

ESL Students and Teachers' Perceptions of Qualities of English Language Teachers

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The Barcelona Conference on Education 2024
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The qualities of a good English language teacher play a key role in the effective English language instruction. Most importantly, students are influenced by the good qualities of a language teacher. Hence, the present paper delves into the students' perceptions of the essential attributes and characteristics that define good English language teachers. A structured questionnaire has been administered through online mode to 435 students across disciplines such as: engineering, science, humanities and social sciences. The questionnaire contained 10 statements on the subject knowledge, personality, adaptability, learning environment, passion for teaching, versatility, interpersonal communication skills, and professional development as key qualities and components of effective English language teachers. Students had to mark their responses to the statements from the five options given on the Likert Scale. Informal interviews with 10 experienced teachers, classroom teaching observation, and student feedback of teaching were also used to obtain data. Results showed that "Teachers must know their subjects well" ranked in the first position with the weighted average of 4.68; and *versatility* is ranked the lowest in the tenth position indicating a lower level of consensus among respondents on its significance in effective teaching. By synthesizing existing literature and conducting surveys and interviews with both students and educators, this paper aims to shed light on the multifaceted nature of effective English language instruction. The findings provide valuable insights for teacher training programs, educational institutions, and language instructors, contributing to the enhancement of English language teaching and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Teachers' Perceptions, English Language Teachers, Language Teacher Qualities

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Introduction

The role of an English language teacher in imparting critical skills is pivotal, as they bear the responsibility of nurturing linguistic competence and shaping the language learning experiences of countless individuals. Therefore, effective English language teaching demands a unique set of qualities and attributes, which, when embodied by educators, can significantly influence the success of language instruction. This research paper embarks on an exploration of the qualities that describe a good English language teacher, seeking to shed light on the multifaceted nature of effective language instruction and its impact on learners. By examining these qualities in detail and their implications for both educators and students, this study aims to contribute to the enrichment of language education, teacher development, and, consequently, the overall advancement of individuals striving to master the English language. The qualities that make a good English language teacher are not only of academic interest but also the real-world applications that can shape the linguistic journey of learners across the globe. By synthesizing existing literature and conducting surveys and interviews with both students and educators, this study aims to shed light on the multifaceted nature of effective English language instruction. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for teacher training programs, educational institutions, and language instructors, contributing to the enhancement of English language teaching and learning outcomes.

Significance of Study

The significance of researching the qualities of a good English language teacher lies in its potential to enhance the quality of language education and its far-reaching impact on students, educators, and educational institutions. By identifying and understanding the qualities that define a proficient English language teacher, this research not only assists in the professional development of educators but also contributes to improved learning outcomes and student motivation. Moreover, it has practical implications for teacher training programs, curriculum design, and educational policies, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and effective approach to English language instruction.

The Aim and Objectives

The present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the key qualities and attributes that students and teachers consider essential for a good English language teacher?
2. To what extent do interpersonal qualities of English language teachers impact students' language proficiency, motivation, and overall learning experiences?

The objectives of the present study are – To understand how interpersonal qualities such as subject language proficiency, matter knowledge, communication, empathy, and the ability to build rapport contribute to the effectiveness of English language instructors; To determine the role of adaptability in responding to diverse student needs, including those of various learning styles and proficiency levels; and To investigate how the qualities of a good English language teacher influence students' language proficiency, motivation, and overall learning experiences.

Literature Review

A good teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops (Crawford, 2004). According to Khaerati (2016), the characteristics of an effective teacher will determine the success of teaching and learning process. In Melek Koc's (2012) opinion, teacher is one of the main factors that has a lot of influence on students' achievement, performance and their success. Similar factors were evident in the research conducted by Zamani, Roya and Ahangari, Saeideh, (2016) that students expected a good English teacher to have the ability to develop proper relationships, ability to build students' confidence, ability to maintain discipline in the classroom. Thus, there is always an agreement on the fact that having an effective teacher is the basic requirement of an EFL class for effective functioning of educational systems and for improving the quality of learning (Babai & Sadeghi, 2009).

