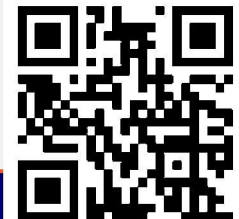


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CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE EFL TEACHERS: REVEALING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AT A UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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Abstract

The effective and sustainable pathway to improve student learning outcomes is the quality of teachers. This study aims to investigate Thai university students' perceptions on preferred characteristics of effective EFL teachers. The data were collected through a 5-point Likert questionnaire and analyzed by using the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences to find mean (\bar{X}) and standard deviation (S.D.). From the total of 200 students studying in four distinctive faculties, 120 students are purposively selected as research participants. The findings indicated the top-five characteristics which students from all faculties perceived as the most important for effective EFL teachers to possess. The characteristics are: (1) open-minded, (2) approachable, (3) reliable, (4) explain clearly, and (5) good teaching methods. By implementing the knowledge of preferred characteristics of effective EFL teachers, the administrators can plan the appropriate teacher training programs for teachers and staff members.

Keywords: Characteristics, Effective EFL teachers, Students' perceptions

Introduction

Research Background

Teachers are important figures in the process of students' learning. Effective teachers positively impact all learners' achievements regardless of differences in their ability levels (Sanders, Wright, & Horn, 1997). According to Sanders (1998), the biggest factor that affect students' academic performance is the effectiveness of teachers. A study into effective characteristics from perception of learners is crucial for the training of teachers (Brosh, 1996). Acknowledging the preferred characteristics can help teachers to improve themselves in accordance with student's preferences and expectations (Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, Al-Siyabi, & Al-Maamari, 2015). Teachers acknowledge students' perceptions will be able to enforce activities that can encourage students to be more engage in the process of

language learning (Koç, 2013). For students learning to be enhanced, efforts into strengthening effective teachers are significant.

Research Problems

It is critically crucial to better understand how different groups of students from specific institutional and sociocultural contexts characterize effective English language teachers (Borg, 2006). Attributing to Borg (2006), identifying what effective EFL teachers are in the Thai context is believed to create development that helps establish a positive atmosphere in the university classroom. This study employed Saiyood (2013)'s study as the framework since the study included the perceived characteristics of effective EFL teachers in Thailand. Also, this study looked at Dincer (2013)'s research study which explored mostly cited four main characteristics of effective EFL teachers from over 30 studies. They are (1) Pedagogical Knowledge, (2) Socio-affective Skills, (3) Subject-matter Knowledge, and (4) Personality Characteristics. In the Thai context, however, it is still questionable. As suggested by Dincer (2013), the present study then explored whether the Thai students agree or disagree with these four characteristics categorized by Dincer (2013). It is expected that the results will be remarkably informative to teachers and teacher trainers working in an English language teaching area.

Objectives of the study

The research objective guiding this study is to explore the perceived characteristics of an effective English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher from the perspectives of Thai university students. Moreover, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the top-five most preferred characteristic of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Thai university students?
 - 1.1 What is the most preferred characteristic of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Airline Business students?
 - 1.2 What is the most preferred characteristic of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Engineering students?
 - 1.3 What is the most preferred characteristic of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Nursing students?
 - 1.4 What is the most preferred characteristic of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Communication Arts students?

Scope of the study

This study was limited only to exploring students' perceptions on preferred characteristics of effective EFL teachers. The participants in this study included 200 fourth-year students from four distinctive faculties – Aviation Personnel Development Institute (Airline Business), Engineering, Nursing, and Communication Arts, who enrolled in semester 2 of academic year 2019 at Kasem Bundit University. Teaching in certain disciplines can be considered as

effective in one setting yet less effective in another; moreover, learners’ different insights of learning English can be provided (Brosh, 1996; Phothongsunan, 2018). In response to this, the four faculties were chosen to gain varied information.

Research Significance

Quality of teaching is an indispensable factor in supporting effective learning. Therefore, it will be advantageous for teachers to realize what their students consider as effective characteristics of an effective teacher. By perceptions of students, teachers are assisted to understand their students’ expectations and lead them to enhance their own skills more successfully.

