, while the remaining five reported getting a better grade than for other courses. None of the participants considered their "best" teacher as "an easy grader"; in fact, as mentioned before, all of the "best" teachers were considered by the students as demanding teachers. Of those who obtained a better than average grade

(compared to their own average grades), three participants (out of five who obtained a better-than-average grade) attributed their good performance to the teacher's ability to motivate them and transmit a passion for the subject matter; that is they attributed their good performance to the teacher's personal qualities. Bernieri (1991, in McCombs & Whistler, 1997), who studied the relationship between student achievement and teachers' interpersonal sensitivity in teaching interactions "found a cluster of teacher qualities to be strongly related to learning", including "being person-oriented" (p.30).

As for the grades obtained in courses given by their "worst" teacher, five out of seven participants reported receiving average grades, while two obtained lower-than-average grades. Four of the participants attributed their average grade to their own efforts, implying that if they had not made efforts to "learn on their own", they would have obtained a lower grade. One of the participants who received an average grade believed he deserved a much higher grade then the one he got and felt he was victim of age-based prejudice.

"The reasons one assigns for achieving success or failure are called 'attributions'" (Weiner, 1979, in Alderman, 1990, p.27), and attribution may be 'external' or 'internal' depending on whether students attribute their success and failure to outside factors (such as task difficulty or chance) or to inner factors (such as a effort or ability) (Alderman, 1990). As we have seen, the interviewed participants made links between their performance and their

teachers, as far as attribution is concerned. They tended to attribute their success with "best" teachers to the teacher while attributing their success (or lack of failure) to themselves, that is "internal factors" with "worst" teachers.

Most of the research done on attribution seeks to establish the locus of control of students, i.e. whether students attribute their success and failures to external or internal factors. Many of these studies have focused on the different attributional patterns of students in relation to culture. While the degrees to which students attribute their successes and failures to internal versus external factors vary according to the students' culture, most groups of students identified did have a higher tendency to attribute successes to internal factors more than they did for failures, i.e. "all groups of subjects, regardless of culture, reported a higher average of perceived responsibility for academic success than for failure" (Yan & Gaier, 1991, p.1). In Yan and Gaier's (1991) study, students varied in the type of internal factor to which they attributed their success; American students, for example, stressed ability more emphatically, while Asian students had a higher tendency to emphasize effort as an attribution for their successes. They attribute this variance to cultural values and national characteristics (Yan & Gaier, 1991), but apart from culture, other studies have also found socioeconomic background and subject content to be related to different attributional factors (Mizokawa & Ryckman, 1990, in Yan & Gaier, 1991). As for attribution of

failures, Yan and Gaier's (1991) participants' strongest attribution was lack of effort.

Trying to establish a link between attribution for successes and failures and teachers is no easy task. In this study, students reported that their success with "best" teachers was a reflection of their teacher's ability and qualities, while they attributed their success with "worst" teachers to their own effort. However, teachers are not considered "external" factors per se in attribution research and theory. In fact, teachers may affect internal factors such as providing incentives for students to develop motivation for the subject and thus make them want to work harder (provide more *effort*), but they also contribute directly to external factors such as *task difficulty* by presenting the students with particular assignments. Nevertheless, it is clear that students in this study did not fail with "best" teachers, that they attributed at least part of their success to their "best" teacher, that they attributed failure with "worst" teachers to the teacher, and success with "worst" teachers to their own efforts. This, at least partly, confirms that students tend to take greater responsibility of their successes than failures.

What seems to be quite clear is that the students attributed their motivation level to the teacher, in all cases.

*Motivation*

While there was undoubtedly a link in this study between student performance and motivation, which they attributed to their teacher, many

elements could have enabled the students to feel "motivated". Although Kohn (in Brandt, 1995) states that it is a fundamental myth in the area of motivation to believe that it is possible to motivate somebody else, it is nonetheless a popular view in education that motivation is a characteristic of people and that some teachers are motivating and some are not (Paris & Turner, 1994). Lewin, Atkinson and McKeachie believe that "motivation is constructed by the individual in a cognitively dynamic context" (Paris & Turner, 1994, p.214). To agree on the concept of motivation we will refer to in this study, we will assume that when students reported being motivated *by* their teachers, they were in fact encouraged by teachers to motivate *themselves*. No matter how we define motivation, students did report an increase in motivation with their chosen "best" teachers.