Good language teachers build rapport by caring about their learners, demonstrating patience and respecting the learners. Thompson (2008) is of the opinion that good language teachers are well-prepared, able to select appropriate frameworks for their lessons and able to design interesting tasks. In general, English teachers, compared to any other subject teachers, play a unique role and are special in connecting socially, personally, and in academic matters with their students. They also create a desirable classroom climate, to plan a variety of learning activities, and to use materials of instruction effectively. According to Richards (2002), teaching a wide range of students needs good preparation based on their interest and ability. Moreover, it is said that the students' perceived organization and communication skills as the most important characteristic, while the teachers perceived English language proficiency as the most important characteristic (Wichadee, 2010).

The teacher of English has to help the students in overcoming their fears about communication and motivate them to develop more positive perceptions of communication activities. A language teacher is expected to play the roles such as – counselor, motivator, communication skills trainer etc. (Reddy et al., 2013). The effective English teachers must have the socio-affective skills to adapt well to the students, have good relationships with students, be approachable and friendly, and listen to students' points of view (Devilito et al., 2022). To help the students to make more understanding of the lesson the teachers also must know and master the vocabulary, and as an effective teacher, it is best to assess students according to what they have to get so that the students are more motivated to learn English. (Devilito et al., 2022). The relationships between students and teachers and the perceptions students have of their teachers seem to be particularly influential on students' engagement in academic undertakings. (Amerstorfer & Freiin, 2021).

In a study conducted by Zarei and colleagues (2019) it was found that characteristics of the effective English language teacher are very influential in teaching English for the students' learning and academic achievement because they can motivate the students to learn English. According to EFL students' perceptions of effective teachers' characteristics in a public university in the South of Vietnam, the group of organization and communication skills, English proficiency, socio-affective skills, and pedagogical knowledge, are the main four aspects of effective teaching. (Hung, 2023).

Methodology

Participants

The study included 435 UG and PG students, and 10 English language teachers from schools and colleges across disciplines such as: engineering, science, humanities and social sciences as participants.

Tools

The structured questionnaire contained 10 statements on the subject knowledge, personality, adaptability, learning environment, passion for teaching, versatility, interpersonal communication skills, and professional development as key qualities and components of effective English language teachers. Students had to mark their responses to the statements from the five options given on the Likert Scale. Data was also collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 English language teachers. Eight open ended questions were formulated to do the interviews which focused on exploring perceptions and experiences related to effective teaching qualities of English language teachers. Additionally, classroom observation as one of the tools was used to understand English language classes and teaching practices. Observation of some classes were video recorded for later analysis.

Content analysis i.e., student feedback was analyzed to identify qualities of a good English language teachers. Student feedback was collected from teachers to understand how students perceive teaching and teachers. The study used combination of methods for a well-rounded examination of the qualities that define a good English language teacher which provided a comprehensive basis for analysis and discussion. While employing these data collection methods, the researchers ensured ethical considerations, maintained participant confidentiality, and obtained informed consent where necessary.

Data Analysis

Gender Wise Analysis: Karl Pearson Correlation Coefficient Method

Correlation is a statistical technique which shows the relationship between two or more variables. The relationship between two series when measured quantitatively is known as correlation.