Literature

Review

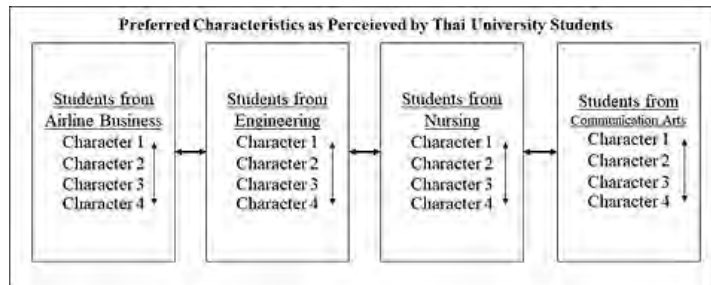


Figure 1. Preferred characteristics as perceived by Thai university students

The current research is grounded upon the studies of Saiyood (2006) and Dincer (2013) on perceived characteristics of effective EFL teachers. The characteristics are as following: (1) pedagogical knowledge, (2) socio-affective skills, (3) subject-matter knowledge, and (4) personality characteristics.

Characteristics of Effective EFL Teachers

Pedagogical Knowledge

The pedagogical knowledge is how teachers apply cognitive knowledge to create effective teaching methodologies and learning atmosphere. Shulman (1987) categorized the pedagogical knowledge into two concepts which are general pedagogical knowledge where classroom management techniques are applied and pedagogical content knowledge when information of particular subject such as English language is applied in teaching procedures. Pedagogical techniques consist of, for example, promoting a stress-free classroom where students feel comfortable to participate the lesson, integrating technology in teaching and learning, motivating students with positive reinforcement etc.

Socio-affective Skills

Socio-affective strategies are related to interaction and relationship between people — teacher and students and/or students and students — where empathy and attitudes are established and fostered in classrooms. Apart from

English content base characters, socio-affective skill is another essential factor that is used to enhance productive learning and positive attitudes towards peers and the teacher. There are several effective socio-affective techniques such as positive self-talking, discussing tasks, social-mediating activity etc., Magno (2010). Importantly, the teachers also need to respond to students' voices and needs in order to properly help them such as using positive affirmation when some lack of confidence in speaking English e.g. "*It's my job to help you do better and succeed.*"

Subject-matter Knowledge

Knowledge is the significant fundamental for all effective English language teachers. The vital characteristic is that the teachers should be proficient in the use of English language. They should have in-depth knowledge and information about English including principles, concept, values etc. In classroom as the teacher is a role model for students, using English fluently and accurately is important so that students can learn and imitate language in correct ways. Additionally, teachers should study the background information and knowledge of students in order to appropriately design effective lesson plans based on their abilities and proficiency levels.

Personality Characteristics

The truly well-trained teachers are not only skillful in English language usage and teaching, but they also make a difference in classroom by their personal qualities (soft skills). Firstly, the teachers provide positively express themselves in energetic way so that learners can absorb the enthusiastic atmosphere and enjoy the lesson. Besides, to demonstrate students how to survive in innovative world, professionals should be flexible, creative and open-minded; students will realize that thinking outside the box is acceptable and necessary, and the sense of humor is one thing. Being firm and patient is the other crucial key. The teacher work among individual differences of students; therefore, the ability to be calm and patiently deal with difficulties during the lesson is very important to a successful classroom management.

Related Studies

There are some previous studies done in the field of language education regarding students' perceptions towards the characteristics of effective EFL teachers. Saiyood (2013) examined characteristics of a good English language teacher perceived by Thai university students. To do so, a questionnaire was distributed to 403 students in which 228 students are non-English major. The finding reveals that English major students ranked (1) explaining clearly, (2) knowing the subject well, (3) entertaining, (4) motivate students to learn language, and (5) having good teaching methods as good characteristics. On the other hand, non-English major students listed similar characteristics with some differences such as impartiality, having sense of humor, and creating a comfortable atmosphere. As a result, these skills can be classified into four skills: Personality characteristics, Pedagogical skill, Social-affective, and other skills. For English major students, they ranked Pedagogical Knowledge, Knowledge of subject matter, and Personality Characteristics. Also, non-English major students ranked Pedagogical Knowledge and Personality Characteristics. Moreover, Dincer (2013) categorized the characteristics into four skills by reviewing over 30 related papers which are socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge, subject-matter knowledge and personality characteristics. The finding indicated that English language teachers should possess socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge, subject-matter

knowledge and personality characteristics. In order to become effective English language teachers, they should merge these skills together.

Research Methodology

Population and Sample

The population involving in this study was fourth-year Thai university students from four distinctive faculties: Aviation Personnel Development Institute (Airline Business), Engineering, Nursing, and Communication Arts. Following the notions of purposive sampling technique, 50 students from each faculty were selected as samples to complete a questionnaire.