Means, Jonassen and Dwyer (1997) conducted a study in which they found a relationship between the relevance of material taught and students' perceived level of motivation as well as their performance. All best teachers described here have been reported to make their material relevant. Relevance is determined, according to Means, Jonassen and Dwyer (1997), as a function of meaningfulness which is established by relating new ideas to existing knowledge as well as a function of need as determined and recognized by students. Relevance can thus be associated with the factors of *relating to experience* and *assessing students' needs* within the framework of teaching styles and the PALS.

Cordova and Lepper (1996) found a link between levels of motivation and "contextualization", "personalization" and "choice". Contextualization refers to presenting the students with tasks that relate to their real context, much like relevance. Personalization makes the learning material relate to the students' preferences and needs, much like the factors of *personalizing instruction* and *assessing student needs* involved in a learner-centered teaching style. Choice refers, as it suggests, to the opportunity given to students to make choices, much as the factors of *learner-centered activities* and *participation in the learning process* would suggest. All "best" teachers were reported as tending to such "motivating" factors; they gave choices to the students at some level or another, they gave contextualized examples that also appealed to the students, as defined by Cordova and Lepper's (1996) definitions of "personalization".

The point that needs to be established here is that even if teaching style was not related directly and irrefutably to the interviewed students' preferences for a teacher, elements which constitute the learner-centered teaching style have been found to be related to motivation and student preferences in past studies, and were confirmed here. It would seem obvious that this study confirms that even if "students do differ in the amount and kind of motivation they bring to classrooms, (...) teachers can enhance or reduce it" (Lowman, 1990, p.136).

*Teacher personality traits and behaviours*

Many personality traits were enumerated repeatedly by many participants, whether they were describing "best" or "worst" teachers. A vast majority of "best" teachers were described by participants as warm, friendly, respectful, intelligent, knowledgeable, good "motivators", passionate and involved people. All "best" teachers were described as using humour and clear and easy-to-understand examples.

The use of humour in the classroom has been studied in relation to a number of factors and outcomes. Bekelja Wanzer and Bainbridge Frymier (1999) did conduct such a study to determine the relationship between student perceptions of instructor humour and student reports of learning. Not only did they find that a high humour orientation was associated with increased perceptions of learning, but they also found links between humour and immediacy. Bekelja Wanzer and Bainbridge Frymier (1991) also reported a positive relationship between teachers' use of humour and student evaluations of teachers (Bryant, Crane, Cominsky & Zillmann, 1980), teacher humour and the creation of pleasurable learning environments (Neuliep, 1991), where students feel less anxious (Long, 1983; Ziv, 1976) and are more willing to participate in class (Korobkin, 1988), and a positive relationship between teachers' use of humour and student learning (Chapman & Crompton, 1978; Curran, 1972; Davies & Apter, 1986; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Hawck & Thomas, 1972; Washlag, Day & Zillmann, 1981; Weinberg, 1973; Ziv, 1979, 1988). Downs, Javidi and Nussbaum

(1988, in Bekelja Wanzer & Bainbridge Frymier, 1991) state that teachers who use humour in the classroom frequently use it to provide clarification in course material and thus facilitate learning. As seen earlier, use of humour and clear examples were the two factors found across all participants when describing their "best" teachers' behaviour.

The link between humour and "immediacy" is also an important one, since, as we have seen before, students in this study all reported enjoying "a close relationship" with their "best" teachers. Various studies link humour and immediacy differently. Some, such as Gorham and Christophel for example, suggest that humour is in itself an "immediacy" behaviour, as it allows the students to feel psychologically closer to the teacher. Others see immediacy and a high humour orientation as two separate factors which share common characteristics, such as involving similar behaviours like "smiling, exaggerated facial expressions and body movements, and changes in rate, pitch, and volume of one's voice" (Bekelja Wanzer & Bainbridge Frymier, 1991, p.52). Even if immediacy and humour are separate concepts, it would appear plausible that, considering their shared similar characteristics, a teacher who scores high in immediacy would also be more likely than not to score high in humour orientation.

