

The Effective English Language Teacher from the Perspectives of Turkish Preparatory School Students

Hazırlık Okulu Öğrencilerinin Bakış Açısıyla Yeterli Bir İngiliz Dili Öğretmeni

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Abstract

In this study, Turkish EFL students' conceptualization of an effective English language teacher is studied. A survey formerly developed by Yu-Hsin (1999) was adapted and administered to 100 foreign language learners studying at two state universities' English language preparatory schools. Also, participants' written responses were collected to understand the qualities attributed to the effective teacher. Results show that an effective teacher is a friendly, young, enthusiastic, creative, and humorous person whose gender is not important. Also, students expect the teacher to be a native speaker of Turkish, but fluent in English, someone who likes to play educational games, and who teaches grammar effectively by using real life situations to explain language items. Also, students claim that an effective English language teacher has correct pronunciation.

Keywords: effective teacher, quality, foreign language, ELT

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'deki hazırlık okullarında İngilizce öğrenim görmekte olan üniversite düzeyindeki öğrencilerin, yeterli bir öğretmeni nasıl tanımladıklarını ortaya koymaktır. Çalışmada, daha önce Yu-Hsin (1999) tarafından hazırlanmış olan ve araştırmacılar tarafından uyarlanmış bulunan anket, iki devlet üniversitesinde öğrenim gören 100 öğrenciye uygulanmış ve ayrıca öğrencilerden yazılı olarak da etkili bir İngilizce öğretmeninde olan özellikler hakkındaki görüşleri alınmıştır. Sonuçlar, etkili bir öğretmenin arkadaşça bir yaklaşıma sahip, genç, istekli, yaratıcı ve esprili olması gerektiğini gösterirken, cinsiyetin önemli olmadığını gösterir niteliktedir. Ayrıca, öğretmenin Türkçeyi anadili olarak konuşan ama hedef dilde yetkin, eğitimsel oyunları oynayan, dilbilgisini etkin bir şekilde öğreten ve öğretirken gerçek yaşam durumlarını kullanan ve düzgün sesletime sahip bireyler olması beklenmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Yeterli öğretmen, kalite, yabancı dil, İDÖ.

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Introduction

Identifying the qualities of an “effective teacher” is not an easy task, since the term “effective” can be interpreted differently by different people. Literature suggests that, depending on the criterion used to judge effectiveness, an “effective teacher” can mean a teacher who always produces a class of high-achievers, or a teacher who generally receives positive evaluations from supervisors and administrators (Stronge, 2002). However, if the focus is on the teaching process and not on the end result, then it is possible to define an effective teacher as a person who “provides information to students in a way that is clear, understandable, and motivating” (Benson et. al., 2001). A similar definition of an effective teacher is given by Stephens and Crawley (1994) who asserted that the quality which distinguishes an effective teacher from the rest is the teacher’s ability to share information with students in such a way that students are able to understand and relate to this information. In another study, Young and Shaw (1999) found that teacher effectiveness is associated with qualities such as “effective communication, a comfortable learning atmosphere, concern for student learning, student motivation, and course organization.” Hence, the quality which distinguishes ineffective teachers from the effective ones is the latter’s ability to make the most boring course interesting and important to the students. In brief, as Clark & Walsh (2002) suggested, some of the common features which described the qualities of effective teachers were that they possess:

1. strong discipline content knowledge;
2. pedagogical skills appropriate to the environment and discipline;
3. personal knowledge which included: the ability to forge strong relationship with the students, a concern for individual students and a firm moral code.
4. intimate knowledge of the context in which they were teaching.

Then, why is it important to have a workforce of effective teachers? As Cheung (2006, pp. 435-436) explains, effective teachers tend to:

- Remain in their posts for longer periods of time,
- Spend more time on teaching and curricular planning,
- Be enthusiastic to teach,
- Be sensitive towards their students’ needs,
- Tolerant towards their students’ mistakes and errors,
- Work with problem students for longer periods of time,
- Participate and build onto the learning experiences of their students.

Research indicates that in order to keep the continuity in attaining a high quality teaching and learning atmosphere, it is necessary to maintain a workforce of effective teachers who create positive learning spaces that are conducive to learning. Among many factors which help creating this positive atmosphere, the quality of the teacher is among the most important.

Research on teacher effectiveness in Turkey has shown that there are a variety of qualities attached to an effective foreign language teacher (Demirel, 1990; Saraç-Süzer, 2007) among which having personal strategies to teach, creating a positive classroom atmosphere, to be able to a model teacher, being knowledgeable on target cultures, possessing positive personal characteristics, having correct pronunciation of the English sounds, teaching with effective classroom materials and using technology are the most common. Taşkafa (1989) found that giving positive reinforcement and being friendly were the most desirable qualities that were expected from a teacher. Similarly, Telli, den Brok, and Çakıroğlu (2008) found that students

gave greatest importance to the quality of positive teacher-student interaction although other characteristics (such as subject-matter knowledge) were mentioned at lesser degrees.