Table 1: Gender-Wise Analysis (Male=328; Female=107)

| | Male | Female |
|-------------------|------|--------|
| Strongly Agree | 1779 | 549 |
| Agree | 1326 | 422 |
| Neutral | 285 | 76 |
| Disagree | 22 | 10 |
| Strongly Disagree | 6 | 13 |

The presented data employs the Karl Pearson correlation coefficient method to explore the relationship between two variables, specifically, gender (Male and Female) and respondents' agreement levels categorized into Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The correlation value (R) of 0.9992 indicates a remarkably strong positive correlation between gender and agreement levels. In statistical terms, a correlation close to 1

signifies that high scores in one variable (e.g., Male responses) correspond consistently with high scores in the other variable (e.g., Strongly Agree responses), and similarly, low scores in one variable align with low scores in the other. In this context, the interpretation suggests that the gender of the respondents and their agreement levels move in the same direction, reinforcing the idea that there is a notable association between gender and the extent of agreement expressed by the respondents. This statistical insight provides valuable information about the relationship between these two variables in the surveyed population. The correlation value of R is 0.9992. This is a strong positive correlation as explained. High X variable scores go with high Y variable scores and vice versa which implies that Males and Females move in the same directions.

Table: 2 Analysis of the Questionnaire

| S. No. | Statements | *SA (5) | A (4) | N (3) | D (2) | SD (1) | WA | Rank |
|--------|---|---------|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|------|
| 1 | Teachers must know their subjects well. | 315 | 107 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 4.68 | I |
| 2 | Teachers need to be gentle and patient. | 218 | 169 | 37 | 8 | 3 | 4.36 | VII |
| 3 | Teachers need to be flexible. | 165 | 217 | 45 | 5 | 3 | 4.23 | VIII |
| 4 | Teachers need to harbour a personalized learning environment. | 184 | 189 | 40 | 6 | 16 | 4.19 | IX |
| 5 | Teachers need to inspire a positive atmosphere and optimism among the students. | 296 | 121 | 13 | 5 | 0 | 4.63 | II |
| 6 | Teachers should be passionate about their job. | 247 | 143 | 39 | 5 | 1 | 4.49 | V |
| 7 | Teachers should be versatile. | 141 | 191 | 96 | 6 | 1 | 4.07 | X |
| 8 | Teachers should connect with their students. | 276 | 138 | 17 | 2 | 2 | 4.57 | III |
| 9 | Teachers should inspire their students to take responsibility for their learning process. | 261 | 144 | 25 | 5 | 0 | 4.52 | IV |
| 10 | Teachers should constantly work on improving their teaching skills. | 225 | 164 | 41 | 3 | 2 | 4.4 | VI |

*SA=Strongly Agree 5; A=Agree 4; N=Neutral 3; D=Disagree 2; SD=Strongly Disagree 1; WA=Weighted Average

Weighted Average Method

Weighted average method is used to compute the weighted average for the students with factors such as attitude, benefits, commitment and decision making that has greatest impacts on functional matrix. For each factor the score for that option is multiplied with the number of respondents to various options. The results are added and divided by the total number of respondents in that factor are ranked in describing data order according to their indices.

$$X_w = \frac{\sum X_i * W_i}{\text{No. of Respondent}}$$

X_w = Weighted Average, X_i = Variable, W = Weights attached to W_i

Table 2 ranks and provides weighted averages for various qualities expected of a good language teacher, as perceived by respondents. According to responses to the statement *Teachers must know their subjects well* ranked in the first position with the weighted average

of 4.68. It indicates strong agreement among respondents that a fundamental characteristic of a good language teacher is a deep knowledge of their subjects.

The second-ranked quality *Teachers need to inspire a positive atmosphere and optimism among the students* with the weighted average of 4.63 emphasizes the importance of creating a positive and optimistic atmosphere in the classroom, showcasing a high level of agreement among respondents. The statement *Teachers should connect with their students* ranked third with the weighted average of 4.57, signifies that establishing a connection with students is considered crucial for effective teaching, with a strong consensus among respondents.

Ranked fourth in the order, *Teachers should inspire their students to take responsibility for their learning process* suggests that motivating students to take ownership of their learning is seen as an important attribute of a good language teacher. Passion for the job is ranked fifth, indicating a strong consensus that enthusiasm and passion contribute significantly to effective teaching. The sixth-ranked quality suggests a shared belief among respondents in the importance of teachers engaging in continuous professional development to enhance their teaching skills.

