

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS A GOOD UNIVERSITY EFL TEACHER

อาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศที่ดีในทัศนะของนักศึกษาไทย
ในมหาวิทยาลัยแห่งหนึ่ง

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how Thai university students in one Thai university context identified the characteristics of a good university English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher. To collect data, a questionnaire was employed with 403 students [175 English major students and 228 non-English major students at Albus University (pseudonym) in order to perceive the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher. The returned questionnaire allowed a researcher to list the top 5 effective EFL teacher characteristics of each group of participants. English major students listed (1) explaining clearly, (2) knowing the subject well, (3) entertaining, (4) motivate students to learn language, and (5) having good teaching methods as the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher. According to non-English major students' responses, they were the same to some extent, i.e. explaining clearly, entertaining, and having good teaching methods. Also there were some different characteristics to some extent such as having impartiality, having sense of humor, and creating a comfortable atmosphere. Moreover, altogether 27 students at Albus University (a pseudonym) agreed to be interviewed. Findings from the interview allowed the researcher to identify what these students perceived as the characteristics of a good university EFL teacher. They were: (1) ability to explain clearly, (2) knowledge of the subject matter, (3) ability to entertain students, (4) ability to motivate students to learn, (5) ability to teach, (6) fairness, and (7) sense of humor.

Keywords: perceptions, characteristics, EFL teachers

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยฉบับนี้เป็นการศึกษาทัศนคติของนักศึกษาไทยในมหาวิทยาลัยแห่งหนึ่งของประเทศไทยที่มีต่อบุคลิก ลักษณะของอาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ โดยมีการเก็บข้อมูลจากแบบสอบถามและการสัมภาษณ์ จากนักศึกษาจำนวน 403 คน ของมหาวิทยาลัยอัสสัมชัญ (นามสมมติ) จำแนกเป็นนักศึกษาสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษจำนวน 175 คน และเป็นนักศึกษาจากสาขาวิชาอื่นๆ จำนวน 228 คน นักศึกษาทั้งหมดได้มีการทำแบบสอบถามเกี่ยวกับ ทัศนคติที่มีต่อบุคลิกลักษณะที่ดีของอาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ โดยผลจากการตอบแบบสอบถาม ทำให้ผู้วิจัยสามารถจำแนกบุคลิกลักษณะที่ดีของอาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ 5 อันดับแรก ดังนี้ นักศึกษาสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษมีความเห็นว่า อาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศที่ดีนั้นต้องมี บุคลิกลักษณะต่อไปนี้ 1) สามารถอธิบายความได้อย่างชัดเจน 2) มีความรู้ด้านวิชาที่สอนเป็นอย่างดี 3) สามารถสร้างความสนุกสนานได้ 4) สามารถกระตุ้นให้ผู้เรียนอยากเรียนรู้ภาษา และ 5) มีวิธีการสอนที่ดี ส่วนทัศนคติของนักศึกษา จากสาขาวิชาอื่นๆ นั้นมีบางคำตอบที่คล้ายกับนักศึกษาสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ คือ สามารถอธิบายความได้อย่างชัดเจน สามารถสร้างความสนุกสนานได้ และมีวิธีการสอนที่ดี ส่วนทัศนคติของนักศึกษาที่มีต่อบุคลิกลักษณะที่ดีของอาจารย์ ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศที่ไม่เหมือนทัศนคติของนักศึกษาสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ คือ อาจารย์ผู้สอน ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศที่ดีนั้น จำเป็นต้องมีความยุติธรรม มีอารมณ์ขัน และต้องสร้างบรรยากาศการเรียนรู้ ภายในห้องเรียน นอกจากนี้การสัมภาษณ์นักศึกษาจำนวน 27 คน ทำให้ผู้วิจัยได้ข้อมูลเชิงลึกของทัศนคติของนักศึกษา ที่มีต่อบุคลิกลักษณะที่ดีของอาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ ซึ่งคำตอบที่ได้ก็คล้ายคลึงกับคำตอบ ในแบบสอบถาม ดังนี้ 1) สามารถอธิบายความได้อย่างชัดเจน 2) มีความรู้ด้านวิชาที่สอนเป็นอย่างดี 3) สามารถสร้างความ สนุกสนานได้ 4) สามารถกระตุ้นให้ผู้เรียนอยากเรียนรู้ภาษา 5) มีวิธีการสอนที่ดี 6) มีความยุติธรรม และ 7) มี อารมณ์ขัน

คำสำคัญ: ทัศนคติ บุคลิกลักษณะ อาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

Introduction

One chapter of the book - *Holler If You Hear Me: The Education of a Teacher & His Students*, Michie shared with a reader a story of one grade seven student, Ruby Anaya. Anaya believed that good teachers were passionate in their job, and attentive and fair to their students. In her interview, she said,

Some teachers would tell us, "Hey you can do something with your life," but I'm pretty sure that when they would come out of school, they would think, "She's a slow student, she's never gonna do anything".