Feldman's (1986, p. 146) previous research on teachers' personality traits found "positive self-regard, energy, enthusiasm and positive regard for others" to be the high ranking qualities that students associate with effective teachers. However, there is always a gray area between the personality traits of teachers "perceived" by students and the teacher's actual personality, since students may form impressions of their teachers based on what they observe in the classroom. Therefore, student perceptions of observed teacher qualities may not always give an accurate description of their real personality, but they will still give a reasonably accurate description of teacher effectiveness. However, students' opinions of effective teachers will give researchers and practitioners some insight into the making of an effective foreign language teacher. Hence, the aim of this study is to determine the qualities of an *effective teacher* from the perspectives of English language learners to shed light on what makes a teacher effective for these learners.

Method

The questionnaire

In order to find out how foreign language learners perceive the qualities of an effective foreign language teacher, a questionnaire with three sections, each containing 10 statements was used (See the Appendix for the questionnaire). The sections were titled personal qualities, professional qualities, and pedagogical skills. The questionnaire was adapted from Yu-Hsin's (1999) inventory and consisted of 30 items adapted by the researchers with minor changes. While grouping the descriptions, three headings (professional, personal, and pedagogical) were used as constructed by Açıkgöz (2005). All of the items were rated on a four point scale (1= not important, 2= important, 3= very important, 4= it is a must). Students indicated the degree of importance of the statements for them by using this scale.

Written responses

In order to get a more detailed description of the qualities of an effective teacher, students' own descriptions of effective teachers were collected by means of two open-ended questions. These two open-ended questions were:

1. Describe the qualities of the foreign language teacher you admire most. Why do you think he/she is an effective teacher?
2. Which features do you think a foreign language teacher should not possess? Why?

Participants

The participants were 100 foreign language learners who were studying English in the preparatory schools of Hacettepe University and Middle East Technical University. There were 37 male and 63 female participants. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21 and 65.2% of the students who participated in this survey had been studying English for more than six years.

Procedures

First, the participants provided responses to the open-ended questions, and then they completed the questionnaire. Results of the questionnaire were analyzed via SPSS 11.5. The students' written descriptions of an effective foreign language teacher were analyzed by noting the frequency of the words (such as the adjectives) used to describe the effective teacher. The words and adjectives describing the effective teacher were categorized to present them in a meaningful way.

Results

Results of the Student Questionnaire

The following are the results of the student questionnaire describing the qualities of effective teachers. The means and standard deviations are given for each type of quality in the tables. For the purposes of clarity, the results are given as they were represented in the questionnaire under the relevant headings.

Personal Qualities

Table 1.
Statistical Results for Personal Qualities of Teachers

	friendly	creative	caring	strict	fair
N	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	3,79	3,44	2,98	2,54	3,17
Std. Dev.	,47768	,84471	1,17189	,93657	1,00559
Not important	0%	5%	17%	13%	10%
Important	3%	8%	18%	38%	13%
Very important	15%	25%	15%	31%	27%
A must	82%	62%	50%	18%	50%

	enthusiastic	young	experienced	humorous	gender
N	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	3,53	3,73	2,20	3,34	2,18
Std. Dev.	,64283	,67950	,92113	,86713	,83339
Not important	1%	2%	23%	6%	21%
Important	5%	7%	45%	8%	46%
Very important	34%	7%	21%	32%	27%
A must	60%	84%	11%	54%	6%

As can be seen in Table 1, students identified the most important qualities an effective foreign language teacher should possess as friendly, young, enthusiastic, creative, humor, and fair. The teacher's gender, experience, and his or her being strict are shown to be less important than the other qualities. Although 46% of students think that gender is an 'important' quality, the percent of students regarding it as the most important feature, a 'must', is only 6%. On the other hand, the results of the item pertaining to 'friendly' are rather striking. Eighty-two percent of the students think that being 'friendly' is a must.

Professional Qualities

As can be seen in Table 2, students prefer Turkish teachers to native speakers with the condition that they are fluent speakers of English. The students believe that effective teachers are the ones who incorporate educational games into their language instruction. Equally, teachers who teach both formal and informal English are regarded as more efficient by the participating students.

