

INVESTIGATING THE QUALITIES OF EFL TEACHERS FROM THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: *In teaching English as a foreign language, teachers play a key role to enhance students' learning process. Even though the notion of "quality" cannot be defined simply, in education, the term of quality is essential to provide an effective teaching/learning process. What quality means for the language teachers is that they need to not only master the subject matter but also know how to deliver it effectively. Language teachers also need to understand what their students expect from them in order to develop teacher-student interaction in language classroom. This research focused on the students' attitudes towards the qualities of a good language teacher in EFL classrooms. This study examines the qualities and competencies that make a good language teacher. The objectives are to identify students' attitude on the qualities of language teachers and to find out the prominent features of a good language teacher. The data are collected from the Third Year English specialization students from Mandalay Universities of Foreign Languages by means of a set of questionnaire adapted from Murdoch (1997).*

KEY WORDS: Teacher-student interaction, qualities, competencies, a good language teacher

INTRODUCTION

It is not a simple task for defining the quality of a teacher as the criteria because it can vary from person to person, from one community to another and from one era to the next. Nevertheless; it is sure that teacher's quality is a fundamental factor to promote effective teaching and learning process. It would be truly beneficial if teachers know what students recognize the characteristics of efficient teachers. There are a lot of competencies, skills and knowledge that a language teacher must possess. Then, teachers need to enhance their quality in accordance with the educational needs. It has been reported by Lee (2010) that EFL teachers are distinguished from teachers of other subjects within four dimensions such as the complex nature of subject matter, the content teaching, teaching approach and teacher personality.

Moreover, the notion of quality has become increasingly important in all branches of education. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 9th edition defines that the notion of quality is a thing that is a part of a person's character, specially something good. As a teacher, personal and professional development, particularly in language teaching, can contribute a great deal to quality education. According to Evetts 2009, Koster 2002, Hargreaves 2000 (cited in Marco Snoek, 2010), profession can be defined as a distinct category of occupational work;

professionalization can be defined as a process in which a professional group pursues, develops, acquires and maintains more characteristics of a profession; professionalism can be defined as the conduct, demeanor and standards which guide the work of professionals.

This research focus on the students' attitudes towards the qualities of a good language teacher in EFL classroom. It was done on third year English specialization students from Mandalay University of Foreign Languages. The reason for choosing the students from this university is that students are learning foreign languages as a major subject and they can be more aware of a good qualities of language teacher. This study investigated the prominent qualities and competencies of a good language teacher for providing effective teaching-learning process in EFL classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of educational researchers suggest that there is an ongoing demand of knowledgeable, skillful, and efficient language teachers in English Language Teaching (ELT). Richards (2017) states that language proficiency plays a critical role in teaching English and it has a great impact on teachers' professional competence. Competency in ELT is mainly concerned with the content or subject matter knowledge, teaching skills, and ability to teach in English. According to Park and Lee (2006), English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge and socio-affective skills are considered as key factors to be an effective teacher from the views of teachers and students. Richards (2002) insists that a teacher's duty is to create a desirable classroom climate, to plan a variety of learning activities and to use materials of instructions effectively.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A theoretical framework for this research is constructed in terms of the qualities of a good English teacher. According to Richards (2001), there are six core components of teacher knowledge. They are as follow:

- (1) Practical knowledge: the teacher's repertoire of classroom techniques and strategies.
- (2) Content knowledge: the teacher's understanding of the subject of TESOL.
- (3) Contextual knowledge: familiarity with the school or institutional context, school norms, and knowledge of the learners, including cultural and other relevant information.
- (4) Pedagogical knowledge: ability to restructure content knowledge for teaching purposes, and to plan, adapt, and improvise.
- (5) Personal knowledge: the teacher's personal beliefs and principles and his or her individual approach to teaching.
- (6) Reflective knowledge: the teacher's capacity to reflect on and assess his or her own practice.