You could feel that they were lying to you, you know? They couldn't look you in the eyes and say you can be somebody in life, because they didn't mean it. One of my teachers even compared us to his dogs. He would tell us that his dogs could do something that we couldn't do.

But there were some teachers who were different, like Mr. Z. He would look into your eyes and really talk to you. He didn't teach the high groups any different from the low groups. He treated us all the same. Plus, Mr. Z would listen to you. If a

teacher doesn't listen, the kids gonna think, "Why should I try to learn this?" Teachers should take the time with each student so they understand it. But some teachers don't really care.

I don't want to say that they're bad teachers. I guess they're trying their best. But the way I see it, they're just there to get paid. I think Mr. Z would teach school even if he didn't get paid. It's like his life. He loves teaching kids. He cares. And if you see the teacher cares, and listens to you, you try to repay him by listening and studying hard in his class. (Michie, 1999: 124)

Michie (1999) also interviewed with Juan, another one of his former student, defined similar characteristics of a good teacher. A good teacher was attentive to his/her students.

To me what makes a good teacher is someone who understands the students. If the teacher knows how the students are thinking, you can teach a class more easily. I mean, if you see the kids are dead, common sense will tell you you better change your strategy, you know? If all these kids are looking at you like a bunch of zombies, common sense will tell you you're doing something wrong.

In the classroom, teacher plays an important role in teaching-learning processes. Teacher has to have the knowledge of the subject matter, well-prepared for teaching, and so on. However, teacher's characteristics are also very important in teaching-learning processes. Agreeing with

this, some educators said that teacher has an impact on students' performances Gillard (2010) said that teacher characteristic had the largest impact on students' performances. Moreover, Darling-Hammond (1999) further noted that understanding characteristics of effective teachers could help teachers to develop their relationship between teachers and students. In the past, there were some studies that explored the characteristics of effective teachers but those studies just look into the general educational field. So, the finding cannot be used to identify the characteristics of an effective foreign language (FL) teacher. This is because a language field is different from other fields (Borg, 2006). To understand better, Borg (2006) listed five factors distinguishing foreign language teachers from teachers of other subjects as follows: (1) the nature of the subject matter itself, (2) the interaction patterns necessary to provide instruction, (3) the challenge for teachers of increasing their knowledge of the subject, (4) isolation, and (5) the need for outside support for learning the subject.

In particular field of foreign language (FL) teachers, Brosh (1996) conducted a mixed-methods study to identify the perceived characteristics of an effective FL teacher. The participants of the study were 200 FL teachers (of Arabic, English, French, and Hebrew) and 406 ninth-grade high school students (from different schools). The returned questionnaires and interview allowed him to list several characteristics of an effective FL teacher. Similarly, an effective FL teacher needed to have

(1) ability to command of four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), (2) ability to transmit knowledge in a way that was easy to understand, and (3) ability to motivate students to do their best. Differently, FL language teachers defined that an effective FL teacher needed to have an ability to provide students with experiences of success. A contrary point of view, the students expressed that an effective FL teacher needed to have fairness and availability after class time. The studies including Intraboonsom (2007) and Sriprasert (2011) findings replicated the study of Brosh were similar to some extent. Most students noted that an effective EFL teacher should have: (1) ability to command of four language skills, (2) ability to transmit knowledge, (3) fairness, (4) availability after class time, and (5) ability to provide students with experiences of success. Furthermore, similar characteristics of an effective EFL teacher were revealed in Hongboontri, Prakongchati & Trirakunkovit (2010) mixed-methods study. Their finding perceived three main characteristics that were (1) teacher personality, (2) good instructional practice, and (3) good knowledge of subject matter.