Teachers need to be gentle and patient, this quality is ranked seventh, reflecting a positive but slightly lower level of agreement compared to higher-ranked qualities. Flexibility is ranked eighth, suggesting that while it is considered important, there is less consensus compared to other qualities. The ninth-ranked quality indicates that respondents see the importance of a personalized learning environment, but it is not universally perceived as critically essential. Versatility is ranked the lowest, indicating a lower level of consensus among respondents on its significance in effective teaching.

Overall, the ranking and weighted averages provide valuable insights into the perceived importance of different qualities of a good language teacher. Higher-ranked qualities with higher averages suggest stronger agreement among respondents regarding their significance in effective teaching, while lower-ranked qualities may have varying levels of importance according to respondent perspectives.

Chi Square Test – Students' Major Subject Wise Analysis

The questionnaire collected from the students of six different major subjects which are as follows: CSE, ECE, EEE, Civil, Mechanical and Metallurgical.

Table: 3 Students' Major Subject-Wise Analysis

| S. No | Statements | Calculated Chi-Square value | Degree of freedom=20, Table value of Chi-Square | Conclusion |
|-------|---|-----------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| 1 | Teachers must know their subjects well. | 19.94 | 31.41 | H ₀ Accepted |
| 2 | Teachers need to be gentle and patient. | 19.33 | 31.41 | H ₀ Accepted |
| 3 | Teachers need to be flexible. | 17.72 | 31.41 | H ₀ Accepted |
| 4 | Teachers need to harbour a personalized learning environment. | 20.67 | 31.41 | H ₀ Accepted |
| 5 | Teachers need to inspire a positive atmosphere and optimism among the students. | 14.90 | 31.41 | H ₀ Accepted |
| 6 | Teachers should be passionate about their job. | 16.91 | 31.41 | H ₀ Accepted |
| 7 | Teachers should be versatile. | 11.76 | 31.41 | H ₀ Accepted |
| 8 | Teachers should connect with their students. | 18.04 | 31.41 | H ₀ Accepted |
| 9 | Teachers should inspire their students to take responsibility for their learning process. | 12.96 | 31.41 | H ₀ Accepted |
| 10 | Teachers should constantly work on improving their teaching skills. | 9.07 | 31.41 | H ₀ Accepted |

Null Hypothesis H₀: There is no significant difference between department wise and given statements at 5% level of Significance.

Alternative Hypothesis H₁: There is significant difference between department wise and given statements at 5% level of significance.

The above given table 3 presents the results of a Chi-Square Test analyzing respondents' opinions on qualities of a good language teacher. The null hypothesis (H₀) in each case states that there is no significant difference in opinions regarding the specified qualities, and the alternative hypothesis (H₁) implies the presence of a significant difference. The calculated Chi-Square values are compared to the table value of Chi-Square with a degree of freedom of 20.

The Chi-Square Test results for the qualities expected of a good language teacher reveal consistent findings across various attributes. For each of the ten qualities assessed, the null hypothesis (H₀) has been accepted, indicating that there is no significant difference in opinions among respondents regarding the importance of these qualities. The calculated Chi-Square values, ranging from 9.07 to 20.67, are all less than the corresponding table value of 31.41, reinforcing the acceptance of the null hypothesis in each case. These outcomes suggest a high degree of consensus among the surveyed population, indicating that the opinions regarding the importance of teachers' subject knowledge, patience, flexibility, personalized learning environments, fostering positivity, passion for the job, versatility, connection with students, encouragement of student responsibility, and continuous improvement in teaching skills are generally uniform. The findings highlight a shared perspective on the significance of these attributes, underlining the collective agreement among respondents without notable variations in opinions on these qualities of a good language teacher.