While "best" teachers were perceived as high in humour orientation, high in immediacy and reported as displaying a multitude of characteristics in line with a caring attitude towards the students, a majority of "worst" teachers were described as aloof, boring, uninterested, uninvolved with the

students, cold and non demonstrative of a genuine caring for the students, and as teachers who would simply read course material and lecture. All of them were described as being incompetent teachers and as having an attitude of superiority.

Overall, the results of this study coincide with many of the before-cited sources, such as Mohan and Hull (1975) who reported that students describe good teachers as being helpful in their school work and having a sense of humour, while bad teachers were described as having a superior and overbearing attitude. The present results also are in line with the studies cited and referred to by McCombs and Whistler (1997). These authors cited the Michigan studies of the 50's (as described in Pintrich, Brown & Weinstein, 1994) in which, as is the case in this study, students reported good teachers as able to present material in interesting ways, friendly, available, fair, and as having a genuine concern for their students (McCombs & Whisler, 1997). Other previous research results that are similar to those of this study are Mohan and Hull (1975)'s reporting on Stern's claims that good teachers show evidence of patterns such as: flexibility in directedness, ability to empathize with students, ability to personalize their teaching, willingness to take risks and experiment (as in being described as "non-traditional" or going outside of the bounds of the curriculum), having an appreciative attitude towards the students, and use of conversational manner in teaching through an informal, easy style. A study conducted by Bernieri in 1991 (cited in McCombs & Whistler, 1997), which supports student preferences for

teachers who are empathetic, genuinely interested in and concerned for the students, as well as person-centered, also seems to coincide with the results of this study. Murray and Renaud (1995)'s research on good teachers, much like the present one, also showed that good teachers "use humour, are respectful of students, and have a rapport with them" (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, p.29). Furthermore, "teachers who measure high in empathy, congruence, and positive regard produce students who score higher on standard tests than do teachers who score low", according to Lawry (1992, p.83). This means that more than simply being preferred teachers, teachers who display those personal traits often associated with a learner-centered teaching style, but perhaps not exclusively, are also more effective teachers.

As for Waters, Kemp, and Pucci's (1988) contention that lowest rated faculty are described in terms of classroom behaviour while highest rated teachers are described in terms of personal and interpersonal qualities, this study would partially confirm this. When asked the first question "Can you describe this teacher?", highly rated teachers (termed 'best' here) had a tendency to be described in terms of personal characteristics, but lowest rated teachers (termed 'worst' here) were described both in personal and interpersonal terms and in classroom behaviour characteristics.

Most "worst" teachers were described by participants as showing some signs of low interest for teaching ("you knew he didn't want to be there", "you could see he hated teaching", "he was not interested in teaching,

only in his position", etc.). McCombs and Whistler (1992) did find that learner-centered teachers reported being "happier with their jobs" (p.24).

*Teacher age and gender*

By looking at the demographic information the participants provided about their teachers, it was possible to look at patterns of age and gender of chosen "best" and "worst" teachers. As seen in **Chart 1** (p.70), most "best" teachers chosen were in the 30's age group, while most of the chosen "worst" teachers were in the 40's age group. Martin and Smith (1990), who conducted a study to evaluate the effect of teacher age and gender on student perceptions, found that "students perceive middle-aged teachers and female teachers as more effective in the classroom" (p.1). They attribute the fact that students prefer middle-aged teachers to the fact that they perceive them to be more experienced than younger ones and more enthusiastic than older ones. They explain that females rated better than males due to the fact that this study was conducted with children and that they are more familiar with female teachers at that level.

In this study, we could have expected to see more males chosen as "best" or "worse" teachers considering that only 25% of university teachers in Moroccan universities are females. We could also have expected that male teachers would have been more likely to have been preferred if the bias of "familiarity" was in play, as it was found in Martin and Smith's (1990) study.