Questionnaire

The instrument of this study was a questionnaire, adapted from Saiyood (2013). There were 24 items representing some characteristics of effective EFL teachers: teachers' Pedagogical Knowledge, Socio-affective Skills, Subject-matter Knowledge, and Personality Characteristics. Names or personal information were not included. The items were ranked with the following categories: 5 means the most important; 4 means very important; 3 means important; 2 means less important and 1 means the least. important. The researcher gave a brief instruction on how to respond the questionnaire. They were informed that there is no right or wrong answers and they just chose the items according to what they believe. Moreover, they could ask the researcher immediately if they had any questions. The questionnaire was filled in and finished within 10 minutes on average.

Data Collection

To obtain permission to conduct this study, all of the Deans from four faculties – Aviation Personnel Development Institute (Airline Business), Engineering, Nursing, and Communication Arts – were contacted and informed about the aims of the present study and research methodology. The permission was then granted. Each faculty was prepared for 50 pieces of the questionnaire. Later, the participants were informed that this study was voluntarily to join. A questionnaire was assigned on the students who agreed to participate in the research. They were told to read thoroughly and fill in each item upon their perceptions.

Data Analysis

From all returned questionnaires, only 30 pieces from every faculty were analyzed due to the incomplete and random responses. Data were statically tallied, tabulated, and entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to calculate for mean (\bar{X}) and standard deviation (S.D.). The data were grouped in both all faculties and each of them. By using Likert scales, the obtained data were transcribed according to the following criteria: 1.0 – 1.49 means the least important; 1.50 – 2.49 means less important; 2.50 – 3.49 means important; 3.50 – 4.49 means very important and 4.50 – 5.00 means the most important.

Findings, Discussions, and Conclusion

Building upon Dincer (2013)'s study, the suggested characteristics are discussed. Following the results, the characteristics of effective EFL teachers perceived by Thai students can be categorized into four major characteristics: Socio-affective skills, Pedagogical Knowledge, Subject-matter Knowledge, and Personality Characteristics.

The findings are discussed in relation to the research questions:

1. What is the top-five preferred characteristic of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Thai university students?

Table 1: Characteristics of effective EFL teachers as perceived by students from all faculties

Characteristics of effective EFL teachers	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level of Importance
Approachable	4.36	.79	Very important
Cheerful	4.09	.92	Very important
Entertaining	4.18	.87	Very important
Enthusiastic	4.06	.78	Very important
Humorous	4.03	.99	Very important
Impartial	4.24	.80	Very important
Patient	4.23	.80	Very important
Reliable	4.24	.77	Very important
Open-minded	4.43	.75	Very important
Has positive attitudes toward the native speakers	4.13	.87	Very important
Good teaching methods	4.30	.79	Very important
Explain Clearly	4.35	.90	Very important
Motivates students to study the language	4.22	.86	Very important
Makes lessons interesting	4.08	.91	Very important
Prepares and organizes the lessons	4.07	.77	Very important
Creates a comfortable learning atmosphere	4.06	.95	Very important
Conducts the lesson in the target language	3.82	.80	Very important
Does not treat students like idiots	4.10	.98	Very important
Stimulates independent learner	3.90	.82	Very important
Helps students after class time	4.03	.91	Very important
Acquainted with the native speakers	3.79	.95	Very important
Provides students with experiences of success	4.11	.88	Very important
Good pronunciation	4.05	.91	Very important
Knows the subject well	4.30	.78	Very important

According to Table 1, students from all the faculties ranked top-five characteristics of effective EFL teachers. They agreed that the teachers should be open-minded (\bar{X} =4.43), approachable (\bar{X} =4.36), able to explain clearly (\bar{X} =4.35), equipped with good teaching methods (\bar{X} =4.30), and reliable (\bar{X} =4.24) respectively. Certain characteristics of effective EFL teachers are in line with some of the studies. These characteristics are in accordance with Saiyood (2013) that the students in Thai context preferred EFL teachers with Personality Characteristics (open-minded, approachable, and reliable) and Pedagogical Knowledge (explain clearly and good teaching methods). However, she suggested another characteristic – Subject-matter knowledge, the possessed knowledge in the subject the teachers teach, but this characteristic is not highlighted. More interestingly, the ranking of the characteristics is different. While non-English major students in her study successively ranked Pedagogical Knowledge and Personality Characteristics, the present study demonstrates that Personality Characteristics and Pedagogical Knowledge are correspondingly prominent.