Teachers cannot always develop their profession only through self-observation and critical reflection, but they go beyond personal and individual reflection for developing subject matter knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and understanding of curriculum and materials. According to the study of Borg (2006), the socio-effective skills enable teachers to establish good rapport with their students as well as maintaining the process of education more effectively and successfully. Eleven key distinctive characteristics of language teachers are as follow:

- (1) The nature of the subject: Language is more dynamic than other subjects and has more practical relevance to real life.
- (2) The content of teaching: Unique in scope and complexity. Teaching a language extends beyond teaching grammar, vocabulary and four skills and includes a wide range of other issues such as culture communication skills and learning skills.
- (3) Methodology: The methodology of language teaching is more diverse and aimed at creating contexts for communication and maximizing student involvement.
- (4) Teacher-learner relationship: In language teaching, there is more communications between teacher and learners and more scope for learners to work on these which are of personal relevance.
- (5) Non-native issues: In language teaching, teachers and learners operate through a language other than their mother tongue. Teachers are also compared to native speakers of the language.
- (6) Teachers' characteristics: For language teachers, characteristics such as creativity, flexibility and enthusiasm are essential.
- (7) Training: A wide diversity of recognized language teaching qualifications exists, some as short as four weeks in duration.
- (8) Status: Language and language teachers are often awarded lower status than subjects and teachers and other languages.
- (9) Errors: Incorrect output by language learners is more acceptable than in other subjects.
- (10) Student Body: Many more adults study languages than other subjects.
- (11) Commercialization: Language teaching is driven by commercial forces more than other subjects.

According to Borg (2006), adults are more interested in learning language and it becomes more important for a good teacher to be able to teach English in an effective and interesting way. In fact, teachers' effectiveness cannot be assessed with any criteria. In language teaching, teachers have different styles of teaching and they can also be classified as native teachers and non-native teachers, unlike teachers of other subjects. Therefore Richards and Farrell (2005) suggested that teachers need to develop their profession regularly and need to make changes by engaging in self-reflection and evaluation, developing specialized knowledge and skills about many aspects of teaching, expanding their knowledge base about research, theory and issues in teaching, taking on new roles and responsibilities, such as supervisor or mentor

teacher, teacher-researcher, or materials writer and developing collaborative relationships with other teachers. The field of language teaching is subject to rapid changes and language teachers need to maintain the interest, creativity and enthusiasm in their profession.

Related Research

Lee (2010) reported on a study of Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' perceptions of some of the unique characteristics of EFL teachers that distinguished them from the teachers of other subjects, building on the work of Borg (2006). In order to identify the distinguished characteristics of EFL teachers, the data were collected by means of the questionnaire to 163 college level EFL students in Japan. The participants in this study responded to be unique along four central dimensions. As the study suggested, EFL teachers and teaching are perceived as being unique in various ways but contextual factors may ultimately affect and shape the way in which teachers and their work are conceptualized in crucial ways (Johnson,2006, cited in Lee,2010)

Another study was conducted by Hajizadeh and Salahshour (2014). The purpose of the study was to find out what foreign language instructors perceive to be the most important characteristics of an effective English language instructor. The participants in this study were 18 EFL teachers with 21-34 years of age and half a year to twelve years of experience of teaching in different private language institutes in Tabriz, Northwest of Iran. Twenty-two students also participated in this study to find out the characteristics of an effective teacher. This study revealed that there were much more similarities than differences between two groups' perceptions.

Nghia (2015) conducted his research on the qualities of English teachers in Vietnam. Vietnamese students perceived twelve qualities as significant factors that enhance their learning. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in the South of Vietnam in 2013 in order to identify the most wanted qualities of English teachers. Among the twelve qualities, teachers' English competence, teaching skills, socio-affective skills were found as the most significant qualities for a successful English teacher, as perceived by students.

Research Design

This research is conducted through qualitative and quantitative survey by means of a questionnaire that is adapted from Murdoch (1997) (cited in Richards,2001). The questionnaire was designed based on three areas: ELT Competencies, General Teaching Competencies and Knowledge and attitudes.