Table 2.
Statistical Results for Professional Qualities of Teachers

	a native speaker of English	a non-native teacher but fluent in English	knows native and target foreign culture	gives homework	takes attendance
N	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	2,48	3,77	3,58	2,12	2,14
Std. Dev.	,89307	,48938	,69892	,78212	,89916
Not important	14%	0%	2%	22%	25%
Important	37%	3%	6%	47%	45%
Very important	36%	17%	24%	28%	21%
A must	13%	80%	68%	3%	9%

	gives tests, quizzes regularly	uses plays, games while teaching	has lived in a foreign country	teaches both formal and informal English	uses pair and group work activities
N	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	2,74	3,65	2,12	3,65	1,85
Std. Dev.	,94943	,70173	,78212	,59246	,67232
Not important	10%	3%	22%	1%	30%
Important	31%	4%	47%	3%	56%
Very important	34%	18%	28%	26%	13%
A must	25%	75%	3%	70%	1%

Pedagogical Skills

In terms of the pedagogical skills, teaching grammar effectively, using real life situations to explain language items, having correct pronunciation of English, and making the students feel relaxed in the classroom are found to be the top qualities an effective teacher should possess. As can be seen in Table 3, being the central authority in the classroom and doing the talk rather than listening to the students are the least important qualities the effective teacher should possess.

Table 3.
Statistical Results for Pedagogical Skills

	uses technology and visual materials	makes students correct each other's work	talks rather than listen	teaches grammar effectively	has correct pronunciation
N	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	2,00	1,89	1,82	3,61	3,40
Std. Deviation	,95346	,76403	,78341	,63397	,71067
Not important	35%	33%	37%	1%	1%
Important	40%	47%	48%	5%	10%
Very important	15%	18%	11%	26%	37%
A must	10%	2%	4%	68%	52%

Tablo 3'ün Devamı

	makes students feel relaxed	manages classroom effectively	uses real life situations to explain language items	makes learners discover language	is the central authority in the classroom
N	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	3,24	2,31	3,59	2,45	1,72
Std. Deviation	,76700	,83720	,63715	,91425	,63691
Not important	35%	33%	37%	1%	1%
Important	40%	47%	48%	5%	10%
Very important	15%	18%	11%	26%	37%
A must	10%	2%	4%	68%	52%

Results of the Open-Ended Questions

Question 1: Describe the qualities of the teacher you admire most. Why do you think he/she is an effective teacher?

Table 4.

Qualities of an effective teacher

	f	%
possesses good knowledge of the English language	476	95,2
should be open to innovations	398	79,6
friendly and not authoritative	365	73
motivating	321	64,2
aware of student needs	306	61,2
good at classroom management	304	60,8
witty, finds fun ways to teach subjects (ie. games)	297	59,4
limits the use of mother tongue	288	57,6

As can be understood from the table above, the majority of students (95,2%) describe an effective teacher as the one with "good knowledge of English". As the second the most important quality, there exists "being open to innovations" (79,6%). In the third place, students prefer friendly teachers rather than authoritative ones (73%). They give importance to the qualities of being "motivating" (64,2%), "aware of students needs" (61,2%), "good at classroom management" (60,8%) and "witty" (59,4%). Lastly, the participants indicate "limiting the use of mother tongue" as another preferred quality (57,6%).

Question 2: Which features do you think a teacher should not possess? Why?

As shown in Table 5, 92,6% of the students describe ineffective teachers as those who show complete dependence on the lesson plan and 89% of them find those teachers ineffective who do not use different teaching methods. Similarly, 88% suggest that those who are unable to meet the expectations and needs of the students, and 85,4% suggest that those teachers that are angry or strict are also ineffective. Focusing on one skill only (80,8%), and having poor command of English are also found to be the qualities of the ineffective teachers (79,4%). 62,2% of the students descib those teachers who discriminate against some students as ineffective and 60,2% of the students suggest that those are bad at classroom management as ineffective teachers.

Table 5.
Students' descriptions of the least effective foreign language teacher

	f	%
complete dependence on the lesson plan	463	92,6
not using different teaching methods	445	89
unable to meet the needs of the students	440	88
angry or strict	427	85,4
focuses on only one skill	404	80,8
insufficient knowledge of English	397	79,4
discriminates between students	313	62,2
bad at classroom management	301	60,2

Conclusion

In this study, it is aimed to gather data on how Turkish students learning English as a foreign language describe the qualities of an effective English teacher.

As these results suggest, students perceive teachers as effective, if they teach both formal and informal English, incorporate games into teaching, and organize group/pair work activities in the classroom. In addition, Turkish students view teachers who use real life situations in the classroom as effective, but do not prefer teachers with high teacher talking time. Finally, the students who participate in this study find some traits as "ineffective." They perceive foreign language teachers who are heavily depended on their lesson plans, who do not employ a variety of methods, who disregard the needs of the learners as ineffective teachers.