1.1 What is the most preferred characteristic of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Airline Business students?

Table 2: Characteristics of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Airline Business students

Characteristics of effective EFL teachers	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level of Importance
Approachable	4.37	.67	Very important
Cheerful	3.87	1.01	Very important
Entertaining	3.90	.99	Very important
Enthusiastic	3.97	.85	Very important
Humorous	3.87	1.17	Very important
Impartial	4.10	.92	Very important
Patient	4.27	.87	Very important
Reliable	4.10	.92	Very important
Open-minded	4.23	.90	Very important
Has positive attitudes toward the native speakers	4.03	1.03	Very important
Good teaching methods	4.10	1.03	Very important
Explain Clearly	4.27	1.04	Very important
Motivates students to study the language	4.00	1.08	Very important
Makes lessons interesting	3.83	1.12	Very important
Prepares and organizes the lessons	4.07	.83	Very important
Creates a comfortable learning atmosphere	3.67	1.09	Very important
Conducts the lesson in the target language	3.63	.81	Very important
Does not treat students like idiots	3.93	1.23	Very important

Stimulates independent learner	3.53	.97	Very important
Helps students after class time	3.47	1.07	Important
Acquainted with the native speakers	3.43	1.07	Important
Provides students with experiences of success	3.63	1.00	Very important
Good pronunciation	3.93	.98	Very important
Knows the subject well	4.20	.92	Very important

Showing clearly different results from the previous study, table 2 reveals that most preferred characteristics perceived by Airline Business students is open-minded ($\bar{X} = 4.43$) which classified in Personality Characteristics. It is surprising that Airline Business students prefer open-minded the most since English is very important to their study as well as future careers. Airline Business faculty aims to prepare students for Airline work field which require them to constantly communicate with clients in English. However, it is possible that the finding indicates their needs for their teachers to become more open-minded towards them. Students in this faculty also prefer teachers who know the subject that they teach well ($\bar{X} = 4.20$). EFL teachers should be proficient in English language in order to train them productively.

What is the most preferred characteristic of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Engineering students?

Table 3: Characteristics of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Engineering students

Characteristics of effective EFL teachers	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level of Importance
Approachable	4.23	.94	Very important
Cheerful	4.30	.88	Very important
Entertaining	4.03	.89	Very important
Enthusiastic	3.90	.80	Very important
Humorous	3.87	1.04	Very important
Impartial	4.17	.87	Very important
Patient	4.13	.82	Very important
Reliable	4.40	.67	Very important
Open-minded	4.50	.68	Very important
Has positive attitudes toward the native speakers	3.93	.91	Very important
Good teaching methods	4.50	.78	Very important
Explain Clearly	4.37	.81	Very important
Motivates students to study the language	4.20	.81	Very important
Makes lessons interesting	4.07	.87	Very important
Prepares and organizes the lessons	4.10	.80	Very important
Creates a comfortable learning atmosphere	4.27	.91	Very important

Conducts the lesson in the target language	3.87	.86	Very important
Does not treat students like idiots	4.17	.99	Very important
Stimulates independent learner	3.80	.66	Very important
Helps students after class time	4.27	.78	Very important
Acquainted with the native speakers	3.73	.83	Very important
Provides students with experiences of success	4.27	.69	Very important
Good pronunciation	3.80	.92	Very important
Knows the subject well	4.43	.82	Very important

According to Table 3, students in an Engineering discipline perceived open-minded ($\bar{x} = 4.50$) as the most essential characteristic. Among all the faculties, the distinct characteristic that a great number of faculty's students chose is for teachers to provide students with the experience of success ($\bar{x} = 4.27$). Their perceptions were not in line with Saiyood (2013) because non- English major students did not perceive open-minded and provide students with the experience of success as parts of the top-five most essential characteristics. New generation students are opinionated and believed in their right to speak up; therefore, they might prefer teachers who will listen to their voices. Engineering students are also curious, critical, and creative people. They might require teachers who are able to convince them that they could be successful in the subject that might not be crucial for their careers.