Participants

The participants for this research were 40 students from Mandalay University of Foreign languages. The reason for choosing this university is that foreign languages are taught as major subjects from undergraduate to postgraduate level and it is the familiar context to do this research. Then, third year students were chosen as the participants because they have at least two years' experiences of language learning and thus they can be more aware of the good qualities of a language teacher.

Procedure

As this research was designed as qualitative and quantitative survey, the perceptions of the participants on each items of the questionnaire are calculated by means of percentage. The rating scales are arranged from “not sure” to “absolutely essential” in which “absolutely essential” can be defined as “a must/completely necessary/extremely important”, “very important” for “of great value”, “important” for “having a big effect on events in the future”, “totally irrelevant” for “not useful or not relating to a particular situation, and therefore not important” and “not sure” for “have doubts in mind about something”. There are 52 items in the questionnaire: ELT Competencies comprises of 22 items, General Teaching Competencies includes 20 items and Knowledge and Attitudes contains 10 items.

Data Collection

A quantitative survey which included the 52 items was used to identify the qualities and competencies of a good English teacher. In this survey, the participants were asked to rate the importance of teacher quality for enhancing their learning process on 6 points scale in which 0 denoted ‘not sure’, 1 for ‘totally irrelevant’ and 2 for ‘of minor important’, 3 for ‘important’, 4 for ‘very important’ and 5 for ‘absolutely essential’. The questionnaires were delivered to the students and collected back after 45 minutes answering on the same day.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data were analyzed by means of percentage to find the extent to which students perceived the importance of each English teacher quality. The percentage of students' responses are displayed in the following tables and figures.

Analysis of Questionnaire on ELT Competencies (Part A)

The first part of questionnaire is concerned with English Language Teaching competencies. There are twenty-two items in this part. The rating scales are by means of 6 points scale in which 0 denoted ‘not sure’, 1 for ‘totally irrelevant’ and 2 for ‘of minor important’, 3 for ‘important’, 4 for ‘very important’ and 5 for ‘absolutely essential’. The items for ELT Competencies (Part A) are coded in Table 1.

Table-1: Coded Items for ELT Competence (Part A)

No.	Items in ELT Competence	Code No.
1	The teacher presents language points in clear and interesting ways.	A1
2	The teacher employs a range of techniques to teach new vocabulary.	A2
3	The teacher tries to relate language forms, functions and vocabulary to contexts relevant to students' interests.	A3
4	The teacher employs a range of techniques for practicing grammatical forms.	A4
5	The teacher sets up interactive pair/group activities appropriately.	A5
6	The teacher employs a variety of activities for developing speaking/listening/reading/writing skills.	A6
7	The teacher achieves a good balance between accuracy-focused and integrative, content-focused activities.	A7
8	The teacher uses games and puzzles effectively and appropriately.	A8
9	The teacher gives students sufficient time to respond to questions.	A9
10	The teacher encourages students to ask questions.	A10
11	The teacher elicits language and background knowledge from students appropriately.	A11
12	The teacher is a good language model for the students.	A12
13	Teacher talk time is appropriate for the language level of the class.	A13
14	The teacher uses and gets students to use correct classroom language	A14
15	The teacher deals with errors systematically and effectively.	A15
16	The teacher gets students to self-correct minor mistakes.	A16
17	The teacher gets students to correct/comment on each other's written work.	A17
18	The teacher makes students aware of the strategies they can use to learn English more effectively.	A18
19	The teacher uses or develops appropriate quizzes and tests to evaluate students' progress and increase motivation.	A19
20	The teacher maintains a dialogue with students to gauge their reaction to the materials and his/her teaching methods.	A20
21	The teacher makes students aware of the pedagogic purposes of classroom activities.	A21
22	The takes into account students' different style of language learning.	A22