**Chart 1. Best and worst teachers by age group**

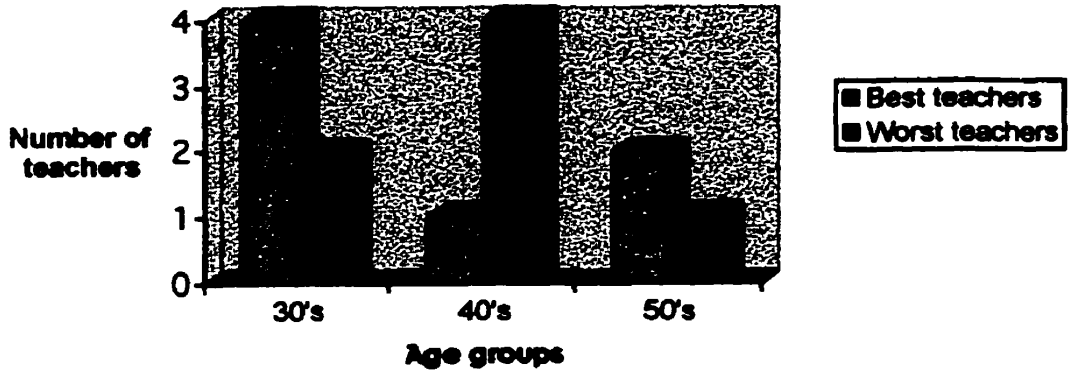
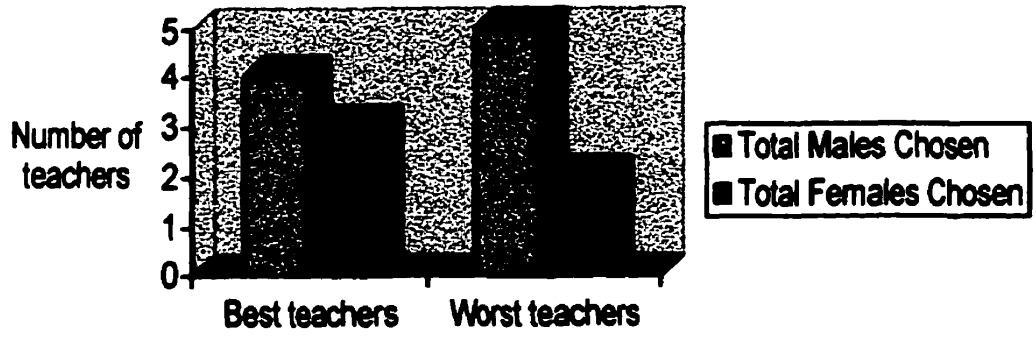
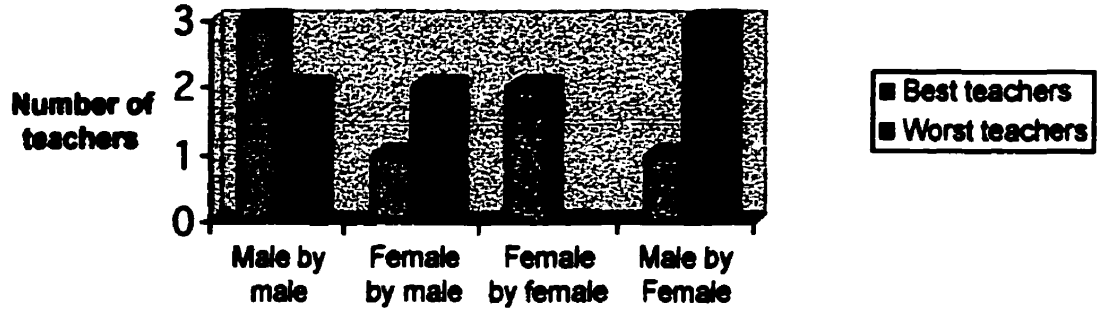



**Chart 2. Best and worst teachers by gender**




As seen in **Chart 2** (above), three females and four males were chosen as "best" teachers, and five males and two females were chosen as "worst" teachers. In **Chart 3** (p.71), we can see that of the three "best" female teachers, two were chosen by two of the three female participants, while no

**Chart 3. Gender of chosen best and worst teachers by gender of participants**




female participant chose a female as a "worst" teacher. The two female "worst" teachers were chosen by half the male participants.

The proportion of females chosen as "best" teachers exceeds the proportion of their gender representation in the university teaching population in general. In terms of percentages, they were chosen 3 out of 7 times (about 43%), while female university teachers represent 25% of all university teachers. The proportion of females chosen as "worst" teachers was close to their actual representation in the general university teacher population (2 out of 7, about 28%).