1.2 What is the most preferred characteristic of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Nursing students?

Table 4: Characteristics of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Nursing students

Characteristics of effective EFL teachers	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level of Importance
Approachable	4.40	.77	Very important
Cheerful	4.40	.77	Very important
Entertaining	4.30	.84	Very important
Enthusiastic	4.47	.68	Very important
Humorous	4.00	.95	Very important
Impartial	4.60	.67	The most important
Patient	4.27	.87	Very important
Reliable	4.57	.73	The most important
Open-minded	4.60	.67	The most important
Has positive attitudes toward the native speakers	4.43	.77	Very important
Good teaching methods	4.53	.68	The most important
Explain Clearly	4.43	.86	Very important
Motivates students to study the language	4.40	.72	Very important

Makes lessons interesting	4.57	.68	The most important
Prepares and organizes the lessons	4.43	.68	Very important
Creates a comfortable learning atmosphere	4.20	1.00	Very important
Conducts the lesson in the target language	3.90	.89	Very important
Does not treat students like idiots	4.37	.89	Very important
Stimulates independent learner	4.27	.74	Very important
Helps students after class time	4.37	.76	Very important
Acquainted with the native speakers	4.30	.65	Very important
Provides students with experiences of success	4.47	.82	Very important
Good pronunciation	4.27	.74	Very important
Knows the subject well	4.53	.68	The most important

According to the statistical results in the Table 4, the most preferred characteristics of the EFL teachers perceived by Nursing students are 1) impartial (\bar{X} =4.60) and 2) open-minded (\bar{X} =4.60). The results mentioned align with the finding of Saiyood (2013) that Personality Characteristics is the preferred characteristic of EFL teachers. In fact, Nursing students prefer an EFL teacher who makes lessons interesting (\bar{X} =4.57) which is in accordance with Pedagogical Knowledge. Similarly, they agree that EFL teachers with good teaching methods (\bar{X} =4.53), which is related with Pedagogical Knowledge. Moreover, the EFL teachers should know the subject well (\bar{X} =4.53), which is related with Subject-matter Knowledge. The results are obvious that Personal Characteristics are the most important quality for Nursing students; it is possibly because the nursing faculty trains students to have good personalities for nursing profession as well as teaching profession. Additionally, Pedagogical Knowledge and Subject-matter knowledge is the other two most important qualities of EFL teachers that Nursing students prefer to study with.

1.3 What is the most preferred characteristic of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Communication Arts students?

Table 5: Characteristics of effective EFL teachers as perceived by Communication Arts Students

Characteristics of effective EFL teachers	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level of Importance
Approachable	4.40	.77	Very important
Cheerful	4.40	.77	Very important
Entertaining	4.30	.84	Very important
Enthusiastic	4.47	.68	Very important
Humorous	4.00	.95	Very important
Impartial	4.60	.67	The most important
Patient	4.27	.87	Very important
Reliable	4.57	.73	The most important

Open-minded	4.60	.67	The most important
Has positive attitudes toward the native speakers	4.43	.77	Very important
Good teaching methods	4.53	.68	The most important
Explain Clearly	4.43	.86	Very important
Motivates students to study the language	4.40	.72	Very important
Makes lessons interesting	4.57	.68	The most important
Prepares and organizes the lessons	4.43	.68	Very important
Creates a comfortable learning atmosphere	4.20	1.00	Very important
Conducts the lesson in the target language	3.90	.89	Very important
Does not treat students like idiots	4.37	.89	Very important
Stimulates independent learner	4.27	.74	Very important
Helps students after class time	4.37	.76	Very important
Acquainted with the native speakers	4.30	.65	Very important
Provides students with experiences of success	4.47	.82	Very important
Good pronunciation	4.27	.74	Very important
Knows the subject well	4.53	.68	The most important

According to the Table 5, the students perceive entertaining as the most preferred characteristics of effective EFL teachers. Entertaining ($\bar{X} = 4.47$) is categorized in Personality characteristic. Communication Arts faculty (CA) mainly prepares students for entertainment field such as acting, media, advertisement, video editing, television show management, Newspaper, etc. Therefore, this faculty attracts students with certain characteristics such as confident students, fun-loving students. The finding shows that characteristics of CA students are in line with entertaining skill which is the most preferred characteristics among the students. Another preferred characteristic chosen by CA students which is completely different from the rest of the faculties is humorous. This preferred characteristic indicates that CA students enjoy a fun and entertaining classroom than the rest of faculties. This study is in accordance with Saiyood (2013) as one of the most preferred characteristics among non-English major students is entertaining.

Recommendation

The future research concerning characteristics of effective EFL teachers could include a larger number of students with different faculties. This research should employ a focus group interview to gain in-depth information. The university also consists of other important agencies such as teachers and administrators. Therefore, it might be beneficial to explore the perceived important characteristics in their points of view.

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