Table-2 The numbers of Students who concerned on the questionnaire for Part-A

Rat ing	A 1	A 2	A 3	A 4	A 5	A 6	A 7	A 8	A 9	A 10	A 11	A 12	A 13	A 14	A 15	A 16	A 17	A 18	A 19	A 20	A 21	A 22
Ns	0	2	3	1	0	0	2	2	0	1	4	4	2	2	4	3	0	2	2	2	7	3
1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
2	0	6	3	7	4	2	2	2	1	4	1	0	5	3	2	5	4	9	3	2	2	6
3	8	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	15	7	14	13	11	17	12	8	10	19	15	14
4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	12	9	14	15	18	15	11	13	12	18	12	12	12
5	1	6	8	3	7	1	1	4	1	11	10	14	4	3	7	4	11	9	7	5	2	5
	5				1				1													

When considering all the items in ELT Competencies, students think that most of the items are relevant to the good qualities of teacher. Only a few students think that item-10, “The teacher encourages students to ask questions” is irrelevant to be a good teacher. The collected data show that 15 students regard that item-1, “The teacher presents language points in clear and interesting ways” is “absolutely essential” and also 16 students chose “very important” for this item. Therefore, total 77.5% of students agreed that this item is necessary to be a good teacher. The second most favorable one is item-6, “The teacher employs a variety of activities for developing speaking, listening, reading and writing skills” because 11 students selected “absolutely essential” and 17 of them chose “very important. And so 70% of students agreed this item is an essential one to be a good teacher. Next, item-12, “The teacher is a good language model for the students” also plays the same role of item-6 as 14 students selected “absolutely essential” and other 14 students chose “very important” for it. Therefore, it can be concluded that English language teacher must present language points in clear and interesting ways, they should employ a variety of classroom activities for developing four skills and they should be a good language model for the students.

Table-3 Coded Items for General Teaching Competencies (Part-B)

No	Items in General Teaching Competencies	Code No.
1	The teacher has a good classroom presence and personality.	B1
2	The teacher is patient, polite and enjoys helping students acquire new skills/knowledge.	B2
3	The teacher positions himself/herself well at different stages of the class.	B3
4	The teacher's style of dressing is an asset in the classroom.	B4
5	The teacher communicates an enthusiasm for the subject.	B5
6	The teacher establishes a good rapport with students.	B6
7	The teacher has good strategies for dealing with inappropriate student behavior.	B7
8	The teacher does not intimidate shy students in the class.	B8
9	The teacher recognizes students' achievement and develop students' interest in learning.	B9
10	The teacher attends to the learning needs of the various ability levels in the class.	B10
11	The teacher gives appropriate feedback to students about their progress.	B11
12	The teacher is able to adapt to his/her teaching plan to respond to students' immediate needs and reactions to planned activities.	B12
13	The teacher's lessons have sufficient variety and change of pace to sustain students' interest.	B13
14	The teacher prepares class adequately and has clear aims and objectives.	B14
15	The teacher uses a variety of techniques to ask questions and elicit responses from students.	B15
16	The teacher gives clear and sufficient instructions, examples or demonstrations before students begin activities.	B16
17	The teacher organizes students well.	B17
18	The teacher makes good use of the whiteboard.	B18
19	The teacher makes good use of visuals and other media.	B19
20	The teacher constantly checks to find out of students have understood teaching points or benefitted from activities.	B20

Table-4 The numbers of students who concerned on the questionnaire for Part-B

Rating	B 1	B 2	B 3	B 4	B 5	B 6	B 7	B 8	B 9	B1 0	B1 1	B1 2	B1 3	B1 4	B1 5	B1 6	B 17	B 18	B 19	B 20
NS	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	4	2	2	3	1	0	1	1	1
1	0	1	0	4	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	1
2	4	4	11	8	4	3	1	7	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	5	5	5	1
3	12	2	17	18	21	16	20	12	10	19	12	10	15	12	10	8	6	13	13	7
4	13	15	5	5	10	14	11	8	13	15	9	19	14	13	18	10	15	16	16	24
5	9	18	7	4	4	7	6	11	15	4	16	6	8	10	7	20	12	4	4	6