Analysis of Questionnaire

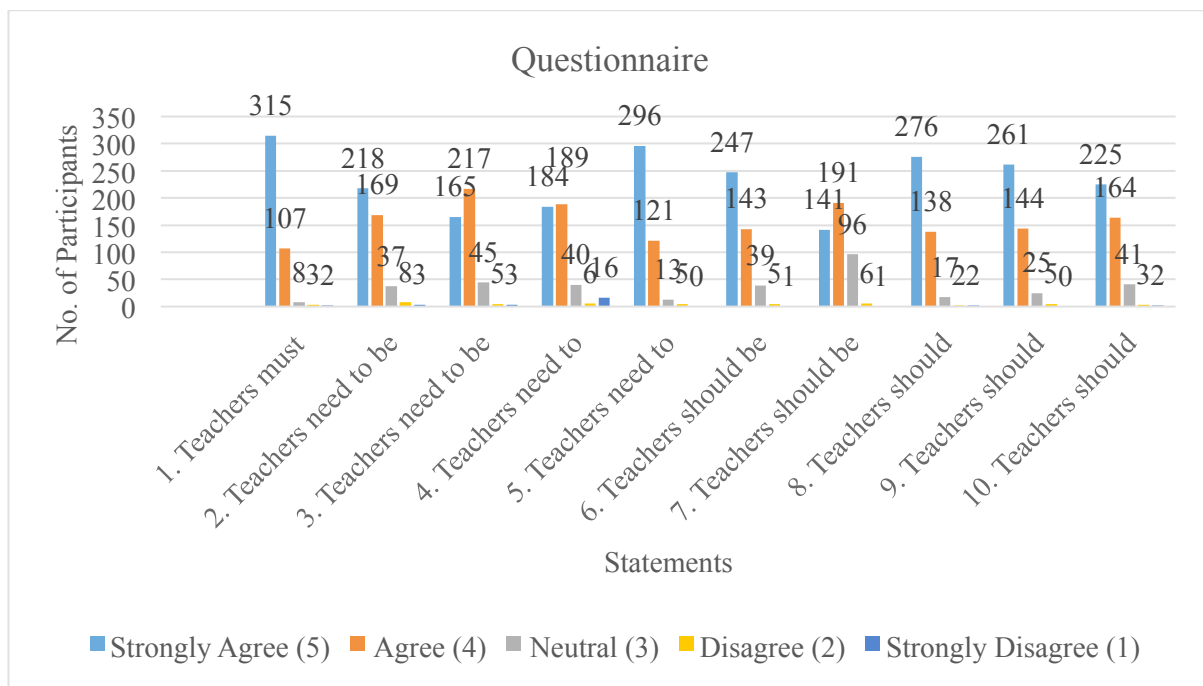


Figure 1: An Overview of Students' Responses to the Statements of the Questionnaire

The statement 1, *Teachers must know their subjects well*, suggests an overwhelmingly high expectation among students regarding the proficiency of their teachers in their respective subjects, with 97.7 percent emphasizing the importance of this quality. The statistics of the statement 2, *Teachers need to be gentle and patient*, reveals that 89.6 percent of students emphasize the importance of teachers being gentle and patient underscores the significant role of empathy and understanding in the educational environment. The data indicating that 88.5 percent of students, to the statement 3 *Teachers need to be flexible*, prefer their teachers to be flexible with them in the learning process. The fact that 89.6 percent of students think to the statement 4 *Teachers to cultivate a personalized learning environment* emphasizes a significant shift in educational perspectives towards individualized approaches to instruction. To the statement 5, the majority of 95.5 percent of students emphasizing the importance of *Teachers inspiring a positive atmosphere and optimism* reflects a profound understanding among students of the impact of a supportive and encouraging learning environment. The statistic revealing that 89.9 percent of students to the statement 6 believe that *Teachers should be passionate about their job* accentuates the profound impact of enthusiasm and dedication in the educational setting. This overwhelming majority suggests that students highly value teachers who bring a genuine passion and commitment to their teaching profession. The statistic indicating that 76.9 percent of students to the statement 7 believe *Teachers should be versatile* highlights the importance of adaptability, creativity, and flexibility in the teaching profession. To the statement 8, *Teachers to connect with their students* the overwhelming majority of 95.6 percent of students emphasizes the significance of interpersonal relationships in the educational setting. We can see that 93 percent of students to the statement 9 believe *Teachers should inspire their students to take responsibility for their own learning process*. Finally, from the above statistics, we can see that 89.8 percent of students to the statement 10 believe *Teachers should constantly work on improving their teaching skills*.