Other studies of effective EFL teachers were also proposed by Banno (2003), Wichadee's (2009), and Chen & Lin (2009). The quantitative findings were more or less the same as those of Brosh. Banno assigned 313 students who were living in Japan (98 Americans, 105 Chinese, and 110 Japanese) to complete a questionnaire to perceive characteristics of an effective FL teacher. The results of the study revealed that

students perceived different characteristics of an effective FL teacher. To illustrate, American students agreed that an effective FL teacher was patient and creative while Chinese students expressed that having good pronunciation was the most important characteristic. On the other hand, Japanese students noted that an effective FL teacher should have these four characteristics: (1) ability to entertain, (2) fairness, (3) open-mindedness, and (4) reliability. Moreover, Wichadee conducted her study by requiring 453 participants (200 students and 53 teachers) in one Thai university to do the questionnaire. According to her findings, the student participants listed three characteristics of an effective EFL teacher including: (1) good preparation, (2) effective communication ability, and (3) pleasant personality. As teacher participants, they indicated that an effective EFL teacher needed to have (1) a good command of four basic English language skills, (2) ability to communicate with students, and (3) ability to plan clear and appropriate goals. In terms of Chen and Lin's findings, data collected from junior high school Taiwanese students reported that instructional competence, personality, and teacher-student relationship were perceived characteristics of an effective EFL teacher. With these lists of the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher, they could help EFL teachers to be aware of other's expectations of them Hongboontri, Prakongchati & Trirakunkovit (2010). As Banno (2003) noted, "students have their own expectations towards teachers, and it is important for teachers to know what they are" (p.345). To do so, this

study was conducted as a mixed-methods study to explore university students' perceptions towards the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher.

Research Question

What are the characteristics of a good university English as foreign language (EFL) teacher?

Methodology and the Research Participants

According to the importance of EFL teacher characteristics, myriad studies, i.e. Borg (2006), Gillard (2010) and Hasekawa (2004), noted that teacher characteristics had a great impact on students' performances. Hence, looking for good EFL teacher characteristics was necessary to the EFL teachers to meet the students' desires. In doing so, I employed a mixed-methods approach to collect and analyze data. A questionnaire and an interview were used to collect data. Altogether 403 students (175 English major students and 228 non-English major students) at Albus University were administered to complete a questionnaire. Twenty-seven students (19 English major students and 8 non-English major students) allowed a researcher to interview. Before the interview was conducted, the researcher had looked into the studies of Brosh (1996), Hongboontri, Prakongchati & Trirakunkovit (2010), Intraboonsom (2007), Sriprasert (2011), and Wall et al. (2002) in order to develop the

interview questions. The questions were piloted on five Thai university students. After that the questions were reworded and rearranged in order of important. The actual interviews took approximately 30 minutes depending on the participant's responses.

With all responses to the questionnaire were tallied, tabulated, and enter into SPSS to calculate for their frequencies. In terms of interview, all interviews were transcribed and later analyzed with Strauss & Corbin's (1990, 1998) open and axial coding techniques.

Findings

In terms of quantitative result, the numeric data demonstrated the five perceived characteristics that an effective EFL teacher needed to have rated by both English major students and non-English major students. The analyzed data revealed that English major students chose ability to explain clearly as the most important characteristic; the other four characteristics included knowledge of the subject matter, ability to entertain students, ability to motivate students to learn, and ability to teach. Interestingly, non-English major students also perceived ability to explain clearly as the most important characteristic that an effective EFL teacher should have. The other traits were ability to entertain students, ability to teach, fairness, and sense of humor.

Table 1 The Top Five Characteristics of a Good EFL Teacher Chosen by Each Group of Participants

English major students	Non-English major students
1. Explaining clearly (54.90%)	1. Explaining clearly (53.10%)
2. Knowing the subject well (42.30%)	2. Entertaining (46.50%)
3. Entertaining (40.60%)	3. Creating a comfortable atmosphere, Having good teaching methods, and Preparing and organizing the lesson (42.40%)
4. Motivate students to learn language (37.70%)	4. Having impartiality (28.10%)
5. Having good teaching methods (34.90%)	5. Having sense of humor (27.20%)

As a part of qualitative result, all analyzed interview data revealed the insightful participant's descriptions of an effective EFL teacher. Overall, these students' descriptions of an effective EFL teacher were in line with their responses to the questionnaire. Most students (both English major student and non-English major students) agreed that an effective EFL teacher needed to have ability to explain clearly. One participant said that;

"In my opinion, an effective EFL teacher was a person who could explain what he/she knew well. So, he/she was able to explain any difficult lessons or complicated content to be easy to understand. Also, he/she could give the examples related to the lessons. Moreover, an EFL teacher should teach and assign works using simple words. If students get what a teacher taught, they would apply the knowledge beyond the classroom".