However, it is interesting to note the gender of the participants who chose females or males as "best" or "worst" teachers; of the three "best" female teachers chosen, two were chosen by female students. None of the female participants chose a female as a "worst" teacher. Both female "worst"

teachers were chosen by male participants. Perhaps students identify better and have a higher potential to develop positive feelings towards teachers of their own gender. Perhaps there was a conscious bias (political agenda) for female participants who chose a female "best" teacher two out of three times and no female "worst" teachers. Nonetheless, while we can only speculate on the motives of participants, it would seem that gender played a role on some level, consciously or unconsciously, in the participants' choices, and more notably so for female participants.

However, if there is indeed a link between students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style, then we may find it important to look at a link between gender and teaching style, to better investigate some explanations of why females outnumbered their representative ratio in the "best" teachers chosen. According to Grasha (1994), "women reported somewhat lower scores on the expert and formal authority scales of the Teaching Styles Inventory and somewhat higher scores on the facilitator and delegator styles" (p.147), the first two styles being associated with teacher-centeredness, and the latter two with learner-centeredness. And as we have seen that the proximity in teacher-student relationship was the major factor that was said to motivate students to choose their "best" teacher, as well as a superior and authoritarian attitude being related to complaints of participants when describing their "worse" teachers, it is also interesting to know that studies (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 1991, as reported in Grasha, 1992), have found that "women in positions of authority are more

likely to down-play their expertise and authority and are likely to be more democratic (i.e. collaborative and participative) in dealing with subordinates then men are" (p.148).

Still along the lines of teaching styles and gender, a study by Hull and Hull (1988) was conducted to investigate the effects of lecture style on learning and preferences for a teacher. The two lecturing styles were divided into categories identified as "feminine supportive" and "masculine demanding". It was found that students generally preferred the feminine supportive style and evaluated those who used it as "more competent, warmer, more sensitive to students' needs, more interested in student learning, but less forceful" than those using a masculine demanding lecturing style (Hull & Hull, 1988, p.489). If lecturing style can be associated with teaching style (we are assuming that all teachers use lecturing as a method at some point in their teaching), a feminine supportive lecturing style could be associated with a learner-centered teaching style, while a masculine demanding lecturing style would seem more closely related to a teacher-centered teaching style. The fact that the supportive lecturing style was termed "feminine" and the demanding was described as "masculine" implies that some personality characteristics are associated with a particular gender. If this was so, would this mean that female teachers are more likely than male teachers to be learner-centered, and thus, if students do prefer learner-centered teachers, they would be more likely to choose females as "best" teachers? Could this explain an over-representation of

females chosen as "best" teachers? Underlying such questions are questionable concepts; this is why they are questions and not statements. Nonetheless, elements of these questions could be worth exploring.

As for the age component, perhaps younger teachers fared better in general because students are more likely to identify with them, due to a closer proximity in age. Perhaps it had to do with the fact that the younger the teacher is, the more he/she is likely to have adopted learner-centered values in teaching as it may be associated with a certain modern paradigm of thinking. There was no study found to determine a link between age of teachers and their philosophical stance in teaching or teaching style.

### 5.3 Critique and Limitations

The major problem encountered in attempting to investigate a link between students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style is directly linked to the definitions and criteria of the teaching styles involved. While the participants' descriptions of their "best" teachers did match the qualities generally displayed by so-called learner-centered teachers (as they would be described by McCombs and Whistler, for example), and while the students' perceptions of their "best" teachers did elicit many positive responses to questions related to the PALS' seven factors, if those same teachers were evaluated on the basis of other criteria said to be in line with a learner-centered orientation, they could not be considered learner-centered.

Bujold and St-Pierre ( 1996), for example, enumerated ten indicators of what would be indicative of a learner-centered style of pedagogical intervention (their version of "teaching style"). These ten indicators are: 1) The students participate in establishing the educational objectives; 2) The students participate in the elaboration of the criteria by which they will be evaluated; 3) Students work at their own pace; 4) Each student is entitled to his/her own culture and hierarchy of values; 5) Each student makes his/her diagnosis of his/her own learning needs; 6) The teacher seeks to satisfy the students needs and not simply to transmit knowledge; 7) The teacher is attentive to students' needs; 8) The students' learning style is respected; 9) Examination procedures are considered learning tools rather than administrative control devices, and 10) The goal of learning activities is to foster the students' autonomy (Bujold & St-Pierre, 1996).