Based on the students' responses, the results of the questionnaire can be summarized in three levels of importance: First, effective communication is highly associated with good English language teachers. Over 90% of respondents cited clear and concise communication as a crucial quality of good English language teachers. They emphasized the ability of the teacher to explain complex concepts in a simple and understandable manner; 85% of respondents believed that a good teacher must exhibit patience and empathy towards students, particularly those who may struggle with language learning; Approximately 80% of respondents stated that a genuine passion for teaching and a love for the English language are vital qualities; More than 75% highlighted the importance of adaptability, where teachers can modify their teaching methods to suit different learning styles and proficiency levels; Around 70% emphasized the need for cultural sensitivity and intercultural competence, recognizing the diverse backgrounds of learners. Second, qualities of moderate importance – Subject Knowledge: About 65% of respondents rated subject knowledge as a moderately important quality; Organizational Skills: Approximately 60% felt that organizational skills, including lesson planning and classroom management, were of moderate importance. Third, qualities of lower priority – Technological Proficiency: Only 45% considered technological proficiency as a key quality, indicating that it's less essential but still relevant; Experience: Surprisingly, respondents ranked years of teaching experience as relatively unimportant (40%). From the results of the student questionnaire, it is worth noting that there were variations in responses among students which reflect the diverse opinions on the qualities that define a good English language teacher and highlight the need for educators to possess a multifaceted skill set to meet the varied expectations of their students and peers.

Analysis of Teacher /Interviews

10 English language teachers from early career to experienced were interviewed to know their own perception of the qualities of good English language teachers. Interviews were audio recorded and some of the transcripts of the selected reflections are presented under each of the questions.

1. *How do you create a supportive and inclusive learning environment for English language learners of diverse backgrounds and proficiency levels?*

“I believe in fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment, so I am interested to know my students individually, understanding their cultural backgrounds, language experiences, and learning preferences. In this way, I design my teaching approach.”

“I encourage students to share their personal experiences, cultural traditions, and language skills, creating opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and enrichment.”

2. *As a language teacher, how you incorporate language proficiency goals into your curriculum?*

“I include task-based learning activities into my curriculum to help language proficiency. These tasks are designed to simulate real-life communication situations, encouraging students to use the language in meaningful contexts.”

“I use a variety of assessment tools, including quizzes, tests, presentations, and projects, to evaluate different aspects of language proficiency.”

3. *How do you ensure clarity and comprehensibility in your instructions and explanations, especially for learners with varying levels of English proficiency?*

“I provide clear and concise explanations, supported by visual aids, examples, and demonstrations to enhance comprehensibility.”

“By catering to individual learning styles and preferences, I promote clarity and comprehension among all learners.”

“I integrate visual aids, multimedia resources, and real-life examples into my instructions and explanations. Visuals can help clarify concepts, reinforce key vocabulary, and provide context for learners who may struggle with English proficiency.”

4. *How do you collaborate with other teachers to support English language learners’ academic and linguistic development?*

“By regularly monitoring students’ progress and discussing their individual needs, we can tailor instruction and intervention strategies to support their academic and linguistic development effectively.”

“By building positive relationships with families and fostering open communication, we can gain valuable insights into students’ cultural backgrounds, language experiences, and home environments.”