The quantitative results of this research show that an effective teacher is a friendly, young, enthusiastic, creative, and humorous person, regardless of the gender. Also, it is expected that the teacher be a native speaker of Turkish, but fluent in English who likes playing educational games, teaches grammar effectively, uses real life situations to explain language items, and has correct pronunciation. In addition to that, the qualitative findings support these findings with slight variations.

These findings are consistent with the related research literature in that Feldman (1986), Clark and Walsh (2002), and Cheung (2006) all point to the importance of forming positive relationships with students as an essential quality of an effective teacher. In our study, we also found that friendliness as opposed to being angry or strict was a trait that an effective teacher should possess.

Furthermore, Hoon and Tomiko (2008) state that Japanese students view an effective teacher as a teacher who "teaches outside the syllabus". Similarly, in our study, Turkish students asserted that an effective teacher shouldn't depend on the lesson plan completely. In other words, he/she should be as creative as possible, which is viewed as a quality that an effective teacher should possess from both the perspective of Japanese students and Turkish students.

In addition, the related literature (Richardson & Thomas, 1989; Stephens & Crawley, 1994 ; Young & Shaw 1999 ; Benson et.al., 2001) postulates that the teacher's knowledge of the subject matter and the ability to share this knowledge is one of the most important qualities of an effective teacher. Our study confirms this finding since the students also attached importance to

the professional qualities of the teacher such as the effective teaching of grammar and the use of real life situations to explain language items.

Our findings do not match with some of the relevant research we have mentioned above. In this study, naturally, students expressed some traits of an effective teacher such as the teacher being a native speaker of Turkish. The reason why students may prefer teachers who are native speakers of Turkish may be attributed to students' feeling more comfortable in the classroom. It can be inferred that Turkish students feel less anxious if they know the teacher speaks Turkish and understands what they are trying to say especially when any break-down occurs in communication. Moreover, the language teacher may be able to translate certain expressions that are difficult in the target language and help the students formulate their ideas in English so that they don't make language mistakes resulting from the mother tongue interference. These factors may influence Turkish students' views of an effective teacher.

This study has limitations. First of all, individuals must have certain qualities associated with the qualities of an effective teacher that can only be understood through a detailed analysis of students' age, level of English, former educational experiences, and participants' socioeconomic factors. However, this study did not articulate this multitude of issues. Second, the qualities given in the instrument are rather vague terms (adjectives) that may mean differently to different individuals. Hence, further research is necessary to see how significant these qualities are at different levels of variables analyzed in a more analytical manner.

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Appendix

Data Collection Tools

A. Open-ended Questions

Please write your answers to these questions.

1. Describe the qualities of the teacher you admire most. Why do you think he/she is an effective teacher?
2. Which features do you think a teacher should not possess. Why?

B. The Questionnaire

The following questionnaire aims to collect your views on the qualities of an effective foreign language teacher. Please indicate the degree of importance of the following factors that make a foreign language teacher an effective one (On a scale from 1-4, 1= not important, 2= important, 3= very important, 4= it is a must).

Personal Qualities

1. Friendly	1	2	3	4
2. Creative	1	2	3	4
3. Caring	1	2	3	4
4. Strict	1	2	3	4
5. Fair	1	2	3	4
6. Enthusiastic	1	2	3	4
7. Young	1	2	3	4
8. Experienced	1	2	3	4
9. Has a sense of humor	1	2	3	4
10. Gender	1	2	3	4

Professional Qualities

1. Only a native speaker of English	1	2	3	4
2. Native speaker of Turkish, fluent in English	1	2	3	4
3. Knows about the Turkish and foreign culture	1	2	3	4
4. Gives homework	1	2	3	4
5. Takes attendance	1	2	3	4
6. Gives tests/ quizzes regularly in class	1	2	3	4
7. Likes to play games	1	2	3	4
8. Has lived in a foreign country	1	2	3	4
9. Teaches formal and informal English	1	2	3	4
10. Uses pair and group work activities	1	2	3	4

Pedagogical Skills

1. Uses technology and visual materials	1	2	3	4
2. Makes students correct each other's work	1	2	3	4
3. Talks rather than s/he listens	1	2	3	4
4. Teaches grammar effectively	1	2	3	4
5. Has correct pronunciation	1	2	3	4
6. Makes students feel relaxed	1	2	3	4
7. Manages the classroom effectively	1	2	3	4
8. Uses real life situations while explaining	1	2	3	4
9. Makes learners discover language	1	2	3	4
10. Is the central authority in the classroom	1	2	3	4