"Best" teachers, as they were described by the participants do not fulfill all or even most of these criteria or indicators. Students do not actively participate in establishing the learning objectives, the evaluation criteria or in diagnosing their own needs; students must abide by timelines set for all students and examinations are definitely not considered as devices to help students learn (as demonstrated in Bourqia, El Harras & Bensaïd's survey, 1995). At the very least, five of the ten indicators developed by Bujold and St-Pierre (1996) are not met by the "best" teachers chosen by the participants.

However, we have to consider the constraints that teachers face in the Moroccan educational system. As we have seen before, teachers in

Morocco are not as free to make decisions about evaluation criteria or educational objectives as they might be here in North America. Universities and educational programs impose strict guidelines, and are mandated to do so by governmental bodies, by which teachers must abide. Therefore, even teachers who are disposed to being learner-centered may not have the freedom to allow their students to make certain types of decisions. It would thus be impossible for teachers teaching in Moroccan universities to score high on a learner-centered orientation within most criteria developed here in North America to measure degrees of teaching styles. It is possible to assume that the "best" teachers described by participants in this study were "as learner-centered as they could be" within the educational context of Moroccan universities.

The only "best" teacher who constituted an exception compared to the others was a teacher of American origin who taught in a private university, and he was reported as "getting in trouble with the academic authorities". He was the only teacher who would meet Bujold and St-Pierre's indicators of learner-centeredness. Private universities in Morocco reportedly do give teachers more freedom with regards to establishing learning objectives and evaluative criteria of student performance, in addition to the fact that classes are composed of far less students, but there still remains some expectations of "what is acceptable" on the part of academic administrative authorities. This American teacher, for example, had responded to his students' expressed wishes (i.e. what could be considered "needs") to learn

"common street English" within an ESL course and was told by academic authorities that this was not "acceptable". He was therefore not able to allow his students to determine their needs and have them met.

With a regard for cultural aspects and teachers' philosophical orientation, Zinn (1990) states: "If you find that your personal orientation tends more towards those philosophies which are less representative of mainstream values, you may experience greater conflicts and dilemmas that those individuals whose philosophies are more in tune with current American values" (p.56). Of course, she is referring to teachers teaching in America, but the same could apply to teachers anywhere. As was made evident by the example of that one teacher, teaching orientations which are philosophically different from philosophical stances of the cultural context in which an educator teaches may come in conflict with those cultural philosophies and the organizations which operate under them. In this case, the teacher was American and thus was probably additionally experiencing a culture conflict as well.

Other "best" teachers who seemingly had a learner-centered orientation may have displayed it in "an acceptable" fashion, being as they were Moroccans, aware of the limits inherent to the system. This could be an explanation of why they would not score "high" on the learner-centered side of the teaching style continuum. Did they feel that their teaching style orientation was "in conflict" with the cultural philosophical stances of the system? Would they, if they could, display more of the indicators of learner-

centeredness? These are questions which could not be answered in this study but are merely raised by it.

While attempting to investigate the presence or absence of a link between the students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style, we must also pay attention to the elements that constitute the concept of learner-centeredness. One alternative explanation for students' choices of good teachers could be that the students' preferences are not related to teaching style but to one or more factors which are simply linked to a student-centered teaching style. Perhaps the only determining factor is the nature and quality of the student-teacher relationship. We might have encountered 'best' teachers who had a friendly and accessible disposition while displaying major traits of a teacher-centered approach; positive responses from students might simply occur as result of the positive feelings they have developed for their preferred teachers.

As for the 'least' preferred teachers having a teacher-centered approach, many of the same limitations or considerations could be underlined. Perhaps the simple fact that these teachers were perceived as unfriendly and distant was a sufficient basis for their 'unpopularity'.

Another major consideration to be taken into account is the fact that I was trying to establish the existence or non-existence of a relationship between the students' preferences for a teacher and this teacher's style, and not necessarily a link between teaching style and teaching effectiveness. Caution should be taken in assuming that students' evaluations of teacher

effectiveness is a valid one. Carbno (1981) and Shmanske (1998), who attempted to test the reliability of SETs (Student Evaluation of Teachers) concluded by cautioning against assuming that these evaluations are valid. As a result of this study, while I may be able to state that it appears as though there is a relationship between students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style for these Moroccans who attended university-level institutions in Morocco, I do not by any means suggest that I found a relationship between teacher effectiveness and teaching style. Perhaps learner-centered teachers are more likely to be *perceived* as effective by students. And then, we would have to also ask what constitutes "effective teaching". Can we measure teaching effectiveness, and how?