The knowledge of the subject matter was also important quality of an effective EFL teacher. A participant explained that;

"For an effective EFL teacher, his knowledge of the subject matter was the first point I thought of. I believed that a smart teacher could consider his thoughts and his teaching reasonably. If he had good consideration, he could prepare good teaching. If he conducted good teaching, the classroom would be enjoyable. If the classroom was enjoyable, students would pay more attention to their studies".

Moreover, an effective EFL teacher should have ability to entertain students also. One participant said;

"I wanted to learn with an EFL teacher who conducted an attractive classroom. The attractive classroom, in my opinion, included a creative teacher, various English materials, and fun. From my experience, I used to learn with an EFL teacher who was very creative. He had many teaching styles. For example, he taught me to learn vocabulary through songs and movies. Sometimes, he attracted me by his dressing styles. He then taught me vocabulary about

his dressing. He always told the jokes to decrease my stress. Especially, he kept trying to make every class full of laugh and fun. I liked him very much because I felt I could learn English”.

Importantly, ability to motivate students to learn was one of qualities that students concerned. One participant told me that;

“...Prof. I admired was a person who took care every step of students’ learning, i.e. his teaching preparation, learning activities, and students’ comprehension. In his classroom, he firstly realized to students’ learning performances. He would give examples of successful senior to will students to learn. He always encourages students all the time. Especially, he never looked down on any low proficiency students. Not only, he never bring students under the pressure, but also tried to make the relax atmosphere. I believed that if students were relax, they would gain more what the teacher taught”.

Another quality that an effective EFL teacher should have is ability to teach. A participant explained that;

“...An effective EFL teacher should give students the feedback of their assignments. The teacher had to be able to explain and to give examples on incorrect issues to clear understand. Importantly, an effective EFL teacher had to be up-to-date. He/she should bring the recent events or real situation to teach in class to students to learn beyond the classroom. For me, I decided to learn

English because I needed to learn, to make good consideration, and to use it in the real life”.

For the basic quality that every effective teacher should have was fairness. One participant said;

“...Scoring had to be clear. I did not serious whether my score was high or low. I just needed to review the score details because I could know what points I missed. For instance, some teachers had good teaching, but there was no assignment feedback. So, I did not know that I did it right or wrong. When the score was shown, I wondered about my score. Did I do something wrong? I did not know because there was no feedback, as well as, explanation”.

Sense of humor was one quality that an effective EFL teacher should be qualified. One participant told that;

“...Sense of humor was important to an EFL teacher because it was a needed tool to make relax classroom atmosphere. Most students needed to learn English without pressure. As a student, I wanted to learn the target language with the EFL teacher who always smiled. For me, smiling meant to be cheerful and humorous. I used to learn with Prof. Star (pseudonym) who qualified this characteristic. He made me love and respect. So, I promised myself that I would study hard for paying respect to him”.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is no doubt that an EFL teacher, particularly teacher's personality, plays an important role in a language classroom. Emphasizing the contribution of teachers' personalities to students' performances, Hasekawa (2004) noted that teacher's personalities determined students' motivation or demotivation to learn. Along with another researcher the understanding on this topic, to some extent, allowed teachers not only to become more aware of other expectations but also to have better relationship between teachers and students (Darling-Hammond, 1999). An analysis of returned questionnaires and transcribed interview data from English major students and non-English major students at Albus University (pseudonym) revealed nine perceived characteristics of an effective EFL teacher and answered the research question. The nine characteristics of an effective EFL teacher were: (1) explaining clearly, (2) knowing the subject well, (3) entertaining, (4) creating a comfortable atmosphere, (5) having good teaching methods, (6) preparing and organizing the lesson, (7) motivating students to learn

language, (8) having impartiality, and (9) having sense of humor. These perceived characteristics were, to some extent, similar to those listed by Brosh (1996), Hongboontri, Prakongchati & Trirakunkovit (2010), Intraboonsom (2007) and Sriprasert (2011). More importantly, the study not only raises awareness among EFL teachers about the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher but also helps EFL teachers in Thailand to improve their instructional practices during in the classroom. As Rhee wrote;

Students are very serious about wanting to learn from the best. During an announcement visit to one high school, I noticed that many classroom were nearly empty. I saw only one that was full, an English class in which the students were actually engaged in discussion. As I left the school an hour later, I noticed that three young men who had been in the English class were leaving as well.

"Where are you going?" I asked one.

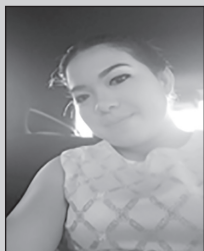
"We came to school because the first period teacher is a good one," he said.

"The second isn't, so we're rolling."

(Rhee, 2010: 133)

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