According to the perception of the respondents on General Teaching Competencies, the item of absolutely essential for the teachers is item-16, “The teacher gives clear and sufficient instructions, examples or demonstrations before students begin activities “as 20 students chose rank-5 for this item. 10 students also agreed this item is “very important” for the teachers. Therefore 75% of students thought that a language teacher should have such character of item-16. And then, item-2, “The teacher is patient, polite and enjoys helping students acquire new skills/knowledge”, is also regarded as an absolutely essential item for language teachers based on the perceptions of 18 students. 15 students believed that this item is very important. Next, 24 out of 40 students regarded that “The teacher constantly checks to find out if students have understood teaching points or benefitted from activities” is very important. Some students assumed that item-3 and item-18, “The teacher positions himself/herself well at different stages of the class” and “The teacher makes good use of the whiteboard” are irrelevant to the qualities of a good teacher. After analyzing students’ views on general teaching competencies, it is necessary for the language teacher to give clear and sufficient instructions, examples or demonstrations before beginning classroom activities. Moreover; the teacher needs to be patient, polite and to enjoy helping students to improve learning processes.

Table-5: Coded Items for Knowledge and Attitudes (Part C)

No	Items in Knowledge and Attitudes	Code No.
1	The teacher believes that learning English is vitally important for students’ future success.	C1
2	The teacher sees language learning as part of a larger process of promoting international contacts and interests in other cultures	C2
3	The teacher believes that education has a vital role in determining the future nature societies.	C3
4	The teacher is knowledgeable concerning the use of different varieties and style if English in different societies/cultures.	C4
5	The teacher considers students’ cultural background to be of great importance when preparing an ELT course.	C5
6	The teacher believes that he/she should empower students to become increasingly more responsible for their own progress in learning.	C6
7	The teacher is prepared to experiment and carry out classroom research in order to further improve his/her teaching competence.	C7
8	The teacher makes constant efforts to maintain/develop his/her own English communication skills.	C8
9	The teacher is aware of the professional development activities and makes full use of available professional support.	C9
10	The teacher is enthusiastic about working with colleagues to raise the quality of ELT programs.	C10

Table-6 The numbers of students who concerned on the questionnaire for (Part C)

Rating	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10
NS	2	2	3	3	5	1	1	5	5	6
1	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
2	1	1	2	3	4	3	3	2	8	3
3	16	13	19	11	17	17	7	17	9	8
4	13	17	6	18	6	13	20	11	17	12
5	6	7	9	5	7	6	9	4	1	11

Table-6 represents the view of students on Knowledge and Attitudes that make a good EFL teacher. 50% of students assumed that item-7, “The teacher is prepared to experiment and carry out classroom research in order to further improve his/her teaching competence”. And then 18 out of 40 students thought item-4, “The teacher is knowledgeable concerning the use of different varieties and styles of English in different societies/culture”. Here, the numbers of students who regarded the items of knowledge and attitudes were absolutely essential are comparatively fewer than those of other items. On the other hand; some of the students were not sure whether these items were important or not. It can be seen that the students do not consider generally these knowledge and attitudes are essential features of a good EFL teacher or not even though these qualities are important to make a teacher effective in English language teaching.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The present study aims to identify the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher from the views of students. It investigated students’ perception on ELT Competencies, General Teaching Competencies and Knowledge and Attitudes that a good language teacher should have. From the quantitative survey by means of a questionnaire, it is found that responses to the questionnaires as “very important” are much more than others. The questionnaire comprises of 52 items in details: ELT Competencies (Part A) includes 22 items, General Teaching Competencies (Part B) consists of 20 items and Knowledge and Attitudes (Part C) contains 10 items.

Regarding ELT Competencies, the findings reveal that an effective language teacher should present language points in clear and interesting ways and should be a good language model for the students. Therefore, language proficiency can be seen as an essential quality of an English teacher to be effective in teaching/learning process. Moreover; creating classroom activities in the interesting way is also necessary. As the prominent features, a good teacher should be able to set up interactive pair/group work activities and able to use different activities to maintain students’ interests. Interactive activities can help teachers motivate students for developing four skills. These findings have specific implications to provide an effective teaching/learning process. With the language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge, a teacher will be able to provide students’ improvement in learning process and maximize students’ involvement in

language learning. It can be said that the proficient teacher is able to deliver the message in an interesting and effective way and there will be good teacher-students relationship. Moreover; students will be more involved in activities for developing four skills.