The major difficulties linked with this study, as with many if not most studies that deal with concepts such as teaching effectiveness or learning, remains that it is highly problematic to measure these abstract concepts. Many operationalizations have been made but all remain more or less controversial. Student evaluation remains a very popular way of attempting to measure teaching effectiveness. While many teachers argue against faculty decisions that rely too heavily on student evaluation (Haskell, 1998), few other ways of evaluating teaching effectiveness exist. What we *can* say from the results of this study is that *if* teaching effectiveness can be determined by students' evaluations of teachers, there is a link between teaching effectiveness and a teacher's teaching methods and the way he/she

interacts with the students, a closer more personal relationship being associated with teaching effectiveness.

*If* teaching effectiveness can be determined by student performance or the ability to facilitate student motivation, we have also found a link between teaching effectiveness and the teachers' choices of methods and relationship to the students - elements which in this study were linked with teaching style. This would be in line with Shmanske's (1998) reported result that " The finding of a positive relationship between professors' ability and their students' performance lends some support to the assumption that a positive relationship exists between a professor's SET (Student Evaluation of Teacher) score and the professor's ability" (p.313).

This fifth chapter has attempted to provide explanations relating to the patterns that emerged from the analysis of the interviews with the participants. The relationship between students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style was first examined, and found to be positive with special consideration to the cultural educational context and how it affects and prevents teachers in Morocco from rating as high in "learner-centeredness" as teachers in North America may be able to. Elaboration of the case of the "exceptionally learner-centered" teacher also provided some understanding of how practically impossible it would be to teach in an "extremely" learner-centered fashion in Morocco. Ample discussion was dedicated to some of the reasons why that is, all of which relate to culture and the educational

system within this particular culture. In this chapter, we also looked at elements other than teaching style that arose in relationship to the students' preferences for a teacher, namely: the importance of the teacher-student relationship, motivation, performance and attribution, and possible gender biases involved in choosing "best" and "worst" teachers.

In the sixth and final chapter, I will emphasize the most important points that arose from this study, raise important questions relating to students' preferences for a teacher and the concepts that were involved in this exploratory study, and suggest areas for future research. This research could be not only interesting but could potentially provide knowledge, understanding and even solutions to problems alluded to in this study, whether in relation to students' preferences, teaching effectiveness or specific problems that the Moroccan system of higher education is facing.

# CHAPTER 6

# CONCLUSIONS

The initial aim of this study was to explore the presence or absence of a link between Moroccan university students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style. The particular significance of this study was that in the past, although many studies were conducted to link student preferences for a teacher and teaching style, there had not been a previous focus on culture as a mediating factor which could affect students' preferences and perceptions of teachers and teaching.

While it appears that regardless of culture, a learner-centered teaching style was preferred in this study as it is mostly found in North American studies, culture does indeed seem to play a role in defining what constitutes a learner-centered teaching style. First, because of the nature of the Moroccan higher education system, it would be impossible for university teachers to display some of the learner-centered characteristics associated with a learner-centered style in North America. In the discussion section, as well as other sections of this thesis, I have explained the reasons for this.

But second, and perhaps most importantly, using a tool such as the Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) as a scoring tool to measure or evaluate teaching style in Morocco is problematic. The PALS questionnaire is culturally biased in that it asks questions which are not relevant within an educational system where academic freedom is limited. For example, it is

simply not logically sound to ask a teacher within such an educational system if he/she allows students to determine the criteria by which they will be evaluated. The development of a culturally sensitive tool designed to evaluate teaching styles in countries such as Morocco may be useful in teachers' attempts to understand their teaching behaviors and eventually develop their teaching competencies.

Another interesting point is the students' preferences for teachers who display immediacy behaviors such as humour, empathy, caring and other characteristics which students identified as making them feel "closer" to the teacher. This is especially interesting in light of the cultural context within which these students live. As we have seen, Arab countries such as Morocco have in the past scored moderately high in Power Distance, meaning that in such societies, people in a position of power such as professors are treated with great deference. While students did describe this phenomenon within the University in general, they still chose teachers who violate, in some way, the expectation that teachers must remain "high and above" their students. Those teachers were indeed characterized as "exceptions to the rule". What does this mean? Certainly, culture is not static but rather fluid; perhaps Moroccan society is undergoing considerable and culturally profound changes and these students, being youths, are evidence of this change. It may be interesting to review scores of Power Distance of different countries, as they may not stay the same but evolve through time.