5. *How do you engage in self-reflection and seek feedback to continuously improve your teaching effectiveness and student outcomes?*

“By inviting peers to observe my teaching and provide constructive feedback, I gain valuable insights into my instructional practices and areas of strength and weakness.”

“By incorporating student feedback and assessment data into my reflective practice, I can make evidence-based decisions to improve teaching effectiveness and promote positive student outcomes.”

6. *Can you describe a successful language learning experience you facilitated in your classroom?*

“I facilitated “Language Café” sessions which were highly effective in fostering authentic communication and camaraderie among students, resulting in noticeable improvements in their oral proficiency over time.”

“A successful language learning experience I facilitated involved integrating digital storytelling projects into the curriculum. Students were tasked with creating digital stories using multimedia tools such as video editing software, digital storytelling apps, or online platforms.”

7. *How do you establish and maintain discipline while promoting a positive and respectful classroom culture?*

“I actively promote positive behavior through praise, encouragement, and reinforcement. I recognize and celebrate students' efforts, achievements, and contributions to the classroom community.”

“I take the time to get to know each student as an individual, showing genuine interest in their interests, strengths, and challenges.”

“I foster a culture of respect, responsibility, and cooperation, which contributes to a positive classroom environment.”

8. *What do you believe are the most important qualities or characteristics of a good English language teacher, and how do you embody these qualities in your teaching practice?*

“A great teacher has good classroom management skills and can ensure good student behavior, effective study and work habits, and an overall sense of respect in the classroom,” a senior language teacher said.”

One of the senior most teacher said, “A good teacher is always passionate about his/her teaching and working with students. Such teachers truly influence students’ learning and also are mindful of the impact they create in students’ lives.”

An English language teacher in his early career believes that “A great language teacher should develop a strong rapport with his or her students with his winning personality and style.”

Observation of Classroom Teaching

English language classroom teaching observation offered valuable insights in understanding not only the nature and personality of teachers but also some aspects of the learner behaviour and their learning processes. First, observing language teachers in action helped us in gaining firsthand experience of various aspects such as teaching strategies, instructional techniques, and classroom management methods. Next, we could observe and witness how English language teachers encouraged learning, provided feedback, and created a supportive learning environment conducive to English language learning. Most importantly, from the classroom observation it is evident that language teaching is an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their teaching approaches, assess their strengths and areas for improvement, and engage in professional development activities tailored to their specific needs.

Student-Feedback of Teacher and Teaching Practices

Analysis of student-feedback helped the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of teaching effectiveness, instructional methods, and classroom dynamics. Students’ perspectives and assessment offered insights into aspects such as: clarity of instruction, engagement level, relevance of materials, and overall learning experience. Analyzing student feedback has also helped us to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement of teaching practices. As per the administrators’ opinion, student-feedback always played a key role in understanding a culture of transparency and accountability in education, empowering students to voice their opinions and contribute to enhancement of teaching practices, improving the quality of education, and promoting student success.

Implications for English Language Teachers

The study offers some key implications for English language teachers:

- English language teachers should prioritize ongoing professional development to enhance their pedagogical skills by attending workshops, conferences, and training programs that focus on effective communication, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity.
- Teachers must continually work on improving their communication skills using clear and concise language, active listening, and the ability to provide constructive feedback.
- Recognizing the importance of empathy and patience, English language teachers should strive to create a supportive and nurturing learning environment, especially for students who may find English language learning quite a challenging experience.
- English language teachers should have enthusiasm and cultivate a genuine passion for English language teaching which will significantly enhance the classroom experience.

Conclusion

The qualities that define a good English language teacher encompass a multifaceted blend of pedagogical expertise, interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, and a passion for teaching. This research has underscored the intricate nature of effective language instruction, with a diverse range of stakeholders emphasizing various qualities. English language teachers must recognize the importance of these qualities and continuously strive for professional growth. The insights gleaned from this research contribute to the advancement of language education, benefiting both teachers and students and ensuring a brighter future for English language learning.

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