In terms of General Teaching Competencies, students believe that if the teacher can give clear instructions, examples or demonstrations before doing classroom activities, the learning process will be more effective. Students think that a good instructor can lead them to interact appropriately in the learning activities. Next finding shows that good personality such as being patient, polite, helpful to gain new skills, a good presence in classroom, encouraging shy students can make a teacher effective in language teaching. In other words, these personal qualities can make a teacher build a good relationship with students. The students accept the idea that the teacher needs to check constantly and find out whether students have understood teaching points or not and the teacher should assure that students have benefitted from activities. It is also found that a good teacher should possess the ability to recognize students' achievement and sustain their interests. If a teacher is good at classroom management, he/she could be effective in teaching a language. Moreover; the students could maintain their interests through the effective activities and with the appropriate feedback from their teacher.

In respect of Knowledge and Attitudes, ten items identify what a good English instructor should possess in EFL context. There is less option, "absolutely essential" compared with other two parts. Most of the students chose "very important". It is found that half of the students perceived a teacher needs to prepare to experiment and carry out classroom research in order to further improve his/her teaching competence. It is essential feature for the teacher to develop his/her profession. According to the order of importance, the second factor of very important is the teacher should be knowledgeable concerning the use of different varieties and style of English in different society/cultures. It is true that learning a language is always related with its culture and both teachers and students need to be familiar with its social and cultural background.

Overall, an EFL teacher should possess these qualities and competencies in accordance with the responses from the students. They identify the prominent features that make a good teacher. All in all, it is possible for the students that they see an English teacher distinctively from other subject teachers and they want their English teachers possess these qualities. That's why the ELT Competencies, General Teaching Competencies and Knowledge and Attitudes are believed as important characteristics to be a good EFL teacher from the perspectives of students from Mandalay University of Foreign Languages.

CONCLUSION

In education, the term "quality" is essential to provide an effective teaching/learning process. In teaching English as a foreign language, teachers play a key role to enhance students' learning and students are highly motivated to learn English from the proficient and effective language teacher. Therefore; this research aimed to investigate the prominent qualities and competencies

of a good language teacher. It was done by means of a questionnaire that covers three parts such as ELT competencies, General Teaching competencies and Knowledge and Attitudes.

According to the results of Lee (2010), EFL teachers are more creative, flexible, and humorous than other subject teachers, but personality characteristics such as positive attitudes and enthusiasm are perceived as the distinctive characteristics of EFL teachers. The findings of Nghia's research in 2015 indicated that English competence, teaching skills and socio-affective skills help students facilitate learning significantly among the unidentified qualities and teachers are demanded to meet their learning needs, behave appropriately and professionally in class and maintain good relationship with them probably.

Compared with other researchers, the finding of the present research revealed that students considered most of the qualities and competencies are very important. The result of this study showed that a good language teacher should be language model and students expect to learn the language from such kind of teachers. Unlike other subjects, use of a wide range of interactive activities: pair-work, group-work, can be helpful to the students for developing their four skills. In General Teaching competencies, the students perceived the teacher has to give clear and sufficient instructions, examples or demonstrations before activities start. And they think it is an absolutely essential character that a teacher must have. In the part of Knowledge and Attitudes, students regarded most of the facts are important for the teachers, but they don't think these characters are must for the teachers. Half of the students agreed that the teachers need to do experiments and carry out classroom research to improve their teaching competence.

The results from this research will be helpful for the Language teachers to understand what students expect from them and it will also enhance teaching/learning process. It is also supportive for language teachers to get the ideas of how to build up successful teacher-students relationship and to have a better understanding of their professional development in English Language Teaching. However; this study is limited to the options of the students from only one university. Further research can be done in the context different universities and different levels of students to gain greater validity in results. It is suggested that more researches in teaching quality are still needed to be done for upgrading the educational standard.

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