As young people in Morocco have considerably more contacts with other nations than did the previous generations, perhaps they are influenced by "Low Power Distance values". Cyber-cafés are proliferating at an incredible speed in Morocco's large cities and these offer one way to increase intercultural contacts. The culture of cyberspace itself displays characteristics of Low Power Distance; for example, regardless of age or sex, everyone on the Internet speaks to others by using the familiar "tu", instead of the reverent "vous" (in French, "you" is used in two ways, the first being singular and the second plural but also used to emphasize respect and deference when addressing a single person). Increased access to music and traveling to and from other cultures also could play a role in affecting this culture's ways of displaying and viewing power in society.

If immediacy plays an important factor in the students' preferences for a teacher, and if students who like their teachers are more likely to feel motivated and to willingly provide more effort, thus possibly perform better, it is equally important for teachers to pay attention to ways in which they can encourage this immediacy in their relationship with their students. As we have seen, some of those ways are to use humour and provide clear examples of what is being taught, both of which have been proven not only to be factors in "getting psychologically closer" to students but have also shown to be associated with student increased learning.

While a considerable amount of attention has been given to the importance of the teacher-student relationship in this thesis, it was initially

because the students identified it as the reason why they chose their "best" teachers. Little attention has been given to the reason why these students had chosen their "worst" teacher, which was, as they reported, "incompetence". Why bring attention to it now? It was clear to a vast majority of these participants that these 'bad' teachers were incompetent as teachers, not so much as specialists in their field. The point I am trying to make here is that most university teachers, in Morocco and perhaps elsewhere as well, have no pedagogical training. Perhaps they should be encouraged to read more on educational research in order to become better teachers. Perhaps the Moroccan governmental body responsible for higher education should pay less attention to how they control student evaluation regulations and measures (which appear not very effective according to Bourqia, El Harras and Bensaïd, 1995, for example), and provide university teachers with opportunities and incentives to develop their teaching abilities.

Another point worth noting relates to the possible gender-bias evident in the choice of teachers by participants. This sample of participants being small, and the goals of this study not being aimed specifically at gender as an issue, it was impossible to be certain that there was indeed a bias here. However, it would be interesting to research a relationship between the gender of students and that of teachers. For example, if female students do identify better and thus learn better with female teachers, perhaps the female proportion of teachers should match more closely that of female students. I could not find exact numbers of the ratio of female-to-male students in

Moroccan universities, but Sabour (1996) reports that in some fields, 40% of students are females, implying that this would be a high ratio of females. As reported earlier, approximately 25% of university teachers are female. Or, if "matching" teachers with students is unrealistic, and if it could be found that students identify and perform better with same-sex teachers, perhaps it would be useful to identify problematic areas of reasons why it is more difficult for students to learn from opposite-sex teachers, in order to provide teachers with information they could use to develop ways to compensate for these weaknesses.

Another way for teachers to receive feedback on their teaching and consequently to adapt their teaching methods to the students is to rely on student evaluations of teachers. Evaluation by students is not a current practice in Morocco. While teachers and university administrators are fighting the government to achieve greater academic freedom, the students are seemingly left behind in this quest for freedom. The very system that is supposed to provide them with tools to succeed in their future as productive citizens does not take into account the students' opinions to formulate their needs and fulfill them. It is no wonder that teachers can hardly be learner-centered when, not only are the students not consulted in regards to any decision, but the educational system is not even teacher-centered but rather state-centered.

In conclusion, if university students in Morocco were given a voice and a chance to state their preferences and needs through evaluations (of

teachers, programs, universities), and if those were recognized as valuable, perhaps the educational system would be on its way to provide its targeted clientele with an education which is more useful, appropriate, effective and satisfying.

And if the lack of focus on cultural aspects in relation to students' preferences for a teacher and teaching style in North America was in question right from the onset in this thesis, what is there to say of the lack of research in education with a focus on the *student* in the country of Morocco itself?

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